

The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh

Unit 2

The Guardian of the Faith

**PRE-PUBLICATION EDITION
MATERIAL IN DEVELOPMENT**

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INTRODUCTION

The Ruhi Institute is an educational institution functioning under the aegis of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Colombia. Its purpose is to develop human resources dedicated to the spiritual, social and cultural progress of the Colombian people. Over the decades its materials have increasingly been used by national Bahá'í communities in all parts of the world.

The approach to curriculum development followed by the Ruhi Institute differs significantly from the traditional one of design, field-testing and evaluation, carried out in a linear fashion. The first step in writing any set of materials is taken, rather, when an experience is created at the grassroots in performing some act of service in response to the exigencies of the development of a community. Materials emerge out of this experience and become an expression of it. They are, on the one hand, a record of the learning that occurs in applying the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith in a particular area of service and, on the other, an instrument for the systematization of that learning. The approach has been described in the following terms in the small volume *Learning About Growth: The story of the Ruhi Institute and large-scale expansion of the Bahá'í Faith in Colombia*:

Once an educational need is identified, a small group of people, working at the grassroots, consult among themselves, develop a set of ideas for educational activities, and put them into practice. The results of this practice are reviewed, evaluated and consulted upon; in light of this consultation, a modified set of educational activities is put into practice, and subjected to reflection that leads to further modification and revision. At no time in this process of curriculum development does action await the final preparation and evaluation of educational materials. At every stage, educational activities proceed with the best materials at hand, in the conviction that it is only through practice and reflection, both pursued in light of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, that more appropriate curricula can gradually evolve. Yet, this is not a setting in which a few individuals are developing materials for their own use, and it does become necessary at some point to finalize the structure and content of each unit so that it may be used with confidence by others. The decision to release a final version of the materials for a given course is made simply when it is noticed that modifications are becoming negligible. It is important to note that the various aspects of this process of consultation, action and reflection are carried out parallel with one another, and not performed in a linear sequence which would be inherently artificial.

As the use of the materials of the Ruhi Institute has become more widespread, the development process has drawn increasingly on experience worldwide in applying the teachings to the life of humanity. Though in practice the process today can take diverse forms, depending on the nature of the material in development, there are generally three stages that give rise to what is considered the final published edition.

1. *Initial Outline*

At this stage a course or text contains the basic concepts and a set of passages from the Bahá'í writings that, taken together, are believed to achieve the educational objective in question. For some time, this initial outline of ideas is used by small groups of individuals in the field, as part of the efforts to elaborate effective course content.

2. *Alpha Version*

As action progresses, the material is refined and begins to reflect new experience gained, incorporating ideas that arise out of it. Not infrequently, certain concepts are amended, new passages from the Bahá'í writings added, or a series of simple exercises introduced to facilitate comprehension of a topic or to help develop an important skill or attitude. Through this process, a consolidated course or text emerges which is generally regarded as the “alpha version”.

3. *Pre-Publication Edition*

In time it is determined, generally on the basis of the integrity of the content, to make the course or text more widely available as a pre-publication edition. Through its continued use, it becomes apparent when a section needs to be moved or an exercise or two revised. Several successive versions may appear. Gradually, however, fewer and fewer modifications are required to achieve the intended purpose of the course or text, and the material, at this stage, goes for publication.

We are happy to make available to selected organizations and institutions one of the units that has reached the pre-publication stage. It is the second of three units of a book currently in development entitled *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*. You are encouraged to send us any comments you have based on your experience in using the course content.

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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 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."

The greater part of the unit provides an overview—however inadequate—of the ministry of Shoghi Effendi. Several of the later sections treat the ministry of the Custodians, that period between the passing of the Guardian and the election of the Universal House of Justice. The next unit will examine some of the major developments that have occurred in the Faith under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice and the nature of the Bahá'í community as it is today.

While exposing you to many passages from the writings of the Guardian and a formidable array of historical facts, the present unit cannot hope to give you more than a cursory review of his life and extraordinary accomplishments. For a comprehensive survey of his ministry, you may wish to read, if you have not already done so, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm's insightful account *The Priceless Pearl*. You can learn more about the short period from the Guardian's passing to the election of the Universal House of Justice in her book *The Ministry of the Custodians 1957-1963*, in which, after an informative introduction, she presents a collection of messages from the Hands of the Cause of God. And, of course, delving into the many volumes of the Guardian's writings available will broaden your historical perspective of the Faith and give you valuable insights into the theme of the Covenant and the Administrative Order.

SECTION 2

When ‘Abdu'l-Bahá wrote the first section of His Will and Testament around 1905 in which Shoghi Effendi was named the Guardian of the Cause, he was a child of seven or eight. 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 reigns 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.”¹

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.”² 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. Shoghi Effendi was not present on that occasion but gave instructions to one of those attending to make a copy of the document.

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.”³ The second stated simply: “Will and Testament forwarded Shoghi Effendi Center Cause.”⁴ To the American Bahá’í community, she sent the following cable on 16 January: “In the Will Shoghi Effendi appointed Guardian of Cause and Head of House of Justice. Inform American friends.”⁵

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.”⁶

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

“He is God! In service at His threshold, I am an associate and partner of the true and self-sacrificing loved ones of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá. In this heart-wrenching calamity—that is, separation from, and grief over, His incomparable beauty—I am, in every moment, your companion and confidant.

“Although the human temple of our loving Lord has fled from our physical eyes, yet, because the clouds have been lifted from the face of the sun, the effulgence of His confirmations shall be stronger, and His assistance, sustenance, and protection more complete and intense, than before.

“Now, we must all turn towards the creative power of His words and anticipate His hidden confirmations. Let us recall the clear promises that issued forth from His sacred lips and from His blessed pen. With utmost endeavor, fervor, confidence, wisdom, attentiveness, self-effacement, detachment, magnanimity, and steadfastness, let us take the step into the field of service. Let us safeguard the impregnable stronghold of the Cause of God, and let us advance and promote the life-sustaining teachings.”⁷

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 day-spring 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.”⁸

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:

1. Shoghi Effendi tells the believers that, though ‘Abdu'l-Bahá was no longer in their physical midst, the effulgence of His _____ would be _____, and His _____, _____, and _____ would be more _____ and _____ than before.

2. Shoghi Effendi encourages the friends to turn towards the _____ of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s words, to anticipate His _____, and to recall the _____.

3. He reassures them by quoting the following passage revealed by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá during the blackest days of His own incarceration: "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 _____!"

4. Shoghi Effendi encourages the believers to remember that the prayers which ‘Abdu'l-Bahá has revealed are _____ to every worker in His Cause, His instructions have _____ a broad and straight _____, and His now doubly effective power of Grace will _____ them, _____ them, and _____ them in their work.

5. 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, in the development of your own local community, you have witnessed the evolution of cycles of crises and victories. With the members of your study group, discuss 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 on his mind seemed to have been the establishment of the Universal House of Justice. He made this the subject of consultation with knowledgeable and longstanding believers from both the East and the West, calling several of them to the Holy Land for this purpose. What is clear is that he soon made up his mind that the foundations of the Cause needed to be strengthened at the local and national levels as preparation for the election of the Universal House of Justice. As we will see in some detail in Section 7, his earliest communications to the Bahá'ís in the East and the West leave no doubt about the direction he wished the Faith to pursue.

During those initial months of his Guardianship, while weighing matters of such paramount importance for the future of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi also faced extreme difficulties brought on by Mírzá Muhammad 'Alí and his associates, who were taking advantage of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to stir up trouble. By 5 April 1922 his preliminary instructions had been conveyed to the Bahá'í world, and the Guardian left the affairs of the Faith in the hands of the Greatest Holy Leaf and departed for Switzerland to gather his strength. A letter written by him at the time and published in the periodical *The Star of the West* read:

“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 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.”⁹

The Guardian remained in Switzerland 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 was made in the development of the Administrative Order. 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 re-entry to the field of Service, bestow a fresh blessing upon His valiant warriors of that favored Land is indeed my earnest prayer.”¹⁰

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.”¹¹

GREAT BRITAIN: “Solaced and strengthened, I now join my humble strivings to your untiring exertions for the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.”¹²

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 life-long service at the Threshold of Bahá'u'lláh.”¹³

INDIA: “May our reunion in the glorious arena of service prove in the spiritual field of that land the herald of triumphal victories.”¹⁴

JAPAN: “Refreshed and reassured I now stretch to you across the distant seas my hand of brotherly cooperation in the Cause of Baha.”¹⁵

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.”¹⁶

TURKEY: “Back to these hallowed surroundings I extend towards you my hand of fellowship and service in the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.”

FRANCE: “Awaiting your joyful tidings in the Holy Land.”¹⁸

Two days later, he cabled:

SWITZERLAND: “Pray convey my Swiss friends assurance of my unfailing cooperation on my happy return to the Holy Land.”¹⁹

And the next day he dispatched two additional cables:

ITALY: “Convey Italian friends my best wishes on my return Holy Land.”²⁰

AUSTRALIA: “Awaiting lovingly glad-tidings of Australian friends in Holy Land.”²¹

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. We should now pause and consider the life of one to whom Shoghi Effendi referred as “my chief sustainer”, “my most affectionate comforter”, “the joy and inspiration of my life”.

Bahíyyih Khánum was two years younger than her Brother, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá. Given the title “the Greatest Holy Leaf” by her Father, she dedicated her life to the service of His Cause. “Verily,” He revealed in a Tablet addressed to her, “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.”²²

Only six years old when Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned in the Síyáh-Chál in Tihrán, the Greatest Holy Leaf became accustomed to suffering from her early childhood. During that turbulent time, the Guardian explains, the family’s property was confiscated and plundered, and “within the space of a single day”, having been a “privileged member of one of the wealthiest families of Tihrán,” she was plunged into a state of poverty. She accompanied her Father on His series of exiles, first to Baghdad, then to Constantinople and Adrianople, and finally to the fortress-city of ‘Akká. As early as the Baghdad period, she carried out tasks through which she 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 life-long 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, disdaining 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.”²³

In these tender words one feels the warmth of the ties that bound Brother to sister. 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 unfailing 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 strength of intellect and the depth of faith that were equally hers.

“Let us then, affectionate brothers and sisters, ponder for awhile 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, choose 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 whole-hearted effort to be like unto them; and it shall be only in this way that we can safe-guard the Cause of God.. .”²⁴

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 it explicitly. 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:

1. The Greatest Holy Leaf encourages us to ponder for awhile upon the _____ that made God’s divine Messengers _____ a life of _____ to one of _____.
2. 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 _____.
3. 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 _____.
4. She bid 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 _____.

5. Why, we should ask ourselves, did 'Abdu'l-Bahá, would 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 _____.

6. 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 _____.

7. 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 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 community of the Greatest Name 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 we get a glimpse into the thoughts of the Greatest Holy Leaf on safeguarding the Cause. We should continue along these lines and try to gain insight into the qualities that distinguished the life of one who was so staunch a 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 Khánúm, 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.”²⁵

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.”²⁶

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....”²⁷

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 terrible 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 world-wide 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.”²⁸

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.”²⁹

There are certain qualities used by the Guardian to describe the Greatest Holy Leaf in the above passages that are essential for every defender of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant to possess. Look at the attributes below, and say a few words about how each could assist any one of us in our efforts to stand firm in the Covenant.

1. Purity of life: _____
2. Tenderness of heart: _____
3. Resignation and serenity: _____

4. A generosity and a love, at once disinterested and indiscriminating: _____
5. A cheerfulness that no amount of sorrow can becloud: _____

6. A forgiving nature: _____

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. We will do this by dividing his ministry into three periods and reviewing each one, quoting passages from the enormous body of writings he has left to the Bahá'í world. The division, while somewhat arbitrary, will aid us in going through a number of important themes in an orderly fashion.

A hallmark of the first period of some fifteen years was the systematic development of the institution of the Spiritual Assembly. In 1921 the Bahá'í world consisted of several scores of centers scattered throughout the globe which functioned with some degree of organization. Much of the Guardian's energy during this period was dedicated to creating a well-organized, world-embracing Bahá'í community with well-established local and national institutions. We have already mentioned that Shoghi Effendi gave the initial impulse to this development soon after his assumption of the Guardianship, even prior to his departure for the few months he spent in quiet contemplation in Switzerland. His earliest communications make his intentions abundantly clear. Below is an extract from a letter dated 15 February 1922 to the Iranian believers:

“The Ancient Beauty, exalted be His glory, states ‘The structure of world stability and order hath been reared upon, and will continue to be sustained by, the twin 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.’ The organization of the Bahá'í world and the sound and timely arrangement 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 individual believers or to the body of the community, and make the necessary determinations and decisions; that they refer the most important matters pertaining to the entire land 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 formed, whatsoever it decides is of God; it will be under the care, the protection and the unerring guidance of the Abhá Beauty.”³⁰

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, and of making provision for the indirect election of a Body that shall adequately represent the interests of all the friends and Assemblies throughout the American Continent”.³¹ 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

counsellors 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 behoveth 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.”³²

In these early communications, 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, and you are most probably familiar with their operation. Our purpose here is not to discuss the many procedural matters related to the functioning and establishment of Assemblies; nor are we concerned with their specific duties and obligations. So much of what the Guardian told the friends as they slowly brought Assemblies into being under his guidance would, he made clear, be considered afresh by the Universal House of Justice, the supreme governing institution of the Faith, and would be changed as it deemed fit. 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. We will then examine briefly the evolutionary nature of Bahá'í administration. This latter discussion, taken up in Section 14, will place in a broader context the points raised in the earlier sections and will make clear how relevant to the Covenant is an understanding of certain fundamentals of Bahá'í administration.

As a prelude to the study mentioned above, let us reflect on the historical circumstances in which the Guardian began with such earnestness to develop the administrative structures and processes of the Cause. Specifically, let us think how, from the very outset of his ministry, he linked the development of Bahá'í administration with the propagation of the Faith. 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 had created a sense of mission among the believers especially in the West, and there was a longing in their hearts to fulfill His highest expectations in service to the Faith. Indeed, the Guardian's early letter to the believers in the West, quoted above, in which he stresses the importance of establishing Local and National Assemblies, begins by calling 'Abdu'l-Bahá to mind with words such as these:

“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!”³³

Of course, the Administrative Order is not simply an instrument of teaching; it is, as we will see later, the pattern for the future organization of human affairs. However, in this unit we are undertaking an historical narrative of the Guardian's ministry, and it is important for us to recognize that the systematic spread of the Cause continues to depend now, as it did then, on the existence of Bahá'í administration. You may wish to discuss the relationship between the two in your group and write down some of your conclusions.

SECTION 8

We begin with the nature of decision making in the Bahá'í community. As you know, it is a basic tenet of the Faith that the principle of consultation should govern collective decision making. The consultative process can be viewed as the systematic investigation of reality—each participant contributing his or her share to this exploration. From the earliest days of his ministry, Shoghi Effendi was eager to ensure that the friends understood the significance of consultation, particularly the essential qualities and attitudes its participants must possess, if the desired result is to be achieved. In his 5 March 1922 letter to the believers in the West, mentioned in the last section, the Guardian quoted extensively from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on this subject, beginning with the following passage:

“Addressing the members of the Spiritual Assembly in Chicago, the Master reveals the following: — *‘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.’”*³⁴

The Guardian continued with several other passages, including the following from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Writings, part of which is well known to you from your study of previous courses:

“Enumerating the obligations incumbent upon the members of consulting councils, the Beloved reveals the following: — *‘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 non-existent, 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.”³⁵

Consultation will be a theme of study in one of the future courses in this series, and we will not venture to summarize such a profound matter in a few paragraphs here. 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, as we saw in the passage cited in the preceding section extracted from his letter dated 15 February 1922 to the believers in Iran. What is more, in quoting the passages from ‘Abdu'l-Bahá 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, not long after quoting the above:

“Indeed, 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.”³⁶

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 as described in the passages above. 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, and you are encouraged to call to mind some of the points that emerged during those earlier discussions. 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. To facilitate your discussions, you may wish to ask yourselves, for example, how desire for personal gain and self-interest, individual agendas and love of power impede in so many instances the efforts of the peoples of the world, particularly their leaders, in finding solutions to the pressing problems of humanity.

SECTION 9

The second subject we will consider is the nature of the relationship between a Spiritual Assembly and the individual believer. Elaborated so eloquently by the Guardian, this relationship is one based on qualities such as love and tenderness, trustworthiness and justice, forgiveness and mutual respect, in which the individual members of the community support and cherish their Assembly and the Assembly, in turn, genuinely cares for those whom it serves. Shoghi Effendi's communications to the Bahá'ís of the world are filled with guidance on the qualities and attitudes, as well as the mode of conduct, that should distinguish us all, whether as individual members of the community or as members of an institution. As early as 12 March 1923, he wrote the passage below describing the relationship between believers and their Assembly:

“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 every one 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.”³⁷

A letter dated 28 October 1935 written on his 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.”

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 insure the protection and advancement of the Cause.”³⁹

The picture drawn by the Guardian of an Assembly and the believers in its community stands in sharp contrast to what we often see in society today. Whether at the level of practice or at the level of theory and thought, 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. The Guardian’s statements, describing a relationship so different in character, require much reflection. Here, 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. 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, Bahá’u’lláh has redefined entirely the nature of the relationship between individuals and their institutions. So many of the words we employ today to describe the organized life of humanity will take on new meaning, words such as “governance”, “freedom”, “power”, and “authority”. The conception of power as an instrument of a few to dominate the generality will, for example, have to give way to a more mature understanding. To think about the magnitude of the change that will be required in this respect, 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?

_____ In order to survive and prosper, every individual must look out after his or her own interests.

_____ One must dominate in order to avoid being dominated.

_____ If you give someone an “inch”, he will take a “mile”.

_____ He who is “strong” wins.

_____ He who “wins” is right.

_____ Conflict is an unavoidable outcome of differing opinions.

_____ Conflict is necessary for truth to emerge.

_____ Diversity is an enduring source of collective strength.

_____ People will always abuse power if given the opportunity.

_____ An enlightened soul seeks not to exercise power over others but to serve them, without any thought of personal advantage.

_____ An enlightened soul seeks not to exercise influence over others but to serve them, without any thought of personal advantage.

_____ 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.

_____ Order in society implies the need for authority.

_____ Authority implies that one is able to impose one's views and opinions on others.

_____ The amount of resources one controls, both human and financial, determines the degree of authority one exerts.

_____ Relations of dominance are a natural consequence of order in society.

_____ Relations of dominance are a natural consequence of order in the universe.

_____ The institutions of society must govern by coercion.

_____ To agree with others is often a sign of weakness.

_____ To let others have their way is often a sign of weakness.

_____ Receiving recognition or credit for one's accomplishments increases the degree of influence one exerts on others.

_____ Receiving recognition or credit for one's accomplishments increases one's good standing in the eyes of others and therefore one's resources, both human and financial.

_____ The more influence one exerts, the more resources one is able to control and the more power one is able to exercise.

_____ Pure deeds and enlightened words exert a powerful influence on others.

_____ Care should be taken not to attribute to oneself the effects of the pure deeds one performs and the enlightened words one utters.

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 believer, 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.”⁴⁰

SECTION 10

The same spirit of reciprocity that characterizes the relationship between the believers and their Assembly animates relationships among the institutions and agencies of the Administrative Order, the next 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.

In 1921, when Shoghi Effendi assumed the Guardianship, only rudimentary structures were in place for administrating the affairs of the Faith at the national level in the United States and Persia. 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 the latter, the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tihrán acted as a central body through which guidance from the Holy Land was channeled and which coordinated certain activities for the entire country. Over the course of the ministry of Shoghi Effendi, as "local Bahá'í communities" advanced sufficiently "in number and in influence", National Spiritual Assemblies were established in country after country. The first three began operating in 1923, one serving Germany and Austria, another India and Burma, and another the British Isles. At the time of his passing in 1957, twenty-six were in operation around the world. The area of jurisdiction of many of the initial National Spiritual Assemblies covered two or more nations, but separate Assemblies for individual countries were later formed as the number of Bahá'ís grew in each.

As you can imagine, whenever there is rapid evolutionary change in the culture of the Bahá'í community as it moves from one stage to another, many questions arise in the minds of the friends. It is often not apparent to them how new ideas and earlier modes of operation fit together. Opinions vary, as do levels of understanding. Only with the passage of time and continued guidance from the Head of the Faith do the friends begin to see how all the diverse elements, systems and processes function harmoniously together in a new stage, each in their proper place, and how continuity with the past is, in fact, maintained.

The formation of National Spiritual Assemblies had such an effect in the Bahá'í world, for, until that time, Local Spiritual Assemblies had enjoyed a certain degree of independence in their operation. Shoghi Effendi addressed this new situation in a number of statements about the relationship between Local and National Assemblies. Significant as the Local Assembly was, and continues to be, he 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. The relationship depicted in his writings is one in which both the National Assembly and its Local Assemblies are motivated by the dictates of genuine respect and mutual trust, by the acknowledgment that they are serving the same ends and eager to see the same divine confirmation descend upon the efforts of the friends to promote the Cause.

One of Shoghi Effendi's concerns in this regard was to ensure that the proper degree of authority was invested in each institution, striking a balance between what should be centralized in the hands of the National Assembly and what should rest with Local Spiritual Assemblies. 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 overcentralization which clog, confuse and in the long run depreciate the value of 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."⁴¹

Let us pause here to think about the implications of some of the ideas discussed. With every shift in culture experienced in the Bahá'í community, the purpose of the Faith, which is to effect a profound transformation in society, is brought into sharper focus, and the generality of the friends are able to better see how the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is recasting concepts fundamental to the life of humanity. Authority is one of these. In society at large, the concept of authority is of course widely misunderstood. 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 writings of the Guardian, especially those associated with the emergence of National Spiritual Assemblies worldwide, we can perceive an entirely different set of attitudes towards authority underlying relationships among the institutions of the Faith, as well as between individuals and the institutions.

What becomes clear from his writings is that, in a mature environment, authority is not an instrument of dominance; it is recognized 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.

SECTION 11

To appreciate more fully the kind of relationship that Shoghi Effendi envisioned would characterize the institutions and agencies of the Administrative Order, think about the culture of contest that we described in the first unit of this book. There we spoke about the spirit of conflict that, even when not overt, is present in subtle forms as individuals and groups try to advance themselves over others. That interests will, more often than not, clash is an assumption widely accepted. In this context, we thought about how individuals and groups—indeed, entire societies—work against one another in pursuit of their own aims and how contest, competition, and confrontation have become norms embedded in social, political, and economic systems. While not denying that there are many who take advantage of numerous opportunities for earnest collaboration and cooperation to achieve noble goals, we acknowledged that an ever-present threat of conflict influences habits of thought and patterns of behavior and defines to some extent the structures and functioning of the institutions of society.

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. With these thoughts in mind, decide which of the following beliefs and attitudes define the nature of the relationship among the various institutions and agencies of the Faith and which ones do not.

_____ A state of peace among groups is the outcome of successful compromise.

_____ Institutions and agencies, at every level, should see themselves as serving the same ends and should welcome the accomplishments of one another.

_____ Interdependence, not competition, is the rule that governs the universe.

_____ Progress is the fruit of competition; take away the freedom to compete—for goods and services, for wealth and social position, for love and recognition, for reward and satisfaction—and people become lazy and lose their motivation and drive.

_____ Humanity has reached a stage in its collective evolution where unity can permeate every aspect of its existence.

_____ Unity, gathering together, and mutual attraction bring life.

_____ 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 society and its institutions.

_____ The power of unity manifested through harmoniously functioning institutions is stronger than the power of coercion.

_____ Harmoniously functioning institutions are able to unlock the power latent in individuals, groups and the community to work for the common good.

_____ Without institutions operating at different levels of society, each with a degree of authority

appropriate to its sphere of responsibility, it is difficult for the power latent in individuals, groups and the community to be directed towards the common good.

_____ Any endeavor undertaken by another individual or group is not worthy of support.

_____ Successful endeavors undertaken by others are, in the final analysis, a threat to one's own degree of influence.

_____ Successful endeavors undertaken by others bring joy to one's heart.

SECTION 12

We turn now to the next 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 principles underlying their operation that Shoghi Effendi expounded as he strove to bring the Administrative Order into being.

Participating in the Bahá'í electoral process is, of course, a duty enjoined on every believer. We each discharge this duty by taking part annually in the election of the Local Spiritual Assembly that serves our community and in the unit convention held in the area where we reside. A small number of believers in every country are also elected as delegates to vote each year for the National Spiritual Assembly at the National Convention. Further, in countries where applicable, the members of the Local Spiritual Assemblies in a region vote for those who will serve on the Regional Bahá'í Council. Let us begin our study of the electoral process by reading the following passage, which describes the attitude that Shoghi Effendi urges the believers to adopt towards the voting process:

“On the election day, the friends must whole-heartedly 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.”⁴²

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.”⁴³

He gives the following 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.”⁴⁴

In the passage below, Shoghi Effendi emphasizes the responsibility placed on the individual believer 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.”⁴⁵

The Universal House of Justice elaborates on this theme in the following passage:

“With a heightened awareness of the functions to be performed by the elected body, the believer can properly assess those for whom a vote should be cast. From among the pool of those whom the elector

believes to be qualified to serve, selection should be made with due consideration given to such other factors as age distribution, diversity, and gender. The elector should make his choice after careful thought over an extended period before the actual election.⁴⁶

The House of Justice offers the following further guidance in this respect:

“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.⁴⁷

While some discussion among the believers of the qualifications and requirements for membership is acceptable, Shoghi Effendi warns against their 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... .”⁴⁸

In order for the individual believer 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.”⁴⁹

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.”⁵⁰

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.^{»51}

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.”^{»52}

The exercises below will help you think through the ideas presented in the above passages. We hope that you will not be content simply to complete each one but will discuss them fully with the members of your study group. In many cases you will find the answers obvious. But remember that the purpose of the exercises is not to test your understanding of the Bahá’í electoral process but to provide you with the opportunity to reflect on its nature and the principles involved.

1. Answer the following questions:

- a. Is it appropriate for the believers to discuss the requirements and qualifications for membership in the institution to be elected? _____
- b. 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?

- c. 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? _____
- d. 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? _____
- e. Is it all right to discuss the performance of the current members of an Assembly?

- f. 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? _____
- g. Is it all right to consider oneself suitable for service on an Assembly? _____
- h. 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?

- i. 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? _____
- j. 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?

k. Is it all right for the believers to discuss for whom they voted after the election?

l. If one does not feel there are any individuals in the community that one knows well enough, should one not participate in the election? _____

m. If one does not feel that one is familiar enough with other members of the community, should one try to figure out for whom others are voting and follow their example? _____

n. If one does not feel familiar enough with the other members of the community, should one rely upon prayer at the time of the election and do one's best to choose from among the names that come to mind?

2. Below are several factors that might come to one's mind when considering the qualifications of those most 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 reasonable degree of understanding of the teachings of the Faith

_____ That he or she possesses a good understanding of the messages of the Universal House of Justice regarding the global Plan under way 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 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 forceful 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 the ability to build unity in the community

_____ That he or she has longstanding experience in the teaching field

_____ 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 shares the same concerns about the Bahá'í community that you have
- _____ That he or she often expresses criticism about 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 travelled
- _____ 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 highly educated
- _____ That he or she is well dressed
- _____ That he or she is wealthy

Clearly there are many other factors that may come to a person's mind when considering the qualifications of those suited for service on an Assembly. You may wish to think of a few more and discuss them with your group.

SECTION 13

Let us now consider the nature of service on an Assembly. Even the brief examination of the characteristics of Local and National Assemblies 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 such an official is successful in pursuing such programs will, at least to some extent, determine whether he or she is re-elected for another term. To accomplish anything, then, a member of a city council must stick to his or her views, take sides, negotiate, and raise objections to decisions with which he or she disagrees. Whatever the merits of such a system, it stands in sharp contrast to the way in which an Assembly functions.

To reflect on the extent of this difference, you may find it useful to review the passages quoted in the preceding sections, beginning with Section 7. On the basis of what you have studied in this unit, and in light of the knowledge you have acquired in the past, you have surely formed some conception of what service on a mature Assembly entails. The following exercises will assist you in consolidating your thinking in this respect:

1. Which of the following characterize the members of the mature Assembly you have envisioned:
 - They were elected on the basis of a platform of views that they set forth.
 - They were elected on the basis of certain qualities that they possess.
 - They received 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 as an opportunity to exert power.
 - They consider their election to the Assembly as 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 consider membership on the Assembly as making 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 helping one another see the subject under consideration from different points of view.
 - 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 their individual views and opinions 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.

_____ They give equal weight to the views and opinions of all the members, irrespective of the particular knowledge and experience that one member may have on the subject under consideration.

No matter how mature an Assembly, it may encounter difficulty 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
 - _____ 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 in consultation and it is clear that none of the other members holds the same views. What does he or she do?
 - _____ Stick to his or her views and prolong the consultations until a sufficient number of the other members relent
 - _____ Accept the possibility that his or her views were wrong
 - _____ Give in for the sake of maintaining unity, but make it clear that his or her fundamental objections remain
 - _____ Accept that the majority sees the situation differently than he or she does and that there must be wisdom in the outcome of the consultation

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 is not fully convinced of a decision made by the 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 judgement 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 judgement
 - _____ 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 14

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. One more fundamental concept merits reflection.

Bahá'í administration proceeds from the Text of Bahá'u'lláh. 'Abdu'l-Bahá defined and expounded the principles established by Bahá'u'lláh, and the Guardian continued this work as he applied these principles to the Bahá'í community throughout the world. Referring to the Bahá'í Administrative Order, the Guardian explains in a letter dated 21 March 1930:

“Few will fail to recognize that the Spirit breathed by Bahá'u'lláh upon the world, and which is manifesting itself with varying degrees of intensity through the efforts consciously displayed by His avowed supporters and indirectly through certain humanitarian organizations, can never permeate and exercise an abiding influence upon mankind unless and until it incarnates itself in a visible Order, which would bear His name, wholly identify itself with His principles, and function in conformity with His laws.”⁵³

That Bahá'í administration is an inseparable element of the Faith is central to Bahá'í belief. Setting out the main factors that must be taken into consideration before deciding whether a person may be regarded as a true believer, the Guardian writes in another letter dated 24 October 1925:

“Full recognition of the station of the Forerunner, the Author, and the True Exemplar of the Bahá'í Cause, as set forth in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Testament; unreserved acceptance of, and submission to, whatsoever has been revealed by their Pen; loyal and steadfast adherence to every clause of our Beloved's sacred Will; and close association with the spirit as well as the form of the present day Bahá'í administration throughout the world..”⁵⁴

In his letter dated 21 March 1930, the Guardian makes the following statement, which is essential to our understanding of a number of fundamental aspects of the Faith, including 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.’”⁵⁵

Further, in a letter dated 12 March 1923, after providing detailed guidance related to the election and duties of Local Spiritual Assemblies, the election and duties of National Spiritual Assemblies, and the Annual Convention, the Guardian states:

“With these Assemblies, local as well as national, harmoniously, vigorously, and efficiently functioning throughout the Bahá'í world, the only means for the establishment of the Supreme House of Justice will have been secured. And when this Supreme Body will have been properly established, it will have to consider afresh the whole situation, and lay down the principle which shall direct, so long as it deems advisable, the affairs of the Cause.”⁵⁶

Here, then, is a basic concept we need to keep in mind, not only in relation to the institutions developed during the initial fifteen years of the Guardian's ministry, but also as we study those established at later stages: Bahá'í

administration is an inseparable part of Bahá'í belief, and it will evolve under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice in accordance with the exigencies of the time.

To think about the implications of the passages above, decide whether the following statements are true or false.

- a. 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 organized religion, which has always been a source of conflict and division in the past. T F
- b. 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. T F
- c. 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. T F
- d. The Administrative Order is inherent to the very purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation; its existence is inseparable from the Faith. T F
- e. The institutions of the Administrative Order serve to canalize the energies released by God's Manifestation for this age. T F
- f. 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. T F
- g. To closely associate with "the spirit as well as the form of present- day 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. T F
- h. To closely associate with "the spirit as well as the form of present- day Bahá'í administration" implies that we actively participate, to the best of our ability, in a community within which the Administrative Order can grow and show its powers. T F
- i. Without the wholehearted support of individual believers, the steady unfoldment of the Administrative Order, and the maturation of its institutions, will be hampered. T F
- j. Close association with the spirit as well as the form of present- day Bahá'í administration helps to foster the spiritual growth of the individual believer. T F
- k. The system envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh, that is His Administrative Order, will demonstrate its full potential in

the far-off future; for now, it is just a means of managing our affairs in order to get by.

T F

1. 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.

T F

SECTION 15

We will end our discussion of the institution of the Spiritual Assembly here. Though its development can be regarded as a hallmark of the first fifteen years of Shoghi Effendi's ministry, we should recognize that it was just one of several institutions that evolved under his loving and methodical care during this period. In this and the next few sections, we will look briefly at five others: 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.”* And of the individual believer, he wrote,⁶⁴ *“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 this respect, 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 whole-hearted support of the various funds of the Cause.”*

Write down some of the characteristics mentioned by Shoghi Effendi that distinguish the act of giving to the Fund:

SECTION 16

The nature and characteristics of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, an institution conceived by Bahá'u'lláh and mentioned by Him in His Most Holy Book, were explained to us by Shoghi Effendi 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 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. ”* *“It should not be inferred, however, ”* he cautioned the friends in this respect, *“that the interior of the central Edifice itself will be converted into a conglomeration of religious services conducted along lines associated with the traditional procedure obtaining in churches, mosques, synagogues, and other temples of worship. ”* *“Prayer, ”* it was explained in a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, *“is essentially a communion between man and God, and as such transcends all ritualistic forms and formulae. ”*

As for the agencies that would, in time, be established around the House of Worship, the Guardian explained that *“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 meagre and often transitory results produced by the contemplations of the ascetic or the communion of the passive worshiper. ”* *“It cannot afford lasting satisfaction and benefit to the worshiper 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. ”*

What are some of the essential concepts that are highlighted by the Guardian in the passages quoted above?

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 at the level of the cluster. Can you say a few words about how the union of these two is reflected in the activities under way, particularly in the burgeoning of a devotional spirit that finds expression in gatherings for prayer and an educational process that builds capacity for service to humanity? How are such efforts in your locality helping to lay the foundations for the realization of Shoghi Effendi's vision of the institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár?

SECTION 17

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 Hah 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 Y 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 Y 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 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. ”*

As a Bahá'í community grows, a time inevitably comes when it is no longer possible to accommodate all its members in one facility, and the Nineteen Day Feast must be held in decentralized locations, often, at the level of the neighborhood. It is not difficult to imagine how the spiritual and social portions of the Feast would be carried out in a neighborhood celebration with say, thirty to forty believers. But how do you think the administrative portion would be conducted in one of several such neighborhoods, all under the guidance of a single Local Spiritual Assembly?

SECTION 18

The institution of Huqúqu'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 Huqúqu'lláh had been applicable since the early days of the Faith, the Guardian explained through his secretary: *“Regarding the Huqúqu'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 Huqúq. When one has paid Huqúq once on a particular sum, that sum is no longer subject to Huqúq, unless it should pass from one person to another. One’s residence, and the household furnishings are exempt from Huqúq. . . Huqúqu'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 Huqúq is a spiritual obligation; the friends must not be obliged by the Assemblies to pay it, but they should be encouraged to fulfil 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-Shah-Muhammad-i-Manshadi, titled Aminu'l-Bayán, and Hájí Abu'l-Hasan-i-Ardikam, titled Hájí Amín. When Hájí Amín passed away in 1928, Shoghi Effendi appointed Hájí Ghulam-Ridá, titled Amín-i-Amín (Trustee of the Trustee), the man ‘Abdu'l-Bahá had appointed to assist Hájí 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-Muhammad has been appointed to succeed his father now gathered into the concourse on high in the Abhá Kingdom, as Trustee of Huqúq 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 Huqúqu'lláh was made binding on the believers in the West. Hand of the Cause Dr. ‘All-Muhammad 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 Huqúqu'lláh brought into being by the Universal House of Justice two years earlier became fully responsible for supervising the work of Regional and National Boards of Trustees of Huqúqu'lláh in all parts of the globe. You will learn more about the law of Huqúqu'lláh in a subsequent book in this series.

SECTION 19

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 promotion 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, the preparation of teachers 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. What does this tell us about the relationship between acquiring knowledge and service to the Cause?

SECTION 20

The preceding study of the development of Spiritual Assemblies and other institutions of the Faith offers us a glimpse into the extraordinary accomplishments of the Guardian's ministry, many of 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 Muhammad 'Alí and his associates, who wasted no opportunity to further 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.”⁵⁷

During the Guardian's ministry there were several instances of Covenant-breaking, but none were able to hamper the progress of the Faith significantly. 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 may wish to review Section 17 of the preceding unit, in which we 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 the Cause follow similar patterns of behavior.

'Abdu'l-Husayn, entitled Ávárih by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, was a prominent teacher in Persia during the Master's lifetime. Following His passing, Ávárih travelled 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, Ávárih felt the House of Justice should 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 Tíhrán 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 1927 Shoghi Effendi wrote to the National Spiritual Assemblies in the West to alert them to the situation and advise them to be on their guard should Ávárih's malicious writings 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 crudest 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.”⁵⁸

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 Ten Year Crusade.

Clearly, in the years immediately following the passing of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Ávárih had hoped to cast doubt on the validity of the center of authority in the Faith. Suppose you were a believer living at the time and someone approached you saying: “Shoghi Effendi is a capable young man, to be sure. But certainly ‘Abdu'l-Bahá did not expect him to steer the progress of the Cause unaided, at his young age and with such lack of experience. How is it possible for him to function effectively without the presence of the Universal House of Justice?” How would you have analyzed these comments?

SECTION 21

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-Fadl, 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-Fadl 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 Áváríh, 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 loathe 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, not under the guidance of the National Assembly, moral or otherwise, and avidly pursued his own endeavors and sought to bring in recruits. Responding to a letter addressed to Shoghi Effendi on this subject, his secretary wrote on his behalf in August 1930:

“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 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, which Ahmad reiterates,... 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 administration. 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.’”⁵⁹

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.”⁶⁰

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.”⁶¹ 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. Imagine you were a believer living in the years following ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s passing. You, too, would have been unaccustomed to administration in the Faith. How would you have analyzed these comments, if someone whispered them in your ear: “You know, I wonder about all this. Shoghi Effendi has little experience. Is it not strange that he does not call upon the assistance of believers like Ahmad Sohrab, who spent so much time with ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and has such a good grasp on the Writings? Indeed, you would think that Shoghi Effendi would welcome Ahmad Sohrab’s advice.

Why is he telling everyone to ignore Sohrab? The approach the Guardian is taking to administration is not proving to be so effective, and Sohrab is correct in saying that Assemblies obstruct the initiative of individuals. Maybe the Guardian does not have a clear picture of what is happening outside the Holy Land, nor all the information he needs to reach good decisions.”

SECTION 22

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.”⁶²

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.”⁶³

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 became a Covenant-breaker, Ahmad Sohrab—and, indeed, not even Mírzá Muhammad ‘Alí—questioned the Will’s authenticity. If you were a believer living at that time and someone approached you with this argument, how would you have analyzed it in your mind: “I had the privilege of meeting ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and listening to Him speak about the Faith. Never once did I hear him talk about administration. Fellowship and loving kindness were His constant themes. That is the religion I joined, not some bureaucratic organization. Look at what has happened to some of the religions of the past that became occupied with the things of this world rather than concerned with spiritual matters alone. All this talk of administration! Shoghi Effendi is changing the true character of the Bahá’í Faith.”

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, such as the three mentioned, assuring them that it could but strengthen the foundations of the Faith. Below is one such passage. Read it several times and then fill in the blanks in the sentences that follow.

“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.”⁶⁴

1. The inevitable result of attempts to undermine the Cause, Shoghi Effendi tells us, is to _____

2. Referring to such attempts, he explains that challenging criticisms, whether or not dictated by malice, can serve only to _____ and to _____.
3. Such criticisms will purge the Faith, he indicated, from _____.
4. Shoghi Effendi advises us, then, that we should not only welcome any _____ but should view as a blessing in disguise _____.
5. Instead of undermining the Faith, the Guardian assures us, such assaults, both from within and from without, reinforce _____ and excite _____.
4. 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. 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 ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s design laid out in 1916 and 1917 for the diffusion of the Faith throughout the world, Shoghi Effendi 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.”⁶⁵

In 1937 there were nine National Spiritual Assemblies in place, though the number would soon be reduced to seven when restrictions imposed by the Soviet state forced two to dissolve. Over the next sixteen years, leading up to the celebrations of the centenary of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh’s Revelation in the Síyáh-Chál, these 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.

Recipients of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, the North American believers, often referred to as its “chief executors”, embarked on a seven-year enterprise in 1937 which 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 other national communities for some time to come. However, as its conclusion drew near, the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles embarked on 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 one-half year plan by the National Assembly of India and Burma. In 1947, two additional national 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. 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 their earlier plans, the National Spiritual Assemblies of the British Isles and of India, Pakistan, and Burma were each ready to commence a two-year enterprise. A year later the newly formed National Spiritual Assembly of Central America launched a one-year plan. The African campaign, undertaken from 1951 to 1953, called for several National Spiritual Assemblies—Britain, Egypt, India, Persia, and the United States—to join forces in their first collaborative effort.

In all cases the objectives set for the plans were either given or approved by the Guardian. In these objectives it is possible to see, if only dimly, the vision for the systematic growth of the Faith that was evolving in his mind. Beyond this, however, it is imperative to recognize the capacity that was being developed with the launch of each new plan. A letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Assembly of Australia and New Zealand gives us insight into his thinking in this regard:

“He strongly feels that the time has come for the believers of Australia and New Zealand to arise as a conquering army and ensure the attainment of their goals under their Six Year Plan. They now

constitute one of the strongest bodies of believers in the world, ranking with such active and well established communities as those of Canada, Great Britain and India. Their period of adolescence in the Faith has passed; they are now adults, and they must face the problems involved in fulfilling their Plan squarely and with maturity. The pleasant period of youthful irresponsibility, when they could look on the work of the American and Persian Communities as the feats of the strong, which they were not called upon to emulate, being too young, is now passed forever.”⁶⁶

The question of administrative capacity is one that merits some reflection. To think about the issue, you may wish to discuss the following question in your group: It is clear that a certain level of administrative capacity had to exist in a community before the National Spiritual Assembly could embark on a plan. But it is also true that such capacity is further increased as the community responds to the requirements of a plan. In what ways does carrying out a plan increase administrative capacity?

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 Community	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 -	

SECTION 25

As the plans of the various communities moved forward, Shoghi Effendi meticulously followed the progress of each one and guided its further development. Many of the communications he sent during the period 1937 to 1953 were concerned with these plans. The forty-five month plan on which the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran embarked in October 1946, for example, included ambitious objectives to be achieved both in its own country and in three adjoining lands. To meet these objectives, each of the provinces in Persia was given a specific assignment. The Bahá'ís of Tihrán were, alone, called upon to raise up fifty families as pioneers, a goal that was surpassed as one hundred and sixty families arose to serve in this capacity 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 BAHAUULLAHS NATIVE LAND. FAR REACHING PROJECT WELL BEFITS COMMUNITY WHICH IN AGE NUMBERS RICHNESS HISTORY LEADS ENTIRE BAHAI WORLD. FRIENDS FOES WITHIN AND WITHOUT AND FELLOW BELIEVERS NORTH SOUTH EAST WEST INTENTLY WATCHING MANNER DISCHARGE GREATEST TASK EVER UNDERTAKEN BY PERSIAN FOLLOWERS FAITH BAHUULLAH. GLORIOUS COMPANY HOLY FOUNDERS FAITH LETTERS LIVING HANDS CAUSE SAINTS HEROES MARTYRS ALL GAZING EXPECTANTLY FROM ABHA KINGDOM UPON PRIVILEGED CUSTODIANS PRICELESS LEGACY BEQUEATHED TO PRESENT GENERATION LABORING CRADLE FAITH... UPON ITS SUCCESS APPOINTED TIME CHIEFLY DEPENDS RELEASE SPIRITUAL FORCES DESIGNED EMANCIPATE HASTEN RECOGNITION FAITH IRAN.”⁶⁷

In addition to guiding the progress of individual plans, 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 fill in the blanks in the sentences 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.”⁶⁸

“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.”⁶⁹

“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 insure ultimate and complete victory.”⁷⁰

“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.”⁷¹

“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.”⁷²

“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.”⁷³

“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.”⁷⁴

“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...”⁷⁵

1. On the basis of these passages, fill in the blanks in the following sentences:

- a. Shoghi Effendi tells us that that the field is _____, 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 insure _____.

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. The Concourse on high _____ over our _____ and _____ to bless and reinforce our _____. The Centre 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 _____.

c. 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 _____.

SECTION 26

The pattern of growth being established by Shoghi Effendi through the plans launched between 1937 and 1953 was clear and straightforward. Largely concerned with the geographic spread of the Faith, it called for individual believers to arise, go to specific localities unopened to the Faith, establish themselves as pioneers, teach, and 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 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.”⁷⁶

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. The annals of the Faith are filled with stories of such self-sacrificing souls who, abandoning their worldly possessions, set out for unknown places solely for the love of God. Yet the challenge before all pioneers, today as it was then, lies not so much in settling in new places, difficult as this may be; the supreme task, rather, is to raise up from among the local population those who will carry forward the work of the Faith. The Guardian stressed this point in several letters, including the one written to an individual believer 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.”⁷⁷

And of course you are familiar from your study of Book 6 with the following passage written by Shoghi Effendi in 1938 in the context of teaching in general, which is especially applicable to those who pioneer:

“Let him not be content until he has infused into his spiritual child so deep a longing as to impel him to arise independently, in his turn, and devote his energies to the quickening of other souls, and the upholding of the laws and principles laid down by his newly adopted Faith.”⁷⁸

Although this unit is not concerned with the act of pioneering itself, given the significant role that homefront and international pioneers play even today in opening and strengthening new centers, it may be fruitful for you to spend a few moments thinking further about this field of service. You have thought much in the past about qualities essential for those who arise to teach the Cause. At the heart of every effort to pioneer is the more demanding challenge, as explained by the Guardian, 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. Think of the spiritual conditions that make it possible for a pioneer to respond to this challenge. How might the qualities of purity, detachment and selflessness contribute especially to the outcome of any such effort? Look at the quotations in this and the preceding section, and try to see, together with the other members of your study group, what expectations the Guardian held in his heart for every pioneer in this respect. Below is some space for you to write down a few of your thoughts.

SECTION 27

An immediate result of the plans under way between 1937 and 1953 was the consolidation of the Administrative Order at both the local and national levels. 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. While the plans served to strengthen the foundations of the Faith in this way, Shoghi Effendi himself, towards the end of the period, took several significant steps to develop further the structure of the Administrative Order.

In a cable dated 9 January 1951 to the Bahá'í world, the Guardian made the following announcement:

“Proclaim National Assemblies of East and West weighty epoch-making decision of formation of first International Bahá'í Council, forerunner of supreme administrative institution destined to emerge in fullness of time within precincts beneath shadow of World Spiritual Center of Faith already established in twin cities of ‘Akká and Haifa.”⁷⁹

The International Bahá'í Council was an appointed body operating in the Holy Land which 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 March 1952, fourteen months later, Shoghi Effendi announced the names of eight believers appointed by him to that body. In May 1955 he raised the membership to nine through one additional appointment. As we will see later, the Council became an elected body at Ridván 1961, under the stewardship of the Hands of the Cause of God. It would cease to exist two years later when the Universal House of Justice came into being.

On 24 December 1951, nearly one year after the establishment of the International Bahá'í Council, the Guardian made a second historic announcement. “Hour now ripe,” he wrote in a cablegram to the Bahá'í world, “to take long inevitably deferred step in conformity with provisions of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s Testament” to appoint the “first contingent of Hands of Cause of God, twelve in number, equally allocated Holy Land, Asiatic, American, European continents.”⁸⁰ You already know from your study of the first unit of this book the 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 though ⁶Abdu'l-Baha did not appoint any Hands Himself, He referred to another four believers as such; 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, he had appointed Dr. John Esslemont a Hand of the Cause posthumously, and in the years that followed he made several other posthumous appointments. However, with his December 1951 announcement, Shoghi Effendi began the process of defining further the functions of the Hands of the Cause and their relationship with other institutions of the Administrative Order. In that announcement, he advised the nine Hands of the Cause residing outside the Holy Land to remain at their posts and to continue to discharge their current administrative and teaching duties pending the assignment of specific functions, as need arose. He also urged them to attend as his representatives all four forthcoming intercontinental conferences, which were scheduled to be held successively in Africa, America, Europe, and Asia during 1953.

Within the span of two months, on 29 February 1952, Shoghi Effendi elevated another seven believers to the rank of Hand of the Cause, bringing their total number to nineteen. He would continue to develop this institution of the Administrative Order throughout the next period, which began with the launching of the Ten Year Crusade in 1953 and concluded with his passing in 1957. Before embarking on our study of that period, we should return to the question of opposition and examine further the forces that were mounting against the Cause during the Guardian’s ministry.

SECTION 28

In this and the next section we will reflect once again on the dynamics of crisis and victory in the Faith. In doing so, we should keep in mind the passage quoted in Section 23 of this unit, as well as the one below, written by the Guardian in one of his earliest communications:

“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.”⁸¹

To take up the question of opposition once again, let us go back to the beginning of the Guardian’s ministry. Soon after Shoghi Effendi returned to the Holy Land 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 Muhammad ‘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. They 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 Muhammad ‘Alí in December 1937:

“The Hand of Omnipotence has removed the archbreaker of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant, his hopes shattered, his plottings frustrated, the society of his fellow-conspirators extinguished. God’s triumphant Faith forges on, its unity unimpaired, its purpose unsullied, its stability unshaken. Such a death calls for neither exultation nor recrimination, but evokes overwhelming pity at so tragic a downfall unparalleled in religious history.”⁸²

The final blow to the remnants of Muhammad-‘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.”⁸³

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 aunts and uncles, his cousins, his brothers and sisters, who had felt in their own lives the devastating effects of the defection of Muhammad-⁴Ali, 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 Muhammad ‘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, signs of their opposition to the authority exercised by Shoghi Effendi as Guardian began to grow. Despite his patient and persistent efforts to encourage them in their loyalty to 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 the most painful circumstances for him, 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 Rúhíyyih Khánum, to whom he referred as “my helpmate,” “my shield,” “my tireless collaborator in the arduous tasks I shoulder.”

SECTION 29

About a year prior to ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s ascension, before the keys to Bahá'u'lláh’s Tomb were wrested by Covenant-breakers from its keeper, another Bahá'í Shrine had been seized by enemies of the Faith. The House occupied by Bahá'u'lláh during His exile in Baghdad, designated by Him a place of pilgrimage, had been taken over by fanatical elements of society. Throughout Shoghi Effendi’s ministry, repeated attempts were made to reclaim ownership of the House. In 1928, after the case had been brought before several courts in Iraq, the Guardian encouraged the Spiritual Assembly of Baghdad to appeal to an agency of the League of Nations, at the time the greatest international body to have come into existence. It ruled in favor of the Assembly, but the authorities in Iraq still failed to act, and the House was never 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 defence 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.”⁸⁴

Seizure of the House in Baghdad was just 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. In Turkistan and the Caucasus, the Bahá'í communities 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, attacks against the believers were instigated by Shi'ite clerics, sometimes acting in concert with government authorities. When a wave of persecution swept over the south of the country in 1926, the Guardian made the following appeal to National Spiritual Assemblies worldwide:

“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.”⁸⁵

This is not the place for a discussion of the atrocities committed against the Bahá'ís in Iran during the period. What is important to realize here is that, 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. The fruits of his labors are clearly visible in the systematic endeavors of Bahá'í institutions and their agencies today to raise the profile of the Faith in the wider society and to contribute to public discourse on important social issues. 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 current efforts in the Bahá'í world—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
- using the 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

Below is a space for you to write down some of the ideas discussed by your group.

SECTION 30

Let us resume our historical narrative here and look at the final years of the Guardian's ministry, from 1953 to 1957. You are already aware that the Ten Year Crusade was launched at Ridván 1953. Its execution dominated the period under discussion. 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 Tihrán. 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, to which, you know, the Guardian sent the Hands of the Cause of God as his representatives. 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 Ridván:

"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."⁸⁶

The conclusion of the crusade would coincide with the world-wide festivities commemorating the "Most Great Jubilee" at Ridván 1963—the hundredth anniversary of the declaration by Bahá'u'lláh of His Mission in Baghdad.

Thus did the Guardian present the Bahá'í world, then relatively circumscribed, with an undertaking of colossal proportions. His plan called for the Cause to make a tremendous leap forward. He would later refer to the Ten Year Crusade as the "mightiest agency yet conceived for the systematic execution of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan." All the institutional capacity he had steadily built in the preceding period had been preparation for this great enterprise—preparation that would enable the Bahá'í world to extend its reach in ten years far beyond what it had been able to do in the previous one hundred.

SECTION 31

The Ten Year Crusade called for the believers and institutions 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, the establishment of six national Bahá'í Publishing Trusts, a multiplication in the number of National Hazíratu'l-Quds, and the acquisition of properties for the future construction of Houses of Worship and the erection of two such edifices. Supplementary plans of National Spiritual Assemblies 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 geographic spread 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.”⁸⁷

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 hoped the Bahá'í world would 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:

1. The primary aim of the Ten Year Crusade was none other than _____
2. The theater of its operation was _____
3. Its duration was _____
4. Its commencement synchronized with _____
5. Its culmination coincided with _____
6. The agencies that assisted in its conduct were _____
8. Its Marshal was none other than _____
9. Its standard-bearers were _____
10. Its generals were _____
11. Its vanguard was _____
12. Its legions were _____

13. The charter directing its course was _____
14. The armor with which its onrushing hosts have been invested was _____
15. 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:

“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 savours 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.”⁸⁸

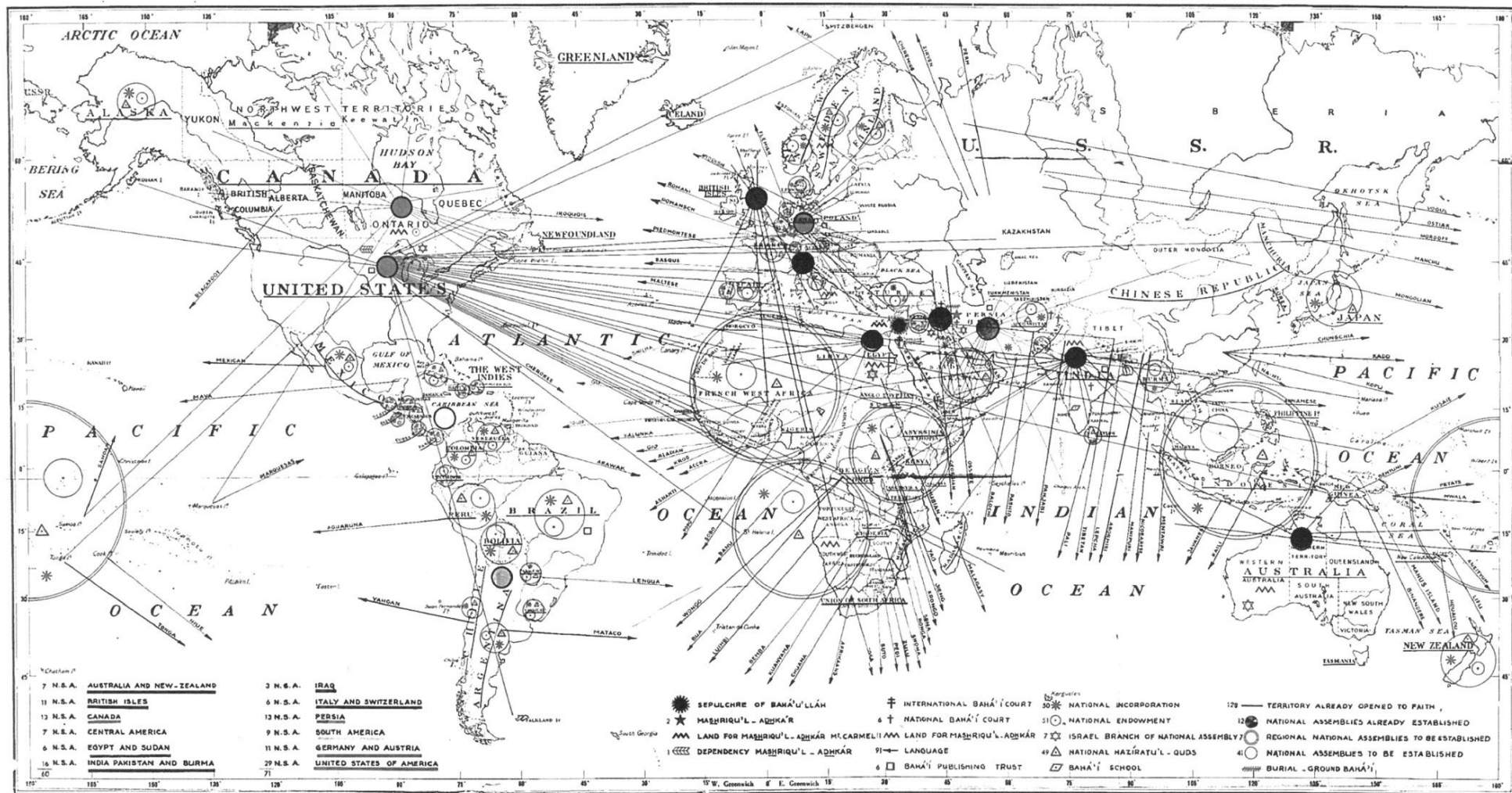
SECTION 32

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.”⁸⁹

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 this objective on a map of the world, which is reproduced on a small scale on the next page. Its precision and care evoke an image of him standing over it, studying its details. One can feel the burden of responsibility that weighed on his once youthful shoulders as Guardian of the Cause. One can feel, as well, the love and loyalty that animated those believers 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. If you know any of these stories, you may wish to share them with the other members of your group today.



- 7 N.S.A. AUSTRALIA AND NEW-ZEALAND
- 11 N.S.A. BRITISH ISLES
- 13 N.S.A. CANADA
- 7 N.S.A. CENTRAL AMERICA
- 6 N.S.A. EGYPT AND SUDAN
- 16 N.S.A. INDIA PAKISTAN AND BURMA
- 20

- 3 N.S.A. IRAQ
- 6 N.S.A. ITALY AND SWITZERLAND
- 13 N.S.A. PERSIA
- 9 N.S.A. SOUTH AMERICA
- 11 N.S.A. GERMANY AND AUSTRIA
- 29 N.S.A. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
- 71

- ☼ SEPULCHRE OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH
- ★ MASHRIQU'L-ADHKÁR
- ▲ LAND FOR MASHRIQU'L-ADHKÁR M. CARMEL
- ☐ DEPENDENCY MASHRIQU'L-ADHKÁR

- † INTERNATIONAL BAHÁ'Í COURT
- ⊕ NATIONAL BAHÁ'Í COURT
- ▲ LAND FOR MASHRIQU'L-ADHKÁR
- 91 LANGUAGE
- ☐ BAHÁ'Í PUBLISHING TRUST

- 50 NATIONAL INCORPORATION
- 51 NATIONAL ENDOWMENT
- 7 ISRAEL BRANCH OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
- 49 NATIONAL HAZIRATU'L-QUDS
- ☐ BAHÁ'Í SCHOOL

- 129 TERRITORY ALREADY OPENED TO FAITH
- 12 NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES ALREADY ESTABLISHED
- 7 REGIONAL NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES TO BE ESTABLISHED
- 41 NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES TO BE ESTABLISHED
- ☐ BURIAL-GROUND BAHÁ'Í

SECTION 34

The rise of the World Administrative Center of the Faith was intimately linked to the consolidation of the Administrative Order throughout the globe. In a message written in 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”. There was a dynamic interplay between the evolution of the central institutions of that Order and the emergence of the physical structures representing them—an interplay which Shoghi Effendi directed with consummate skill. In the grandeur of the edifices he 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 the World Administrative Center of the Faith into being.

The charter that guided the Guardian was the Tablet of Carmel. The Tablet, revealed by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, provided the spiritual impulse for the rise and establishment of the international institutions in the Holy Land, foretelling the establishment on God's Holy Mountain of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice:

“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.”⁹¹

In the following passage the Guardian 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 Will and Testament of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and the Tablets of the Divine Plan, 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.”⁹²

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—the physical manifestation of our inner condition, in which our hearts are turned 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?

SECTION 35

By October 1957 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. Parallel to this expansion, concerted effort had been made at the local, national, continental, and international levels to extend and strengthen the foundations of the Administrative Order. The number of Local Spiritual Assemblies, for example, had crossed the one thousand mark. National Spiritual Assemblies in operation worldwide, which Shoghi Effendi repeatedly reminded the friends were “pillars of the future Universal House of Justice”, had climbed to twenty-six. Noteworthy, too, in this respect was the pace at which the Guardian had developed the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God.

In a succession of communications written from the initial set of appointments in 1951 to his unexpected passing in 1957, the Guardian elaborated in considerable detail the functions of the institution of the Hands of the Cause, giving shape to its structure. You already know that he raised the number of those appointed to this rank from twelve to nineteen in February 1952. In his 8 October 1952 message announcing the Ten Year Crusade, he took another significant step in the development of the institution:

“Call upon fifteen Hands from five continents, by virtue of their supreme function as chosen instruments for the propagation of the Faith, to inaugurate historic mission through the appointment, during Ridván 1954, of five auxiliary boards one each continent, of nine members each, who will, as their adjuncts, or deputies, and working in conjunction with the various National Assemblies functioning on each continent, assist, through periodic systematic visits to Bahá’í centers, in the efficient, prompt execution of the twelve projected National Plans.”⁹³

In his Ridván message to the Bahá’ís of the world in 1954, Shoghi Effendi referred to the establishment of the Boards and explained that their members would “aid and advise” the Hands on each continent “in the effective prosecution of the Ten Year Plan”. He maintained the number of Hands of the Cause at nineteen until October 1957, a month before his sudden passing, when he made another set of appointments, bringing their total to twenty-seven. At the same time he brought 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. Before we go further in our discussion, you may wish to take a glance through the questions below. Though you may not know the answers to all of them, you will most certainly come across this information as you continue to learn about the Administrative Order of the Faith.

- a. How many members of the Auxiliary Board for the propagation of the Faith are there in your continent?

- b. How many members for the Auxiliary Board for the protection of the Faith are there in your continent?

- c. Who sets the number of members of each Auxiliary Board today? _____
- d. How long is the term of service of the members of the Auxiliary Boards? _____
- e. On what date does the term begin? _____
- f. Can an individual serve on an Assembly, Local or National, while a member of one of the Auxiliary Boards? _____
- g. Can an individual serve as a delegate to the National Convention while a member of one of the Auxiliary Boards? _____
- h. Can an individual serve on a training institute board while a member of one of the Auxiliary Boards?

The communications written by the Guardian during the crucial period of 1951 to 1957 define another

important dimension of the structure and functions of the institution. He assigned to the body of 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 Hands of the Cause worldwide with the responsibility of forging ties with National Spiritual Assemblies for the explicit 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.

SECTION 36

In the rapid development of the institution of the Hands of the Cause during this period, the operation of the power of the Covenant is clearly visible. After having strengthened the capacity of the institution by defining its functions related to propagation, Shoghi Effendi began to lay stress on its duties related to the protection of the Faith in what would be the final months of his life. First, in a message sent in June 1957, he brought into sharp focus the responsibility of the Hands of the Cause not only for the propagation of the Faith but also for its protection, calling upon them to act in concert with National Spiritual Assemblies 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 insure 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.”⁹⁴

And in a message written in October 1957, the Guardian emphasized, again, the “sacred responsibility” of the Hands of the Cause of God as “protectors of the Faith”, referring to them as “high-ranking officers” and designating them “Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh’s embryonic World Commonwealth”. He made this pronouncement in the context of the progress achieved in the Ten Year Crusade:

“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 insuring the propagation, of His Father’s Faith.”⁹⁵

In retrospect, knowing that the Guardian would pass away a few weeks after the above message was written, we can see 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 believers, now not limited in geography to a few centers scattered across the globe but comprising a world-embracing, ever-increasingly diverse community. Later we will examine the ministry of the Custodians—that period from 1957 to 1963 during which, by the sheer force of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation and through the power of divine assistance, the Hands of the Cause of God held the Bahá'í world on the course set by the Guardian, bringing the Ten Year Crusade to a triumphant conclusion and overseeing the election of the Universal House of Justice. For now, think about what dangers would have threatened the Bahá'í community if the capacity of the institution of the Hands of the Cause to shoulder its dual function had not been so steadily and deliberately built by Shoghi Effendi.

SECTION 37

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 BY BELOVED GUARDIAN. ONLY ONENESS HEART ONENESS PURPOSE CAN BEFITTINGLY TESTIFY LOYALTY ALL NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES BELIEVERS DEPARTED GUARDIAN WHO SACRIFICED SELF UTTERLY FOR SERVICE FAITH.”⁹⁶

Messages of love and loyalty addressed to the Hands of the Cause poured in from all parts of the globe, while heartbroken Bahá'ís soon began to arrive in London from abroad 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 Shine 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 38

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 supervision and guidance 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.

Since ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament had envisioned the possibility of other Guardians' succeeding Shoghi Effendi, and since he had expounded on this possibility in his own writings, the Bahá'í world had assumed that the line of Guardians would continue. 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, nine Hands of the Cause 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 Aghsán, would have had to be selected by Shoghi Effendi during his lifetime, and would have had to receive the assent of nine designated Hands of the Cause. None of these criteria had been fulfilled. The Guardian did not have any children and all the Aghsán 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 that: “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.”⁹⁷ The Hands of the Cause therefore decided that they would call upon the Bahá'í 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.”⁹⁸

SECTION 39

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 enabling them to continue the work he had initiated. In December 1957 they were able to fulfill his plan to tear down the house that had been occupied by Covenant-breakers at Bahjí, and beginning in January, the Hands each attended during the following year, as he had specified, the five International Conferences that he had called 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, Uganda; Sydney, Australia; and Frankfurt, Germany. 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 as legal Custodians.

It was following their third Conclave in 1959 that the Hands of the Cause announced plans, as anticipated by the Guardian, for members of National Spiritual Assemblies worldwide to elect nine adult believers at Ridván 1961 to serve on the International Bahá'í Council in the Holy Land. As you know, the International Council was first appointed by Shoghi Effendi in 1951, and its evolution into an elected body was seen by him as an important step towards the eventual election of the Universal House of Justice. In issuing this announcement, the Hands of the Cause 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 they made a similar appeal. The significance of their request should not be underestimated. No one would expect from the history of religion that having total control over the affairs of the Faith they would so readily refrain from the temptation to maintain control in some fashion. With gladness and joy, the Hands of the Cause of God relinquished their temporary authority, placing themselves completely at the service of the Universal House of Justice. We will read about the election of that body in the next unit and will end this section with its tribute to the Hands of the Cause of God, written 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.”⁹⁹

The Ten Year Crusade, that mighty enterprise conceived by the Guardian, had brought the Cause of God to its

next stage of development. The “crowning unit of the administrative structure of the Faith”, the Universal House of Justice, had been established on a firm and unassailable foundation as he had envisioned in 1922 when he set out, almost entirely alone, to strengthen the Faith at the local and national levels.

SECTION 40

We should pause to remind ourselves that, while the Faith continues to move from strength to strength, protected by the shield of the Covenant, there are, from time to time, those who, consumed by personal ambition, attempt to create confusion among the believers 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 election of the Universal House of Justice. Some two years after Shoghi Effendi's death, Charles Mason Ramey, 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 Ramey 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, Ramey 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, Ramey, who at the time was age 84, issued a "Proclamation" declaring that he was the "second Guardian". He ignored entirely the fact that Shoghi Effendi never made either a verbal or written statement appointing him successor—something he would never have done in any case, given the explicit requirements in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will that the office was to be filled by the first-born male child of Shoghi Effendi or another faithful living male descendant of Bahá'u'lláh, that is, another "ghusn". He disregarded, as well, the clear stipulation that Shoghi Effendi's selection, if one had been made during his lifetime, would have required the assent of nine Hands. Ramey argued, instead, 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. "[E]re the expiration of a thousand years," was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's exhortation, "no one has the right to utter a single word, even to claim the station of Guardianship."¹⁰⁰ Refusing to abandon his attempt to seize control of the Cause, Ramey was expelled from the Faith by the Hands.

In the initial confusion created by Ramey's proclamation, a small number of misguided believers followed him down the barren path he was determined to walk. One group, calling themselves "Bahá'ís under the Guardianship", came together in New Mexico in the United States between 1961 and 1962. The next year they formed what they called the "National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States under the Hereditary Guardianship". Their hopes to take control of the Temple property in Wilmette and become the authorized voice of the Faith in the country through legal means crumbled when the National Spiritual Assembly secured an injunction prohibiting them from using Bahá'í terminology and infringing on the Assembly's rights. Not long after, Ramey ordered that the group be dissolved.

Then in September 1964 Ramey created what he called the "Second International Bahá'í Council" and appointed Joel Marangella its president. Marangella, however, apparently lost favor with Ramey, who dissolved the council two years later, ordering him to return all of its papers. In 1967 Ramey appointed Donald Harvey to succeed him as the "third Guardian". He intended to name "twenty-four elders", who would administer the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in cooperation with Harvey, but he abandoned the idea before completing the appointments. Then, in 1969 Marangella announced that he was the legitimate successor of Ramey, rather than Harvey, and created what he called a "National Bureau of the Orthodox Bahá'í Faith".

As time went on Ramey's followers began to disintegrate into smaller and smaller contending groups. Two such groups emerged in the United States, both associated with the short-lived New Mexico group. Reginald King

led one offshoot group. When Remy broke his association with him, King transferred his allegiance to Marangella. At some point he abandoned Marangella, however, claiming that Remy was actually a “Regent” and that he had come to the “realization” that he was the “Second Regent”.

King had a long-running dispute with Leland Jensen, who led the other meager group of Remy’s followers in the United States. Fleeing a disaster flood predicted by Remy, which, of course never happened, Jensen moved to Montana in 1964. While there he had difficulty with the law and was convicted in 1969 for “lewd and lascivious” behavior. He claimed to have had an angelic visitor during his prison sentence who told him that he was some kind of prophet and several inmates began to follow him. Upon his release from prison, he traveled around the United States trying to bring together Remy’s remaining followers into an organized group. In 1991 he created the group “Bahá’ís Under the Provisions of the Covenant” and set up another “Second International Bahá’í Council”. At some point Jensen made the absurd claim that Remy’s adopted son in Italy, Giuseppe Pepe, was the “fourth Guardian”. Pepe, whose relationship with the Faith was not clear, though at one point he wrote to the World Center to say he was not a Bahá’í, refused to become involved in the infighting among the factions of Remy’s followers that had emerged or to accept that he was the “fourth Guardian”. In 2001 several years after the death of both Jensen and Pepe, another member of the Jensen group made the claim that he had been appointed “Guardian” by Pepe.

Remy himself, of course, had died much earlier in 1974. In the end, he began to attack the work of Shoghi Effendi, declaring that his efforts to develop Bahá’í administration were in error and that he, Remy, 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.”¹⁰¹

The remnants of Remy’s followers 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. One of Harvey’s associates, Jacques Soghomonian, eventually produced a document stating that Harvey had appointed him the “fourth Guardian”. He has already announced his successor as the “fifth Guardian”, while Marangella has named a successor he considers the “fourth Guardian”. 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.

Though it fills the heart with sadness to think about the ways of those who fail to uphold the Covenant, this last point deserves 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 hint of ingenuity, 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 unwelcome items of correspondence or literature 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 but simply to pay them no heed. Discuss in 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.”¹⁰²

“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.”¹⁰³

“It is useful to bear in mind that the Internet is a reflection of the world around us, and we find in its infinitude of pages the same competing forces of integration and disintegration that characterize the tumult in which humanity is caught up. In their use of the Internet, Bahá'ís should stand aloof from the negative forces operating within it, availing themselves of its potential to spread the Word of God and to inspire and uplift others.. .”¹⁰⁴

SECTION 41

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.

We have already considered the question of interpretation in Sections 11 and 12 of the preceding unit, and it is suggested that you return to those sections and read them again. Our discussions there focused on how pivotal it is to the Covenant that Bahá'u'lláh named ‘Abdu'l-Bahá the Interpreter of His Words and that ‘Abdu'l-Bahá named Shoghi Effendi Interpreter after Him, closing in this way the door to the kinds of divisions and schisms suffered by so many religions in the past. You may wish to explain in your own words below the significance for the Bahá'í community of having been blessed with two successive authorized Interpreters following the passing of Bahá'u'lláh.

As was indicated in the first unit, it would be impossible to explore in this book the enormous body of interpretations of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation that have been given to us, whether by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá or by the Guardian—this would entail delving into so many 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 the passages that provide us with an understanding of his station are placed in the context of his description of the institution of the Guardianship, the Universal House of Justice and the Administrative Order, which has been our focus in this and the previous unit and does not require any further elaboration at this point.

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:

“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.”¹⁰⁵

SECTION 42

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.”¹⁰⁶

To think through the concepts presented in the above passage, you are encouraged to carry out the following exercise:

1. Referring to the station of Bahá'u'lláh, the Guardian warns us not to _____ or _____ the divinity attributed to _____ and the complete incarnation of _____.
2. 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 _____.
3. 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, _____.
4. 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 kind of possible misunderstanding

about the nature of God and His Manifestations does Shoghi Effendi put to rest in the above passage?

On the basis of the above passage and the one quoted in the previous section, as well as your own knowledge of the Faith, write in your own words a paragraph or two on the subject “Who is Bahá'u'lláh?”

SECTION 43

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.”¹⁰⁷

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.

1. 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 _____.
2. Shoghi Effendi indicates that the Báb is not to be regarded merely as an _____ of the Bahá'í Revelation.
3. In the Person of the Báb, the Guardian makes clear, the _____ of the Prophets Who have gone before Him has been _____.
4. 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 had _____ of its _____, constitutes the most _____ of the Bahá'í Dispensation; it is further evidence of its _____, a tremendous _____ to the _____, to the _____ and _____ with which this _____ has been invested.
5. The greatness of the Báb consists primarily, not in His being the _____ of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, but rather in His having been invested with the _____ inherent in the inaugurator of a _____ religious Dispensation, and in His wielding, to a degree

SECTION 44

From your study of Section 15 of the preceding unit, you are already familiar with passages from “The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh” that describe the station of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá. At 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-6Ahd, the Book of His Covenant, or in the Súrih-i-Ghusn (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 superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized.”¹⁰⁸

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:

1. 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 _____.
2. 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 _____.
3. 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 _____.

4. 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.

5. 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 _____ and _____ and _____ have been blended and are _____.

On the basis of the Guardian’s above clarification and your study of the quotations in the preceding unit, write down some of the thoughts that fill your heart and mind as you reflect on the station of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá as the “Mystery of God”

SECTION 45

In addition to providing the Bahá'í world with many statements that constitute authoritative interpretation, the Guardian devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to translating the Writings of the Central Figures of the Faith from Persian and Arabic into English. Among the works he translated were *The Hidden Words*, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha 'u 'llah*, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahauallah*, the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, and the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. We should realize, of course, that his translations carried with them a measure of interpretation. And as with so much that he did, the Guardian's translations set both the parameters and a standard of beauty for all future translators of the Writings of the Faith.

It should be mentioned, as well, that the Guardian translated and edited the stirring chronicle of the early days of the Faith written by Muhammad Zarandí, also known by the name given to him by Bahá'u'lláh, Nabíl-i-A'zam. Nabíl's narrative was written around 1888 at Bahá'u'lláh's instructions. A copy which had been corrected following submission to Bahá'u'lláh was among the papers carried off by Mírzá Muhammad '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: Nabíl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, bringing into a cohesive form the content of the original draft written by Nabíl. 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."¹⁰⁹

SECTION 46

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.

Most 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 over 11,000 items in English written by Guardian, or at his instruction on his behalf, in the possession of the Archives Office at the Bahá'í World Centre and over 12,000 in Persian and Arabic. The Office holds a further 9,000 cablegrams, bringing the total to more than 32,000. 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.

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*; *Messages to Canada*; *Arohanui: Letters from Shoghi Effendi to New Zealand*; *High Endeavours: Messages to Alaska*.

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 general 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, outlines the spiritual prerequisites necessary for the successful prosecution of its mandate. *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. 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. As noted earlier, the number of his communications in Persian and Arabic comes to over 12,000. If you know these languages, then you will have access to information about the titles available. Eventually the Guardian's Persian and Arabic communications 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.

SECTION 47

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 subjects addressed in the vast body of his written works.

Book 9 of the Ruhi Institute series will explore the Bahá'í perspective on history, the mission of the Bahá'í community, and its present-day focus. That book will provide a broad survey of the Guardian's many profound statements related to the nature of society, the Bahá'í community, and the individual. However, 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 the passages reveal:

"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."¹¹⁰

"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."¹¹¹

"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."¹¹²

"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."¹¹³

"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.”¹¹⁴

“I was deeply touched and comforted by the noble sentiments you have expressed. The loss the Cause has sustained through the passing of so distinguished a pioneer as Mrs. Maxwell is great, very great. The work she accomplished is truly historic and an example to others. I pray that you may be graciously assisted to follow in her footsteps and achieve victories as great and lasting as those she achieved. I will ever remember you in my prayers. Be assured.”¹¹⁵

“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.”¹¹⁶

“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.”¹¹⁷

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