



Century of Light

Keele Campus

The Guardianship:

Fourth Morning Session (75 minutes)
11 August 2015

7. The Predicament of the Guardianship

The Predicament of the Guardianship

Return, then, and cleave wholly unto God, and cleanse thine heart from the world and all its vanities, and suffer not the love of any stranger to enter and dwell therein. Not until thou dost purify thine heart from every trace of such love can the brightness of the light of God shed its radiance upon it, for to none hath God given more than one heart. . . . And as the human heart, as fashioned by God, is one and undivided, it behoveth thee to take heed that its affections be, also, one and undivided. Cleave thou, therefore, with the whole affection of thine heart, unto His love, and withdraw it from the love of any one besides Him, that He may aid thee to immerse thyself in the ocean of His unity, and enable thee to become a true upholder of His oneness., the Exalted, the Great.

(Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh: page 52)

Whole Group Session (Slide Presentation)

A. The Situation the Guardian Was Faced With

Before we look at the implications of the Guardian's ministry for us now, we need to understand the situation in which he had to operate. As we have seen, he assumed his role in 1923 between two world wars. This helps us (page 45) 'to understand the magnitude of the challenge facing Shoghi Effendi at the outset of his ministry.' The situation was bleak: 'there was nothing that would have inspired confidence that the vision of a new world bequeathed him by the Founders of the Bahá'í Cause could be significantly advanced during whatever span of years might be allowed him.'

Nor were the resources within the Bahá'í community apparently adequate to the task (ibid): 'Nor did the instrument available to him appear to possess the strength, the resilience or the sophistication his task required. . . . the core of Bahá'u'lláh's followers consisted of the body of believers in Iran, of whose number not even a reliable estimate could have then been produced.'

Consultation with leading Bahá'ís made it clear (page 46) that 'the creation of an international secretariat would be not only useless, but probably counterproductive.' The daunting reality was that Shoghi Effendi was alone in his monumental task: 'How completely alone he was is almost impossible for the present generation of Bahá'ís to grasp; to the extent one does grasp it, the realisation is acutely painful.'

He candidly explained the implications to the Bahá'ís (page 83): 'Shoghi Effendi proceeded with scrupulous regard for the constraints placed on him by circumstance, a faithfulness that will be the pride of Bahá'u'lláh's followers throughout the ages to come. The record of his thirty-six years of service to the Faith . . . contains . . . no action on his part that would in any degree "infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain" of the Universal House of Justice.'

The members of his own family, who should have supported him, took every opportunity to do exactly the opposite (page 47). Only the sister of 'Abdu'l-Bahá stepped forward to help him (page 48): 'Bahiyih Khanum played a vital role in guarding the interests of the Cause after the Master's death and became Shoghi Effendi's sole effective support. Her fidelity evoked from his pen perhaps the most deeply moving passages he was ever to write.' After her passing in 1932 he sent a letter to the Bahá'ís "throughout the West", which read in part:

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.

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His aim was crystal clear (page 49): ‘. . . . 'Abdu'l-Bahá had been emphatic in asserting, as already noted, that the revolutionary changes taking place in every field of human endeavour now made the unification of humanity a realistic objective. It was this vision that, for the thirty-six years of his Guardianship, provided the organising force of Shoghi Effendi's work.’

The path towards it was fraught with difficulties (pages 53-54): ‘Fully aware of the condition into which society had fallen, the consequences of his betrayal at the hands of family members on whose assistance he should have been able to rely, and the relative weakness of the resources available to him in the Bahá'í community itself, Shoghi Effendi arose to forge the means needed to realise the mission bequeathed to him.’

In the end (page 83) ‘In important respects Shoghi Effendi may be said to have extended by an additional, critical, thirty-six years the influence of the guiding hand of the Master in the building of the Administrative Order and the expansion and consolidation of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. One has only to make the fearful effort of imagining the fate of the infant Cause of God had it not been held firmly, during the period of its greatest vulnerability, in the grip of one who had been prepared for this purpose by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and who accepted to serve - in the fullest sense of the word - as its Guardian.’

His achievement was truly remarkable. He could (page 85) ‘look nowhere but to the Writings of the Founders of the Faith and the example of the Master for the guidance his work required.’ He had no advisors. His wide reading ‘could do no more than supply raw materials that his inspired vision of the Cause must then organise.’ Not even the most sceptical ‘can fail to acknowledge that the integrity with which a young man in his early twenties accepted so awesome a responsibility - and the magnitude of the victory he won - are evidences of an immense spiritual power inherent in the Cause he championed.’

(End of Presentation: any questions?)

Groupwork

For each group discussion the group should choose a facilitator. It would be best to change the facilitator for each piece of group work over the series of workshops but the group will remain the same. During the consultation, the facilitator's role is to keep track of the time, to ensure that:

1. everyone contributes something,
2. no one keeps repeating the same point, and
3. no one makes excessively long contributions.

All group members needs to keep their own record of the main points for using in the role play at the end of the group consultation. The notes should be easy to use in a conversation. Both groups will use the same material.

We need to look at the developments Shoghi Effendi engineered under two main headings:

B. The Value of Administration

Page 54: It fell to Shoghi Effendi, however, **to assist the community to understand the place and role of these national and local consultative bodies in the framework of the Administrative Order created by Bahá'u'lláh and elaborated in the provisions of the Master's Will and Testament.** An obstacle faced by a significant number of believers in this respect was **the unexamined assumption of many that the Cause was essentially a "spiritual" association in which organisation, while not necessarily antithetical, did not constitute an inherent feature of the Divine purpose.** Emphasising that the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and the Will and Testament "are not only

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complementary, but ... mutually confirm one another, and are inseparable parts of one complete unit", the Guardian invited the believers to reflect deeply on a central truth of the Cause they had embraced:

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 organisations, **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.

I will repeat again here the quote used earlier from *Cultural Creatives* by Ray and Anderson (page 246):

Cultural Creatives may be leading the way with responses directed towards healing and integration rather than battle. For these responses to contribute to the creation of a new culture, grassroots activism and social movements will have to evolve into new institutions. . . . [W]hile new social movements are transitory, institutions can turn the energies of these movements into everyday action.

1. What might have been, and perhaps still is, so difficult about seeing spirituality and organisation as compatible?
2. How can we move beyond this apparent conflict and carry a whole community with us in a spirit of what the Universal House of Justice terms 'efficiency and love'?

C. Implementing a Divine Plan

Our struggle to integrate spirituality with planning had to be addressed by the Guardian.

Page 66: With the administrative structure of the Cause taking shape, Shoghi Effendi turned his attention to the task he had been compelled to delay for so long, **the implementation of the Master's Divine Plan.**

Page 67: The **two chief instruments** by which Shoghi Effendi set about cultivating a heightened devotion to teaching in both East and West were the same as those on which the Master had relied. **A steady stream of letters to communities and individuals alike opened up for the recipients new dimensions in the beliefs they had embraced.** The most important of these communications, however, now became those addressed to National and Local Spiritual Assemblies. **Their effect was intensified by the stream of returning pilgrims who shared insights gained by direct contact with the Centre of the Cause.** Through these connections every individual believer was encouraged to see himself or herself as **an instrument of the power flowing through the Covenant.**

In 1944 *God Passes By* was published (page 70):

History is a powerful instrument. At its best, it provides a perspective on the past and casts a light on the future. **It populates human consciousness with heroes, saints and martyrs whose example awakens in everyone touched by it capacities they had not imagined they possessed.** It helps make sense of the world - and of human experience. It inspires, consoles and enlightens. It enriches life. In the great body of literature and legend that it has left to humanity, history's hand can be seen at work shaping much of the course of civilisation

God Passes By elevates **this great work of the mind to a level ardently striven after but never attained in any of ages past.**

Page 77: [In 1952] [b]efore the believers could celebrate these achievements, a new challenge of staggering proportions was unveiled by Shoghi Effendi. Impelled by historic forces that only he was in a position to appreciate, the Guardian announced

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the launching at the forthcoming Ridván of a **decade-long, world-embracing Plan, which he designated a "Spiritual Crusade"**.

Page 78: In effect, the Plan called for the Cause to make a giant leap forward over what might otherwise have been several stages in its evolution. What Shoghi Effendi saw clearly - and what only the powers of foresight inherent in the Guardianship made it possible to see - was that **an historical conjunction of circumstances presented the Bahá'í community with an opportunity that would not come again** and on which the success of future stages in the prosecution of the Divine Plan would entirely depend.

Page 80: As the conception of the Ten Year Crusade took shape in his mind, Shoghi Effendi moved to mobilise the spiritual support [the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God¹] could bring to achieving the tasks of the Plan. In a cablegram of 24 December 1951, he announced the appointment of the first contingent of **twelve Hands of the Cause of God, allocated equally to the work in the Holy Land, in Asia, the Americas and Europe**. These distinguished servants of the Cause were called upon to **focus directly on the challenge of mobilizing the energies of the friends and providing the elected bodies with encouragement and counsel**. Shortly thereafter the number of Hands of the Cause was raised from twelve to nineteen.

The resources available for the discharge of this responsibility were greatly increased by the Guardian's decision in October 1952, calling on the Hands of the Cause **to create five auxiliary boards**, one for each continent: . . . Subsequently, separate auxiliary boards were created to assist with the protection of the Faith, the other of the two chief functions of the Hands of the Cause.

1. Letters and books are still a key means of communication for the World Centre with the Bahá'í community. How easy do we all find it to read and relate to these documents?
2. Are we able to use them effectively as a way of deepening our understanding of and engagement with the plans of the Faith?
3. Many Bahá'ís, as well as their friends and family, visit the Bahá'í World Centre. Do we feel that the spirit of this infuses the lives of our communities and impacts upon our thinking and behaviour as visits to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian clearly did for the Bahá'ís of the past?
4. We still have Auxiliary Board members, but the Hands of the Cause have all passed away, and now it is the Counsellors who perform their role (we will explore that in more detail in the next session). How hard do we feel it is, in the sceptical and materialistic climate of the current Western world, for the Counsellors to seek to emulate the impact of the heroic sacrifices of the Hands of the Cause?

Group Report Back: this is to be done as an exercise in role play. As far as time permits, one member of each group takes it in turns to explain to a member of the other group what they have learnt and needs to field whatever questions and comments come their way. This should involve those, if any, whom time did not permit to do this earlier. The exact method for this will be determined on the day when we know the exact group sizes.

¹ During His own lifetime, Bahá'u'lláh had appointed a few distinguished Bahá'ís as "Hands of the Cause of God". Their role was formally defined by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His [Will and Testament](#), where He emphasized and clarified their responsibilities, including protecting and propagating the Faith. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote that the Guardian must appoint and direct future Hands of the Cause. During the last six years of his life, Shoghi Effendi named 32 Bahá'ís as Hands of the Cause. When he passed away, 27 of them were still living. In a message penned just weeks before his passing, Shoghi Effendi referred to the Hands of the Cause of God as "*the Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealt*".

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Pause of Reflection

If there is time let us pause for a few moments to reflect quietly in the way we have learnt, on a passage we have memorised or else begin to memorise the quotation at the head of this handout.

D. The Passing of the Guardian

Page 81: Less than a month thereafter, the Bahá'í world was devastated by the news of Shoghi Effendi's death on 4 November 1957 from complications following an attack of Asiatic influenza contracted during the course of a visit to London. The Centre of the Cause who, for thirty-six years, had day by day guided its evolution, whose vision encompassed both the flow of events and the actions the Bahá'í community must take, and whose messages of encouragement had been the spiritual lifeline of countless Bahá'ís around the planet, was suddenly gone, leaving the great Crusade half finished and the future of the Administrative Order in crisis.

Page 84: It is not only that Shoghi Effendi refrained from legislation; he was able to fulfil his mandate by introducing no more than provisional ordinances, leaving decisions in such matters entirely to the Universal House of Justice.

Nowhere is this self-restraint more striking than in the central issue of a successor to the Guardianship. Shoghi Effendi had no heirs of his own, and the other branches of the Holy family had violated the Covenant. The Bahá'í Writings contain no guidance in such an eventuality, but the Will and Testament of the Master is explicit as to how all matters that are unclear are to be resolved:

It is incumbent upon these members (of the Universal House of Justice) to gather in a certain place and deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book. Whatsoever they decide has the same effect as the Text itself.

In conformity with this guidance from the pen of the Centre of the Covenant, Shoghi Effendi remained silent, leaving the question of his successor or successors in the hands of the Body alone authorized to determine the matter.

It is to the issue of that successor that we return after lunch.

If we get through this early we will begin the presentation that starts Session 8