

‘Alí Nakhjávání

SHOGHI EFFENDI:
AUTHOR OF
TEACHING PLANS

Acuto 2005

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FOREWORD

The second course, held in Acuto in February 2005, under the auspices of the Counsellors in Europe and the National Spiritual Assembly of Italy, dealt with the subject of Shoghi Effendi's Teaching Plans. Over 90 Bahá'í youth from 25 countries in Europe attended this course.

In six sessions we discussed the chronology of events, and more particularly the manner in which Shoghi Effendi educated the institutions of the Faith to formulate and prosecute teaching plans, in preparation for the launching of his historic and unique Ten Year Crusade, which was the climax and '*chef d'oeuvre*' of his glorious ministry.

May the material assembled and presented in this course be of some help to the friends in obtaining a deeper appreciation of the distinctive genius of the beloved Guardian and his inspired leadership, as he guided the Bahá'ís of the world to advance resolutely along the path envisaged for them in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh.

‘Alí Nakhjávání

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I

Twin Basic Themes of the Guardianship

Many have been the attempts to review the events associated with the life of Shoghi Effendi and, more particularly, the developments that transpired under his watchful eye and were a result of his initiatives during his thirty-six years of Guardianship. Of course, the best survey of these thirty-six years has been the brilliant story written by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum in her book *The Priceless Pearl*.

During the very first few years of his ministry, Shoghi Effendi had to establish his position in the outside world and with the authorities in the Holy Land, in view of the assaults of the Covenant-breakers. These Covenant-breakers hoped to claim custodianship of the Bahá'í Holy Places after the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Shoghi Effendi also had to establish the legal right of the Bahá'ís to the ownership and custodianship of the Most Holy House in Baghdád, in the eyes of the government of the land and eventually on the international level, under the scrutiny of the League of Nations. He undoubtedly also knew that he had to provide the Western world with reliable translations into English of several volumes of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, as well as an adequate presentation of the contents of *Nabil's Narrative*. Furthermore, in Bahjí the property surrounding the Most Holy Shrine had to be cleansed from the presence of the Covenant-breakers, and in Haifa he had to purchase land adjoining the Shrine of the Báb painstakingly, one plot after another. Elsewhere in the East, he had to ensure that essential Holy Places in Iran and in Turkey, and historic sites in these countries related to events in the annals of the Heroic Age of our Faith, were acquired. He had to further enrich the lit-

erature of the Faith by disclosing the vision of Bahá'u'lláh for the unfoldment of the Bahá'í civilization yet to be born and by answering the need of the believers and the public for an authentic, interpretive and reflective history of the events of the Apostolic Age and their relationship to the evolution of the Transitional Age.

However, from all the multifarious responsibilities facing him, two basic themes were constitutional in character and were, indeed, at the very core of the aims and purposes of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. These two themes had their roots in three charters, namely the Tablet of Carmel revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His Tablets of the Divine Plan, addressed to the North American Bahá'í Community. The first two charters dealt with the up-building of the framework of the future World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, while the third was the clarion call of the Centre of the Covenant for the propagation of the Faith, leading to its spiritual conquest of the planet. These two themes were closely and intimately interrelated, inasmuch as, on the one hand, the propagation of the Faith could not be sustained without an adequate administrative structure to coordinate and direct its various activities and, on the other, the very existence of a properly functioning Administrative Order could not be justified and consolidated if a parallel development in the teaching field was not constantly maintained.

These two lines of Bahá'í activity had to develop systematically, to run parallel to each other and to reinforce their respective operations. The first line was to lead the Bahá'í world to a level of capacity, enabling it to sustain the weight of the promised Institution at the summit of the Administrative Order, namely the Universal House of Justice. The second parallel line was to devise ways and means to implement the wishes of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as voiced by Him in His immortal Tablets of the Divine Plan.

In this introductory preamble we will first consider briefly how Shoghi Effendi patiently built up the institutions of the Administrative Order and equipped them with the capacity to take on

the responsibility of implementing the provisions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Divine Plan.

In his Foreword to *God Passes By*, Shoghi Effendi defines the vital role the Guardianship played from 1921 until 1944 in shaping and applying the teachings of the Faith. The statement made by him on this point is best expressed by his own words:

[These teachings] at first designedly rigid, complex and severe, [were] subsequently recast, expanded, and liberalized under the succeeding Dispensation, later expounded, reaffirmed and amplified by an appointed Interpreter, and lastly systematized and universally applied to both individuals and institutions (God Passes By xvii).

The four stages in the above sentence clearly refer to the Báb, next to Bahá’u’lláh, followed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and then the contribution made by the Guardian himself.

In the passage mentioned above, we see that Shoghi Effendi considered it a role of his Guardianship not only to guide the Bahá’í world to universally apply the teachings, laws and ordinances of the Bahá’í Revelation to the extent that the capacity and circumstances of the Bahá’í communities permitted, but also to enable the body of believers to apply these teachings in the work of the institutions of the Administrative Order – institutions which had just been formally established and were destined to become, in the distant future, potent instruments in the building of the Bahá’í World Commonwealth.

On the subject of applying the teachings to individuals, within the constraints of wisdom, we see Shoghi Effendi translating the Obligatory Prayers and stressing their importance in the spiritual advancement of individual believers. We also note his explanation of the essential details related to the obligation of fasting, of the importance of monogamy, of observing the Bahá’í Holy Days and of the need to suspend work on such days, of the requirement to

avoid alcoholic drinks, habit-forming drugs and all forms of sexual vice, and so on.

The last part of Shoghi Effendi's sentence quoted above has a direct link with the subject of our discussion, namely the application of the teachings to the principles and guidelines that must govern the operation of Bahá'í institutions. In the days of Bahá'u'lláh and even later, during the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the implications of the sentence in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (see ¶181) regarding the World Order, which, in Shoghi Effendi's translation, is a plain and straightforward statement in the Most Holy Book, were not clearly understood. In fact, the verse was even misunderstood because the scholars of the Faith took it as a reference to the order of the contents of the Most Holy Book and the format of the revelation of its verses.

It was thanks to Shoghi Effendi and his translation into English of this verse, which appeared in his 'Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh' in 1934, that the Bahá'ís realized that the former concepts were wrong. His translation reads as follows:

The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System – the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed (World Order 146).

Bahá'u'lláh's references to the institution of the House of Justice on its international, national and local levels were generally taken as mere statements providing for necessary centres to look after the affairs of the community. Shoghi Effendi's vision was different. He saw this institution, at its international level, as a dome, at its national level as pillars supporting the dome, and at its local level as foundations upon which these pillars were destined to rest. This hierarchy was, furthermore, to come into being through election by the rank and file of the faithful, as clearly stated in the Master's Will. Furthermore, this line of institutional activity had

to have a counterpart of appointed individuals who would primarily be concerned with the protection and propagation of the Faith, also stipulated in the same document.

The contemplation of such a system, which is common knowledge to the Bahá'í community today, was partly or completely absent in the minds of the believers during the ministries of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. They must have wondered in their speculations about the future of the Cause, travelling on donkeys or in horse-drawn carriages on dusty roads, what supernatural events would take place to enable the Bahá'í communities in scattered regions of the East, and later in Europe and North America, to be transformed into instruments for the realization of God's purpose for mankind.

Before He passed away, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had explained to the friends that His ministry was like a wedding day but that after Him would come the time for an orderly home to be established (see *Star of the West*, vol. XII, no. 12, p. 194). He also referred, in one of His Tablets, to His own passing, and Shoghi Effendi, in the 'Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh', clearly states that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's intent was to prepare the friends for the rise of the Administrative Order established by His Will and Testament. His statement is as follows:

Fear not, fear not if this Branch be severed from this material world and cast aside its leaves; nay, the leaves thereof shall flourish, for this Branch will grow after it is cut off from this world below, it shall reach the loftiest pinnacles of glory, and it shall bear such fruits as will perfume the world with their fragrance (World Order 146).

To illustrate the patience with which Shoghi Effendi educated the Bahá'ís in their understanding and application of administrative principles, let us look at the institution of the Nineteen Day Feast. Throughout the Heroic Age, the duty of extending hospitality every nineteen days was generally understood as applicable to in-

dividuals, since the Administrative Order was as yet unborn. Moreover, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá added the importance of prayers and reading from the Tablets in the Nineteen Day Feasts which were held in the home of individuals. Therefore, for years, in Iran, Bahá’ís invited non-Bahá’ís to the Nineteen Day Feasts and shared readings from the Writings. The Nineteen Day Feast, as you know, was established in the Bayán, subsequently confirmed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and further elaborated upon in the days of the Master. The whole history of this institution will help us in following what happened in the Bahá’í world. As stated in the Foreword of *God Passes By*, Shoghi Effendi says that one of his functions as Guardian was to apply the teachings concerning individuals to the institutions. Thus, with the birth of the Administrative Order, Shoghi Effendi made it clear, less than sixteen months after the inception of the Formative Age, that this provision in the code of Bahá’í laws was also binding upon institutions. The Local Assembly in each locality was now made officially responsible for the Nineteen Day Feast held under its jurisdiction, with its three component parts, namely devotional, administrative and social.

A very interesting development took place in Iran in connection with the holding of Nineteen Day Feasts. Those Feasts in the days of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá were, as stated above, generally organized by individual believers on odd days of the week and non-Bahá’ís were invited to attend. With the inception of the Formative Age, Shoghi Effendi advised that Nineteen Day Feasts were henceforth to be held, preferably, on the first day of each Bahá’í month, under the jurisdiction and guidance of the Local Spiritual Assembly. The Persian friends sought the guidance of Shoghi Effendi on whether or not non-Bahá’ís should continue to attend and, at that early stage of the Administration in Iran, he felt that non-Bahá’ís could do so.

Later, as the Administration developed in the United States and Canada, Shoghi Effendi explained the three parts of the Feast and advised that such meetings were to be for Bahá’ís only.

In the mid-1930s the instructions given to the West became known in Iran, and so Shoghi Effendi's guidance was sought once again. It was at that time that he said that this advice to the West was now also applicable to the East. This was obviously because Feasts had developed and had become occasions when, during the administrative part, domestic community issues of the Faith were being discussed by the local believers.

However, on 31 March 1955 Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written by his secretary on his behalf and addressed to a Bahá'í group in Florida, made the following statement: *'Every Bahá'í, as a part of his spiritual birthright, must teach, and the one avenue where he can do this most effectively, is by inviting friends into his home once in 19 Days . . .'* (*Lights of Guidance* 247). Nearly two years later, on 6 March 1957, in a letter written on his behalf, the following elucidation was given: *'The friends must realize their individual responsibility. Each must hold a Fireside in his or her home, once in 19 days, where new people are invited, and where some phase of the Faith is mentioned and discussed. If this is done with the intent of showing Bahá'í hospitality and love, then there will be results'* (*Lights of Guidance* 247).

These two letters of Shoghi Effendi and the message they convey could well be regarded as an echo of the provision of the Bayán, as well as the verse revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. In these texts, the believers are exhorted to extend hospitality to their guests, even, as the Kitáb-i-Aqdas stipulates, *'though only water be served'* (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* ¶40). As his letter indicated, it would be entirely satisfactory for firesides to be held *'once in nineteen days'*. Any suitable day for the Bahá'í host or hosts would certainly be in line with Shoghi Effendi's guidance, provided that over a period of one year, a minimum of nineteen such firesides were held.

Bahá'ís today therefore have two types of gatherings every nineteen days, one under the supervision and direction of the Local Spiritual Assembly, which is the official and institutional Nineteen Day Feast, preferably held on the first day of the month,

and the other, firesides in their homes, in order to extend hospitality and teach the Cause.

We are currently serving under the Five Year Plan in which the importance of Training Institutes and the three core activities is emphasized. During our trips around the world, we have found that Bahá'ís have sometimes replaced firesides with study circles, thinking that the Universal House of Justice had abolished firesides as a sign of the coming of a new epoch. Unfortunately the intent has been misunderstood. Study circles are primarily an institutional activity whereas firesides are an individual activity and responsibility, aimed at extending hospitality and teaching the Cause. Study circles do not cancel out the obligation to have firesides. Bahá'ís have to understand that study circles become part of the activities of the community. We are called upon to support study circles *and* to hold firesides in our homes, as well as to attend Nineteen Day Feasts.

Needless to say, Shoghi Effendi, like Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá before him, also drew the attention of the members of the community to the importance of teaching and encouraged the friends to deliver the message of the New Age to high and low alike. During the Heroic Age of the Faith, glorious feats in the teaching work had been achieved by the Dawn-Breakers, the Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh, the Disciples of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Hands of the Cause of God, as well as distinguished and outstanding teachers and promoters of the Cause. These achievements were both in response to specific guidance from the Head of the Faith, as well as the result of individual initiatives on the part of devoted and God-intoxicated believers.

From 1916 and 1917 when the Tablets of the Divine Plan were revealed until 1937 when, under Shoghi Effendi's guidance, the first Seven Year Plan of the North American Bahá'ís was launched, the rudimentary and elementary agencies of the Faith were not actively involved in the initiation of teaching projects. Those early administrative agencies were of course reminding the believers of the obligation to teach the Cause and encouraging the

friends when they arose. A few outstanding individuals, in both East and West, certainly arose, travelled, spread the Message and proclaimed it and were instrumental in raising up enthusiastic communities. But these efforts were not created in an organized way under an elected central administrative body. The Head of the Faith was, of course, aware of these undertakings and in many cases initiated and even directed these endeavours. This period from 1916 and 1917 till 1937 was described as a phase when the Tablets of the Divine Plan were ‘in abeyance’.

As Local and National Assemblies were formally constituted, these Assemblies were invariably urged by Shoghi Effendi during the first sixteen years of the Formative Age to assume responsibilities in the teaching field, particularly by way of organizing circuit teaching trips, stimulating the activities of pioneers, and adding their share of support in promoting the expansion work.

It was only in 1937, as stated above, that Shoghi Effendi felt the time had arrived for the National Spiritual Assembly in North America to undertake the first teaching plan ever to be formally adopted and institutionally executed anywhere in the Bahá’í world, so that in addition to the responsibility of the individual to teach, the institutions, likewise, were now charged with the obligation to adopt teaching goals and to ensure that they were systematically implemented.

Let us look at the Bahá’í statistics relating to expansion. During the first ninety-three years since the inception of the Faith – that is, seventy-seven years of the Heroic Age, plus the first sixteen years of the Guardianship – we see that the light of the Faith reached fifteen countries at the end of the ministry of Bahá’u’lláh, thirty-five countries by the end of the ministry of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and forty-four countries by 1937, when the first Seven Year Plan was launched.

To demonstrate the speed with which the expansion of the Faith took place after this new phase of institutional responsibilities was launched, we note that the number of countries open to the Faith grew from forty-three to seventy-eight by the end of the

first Seven Year Plan, which is an increase of over 80 per cent in only seven years.

Nowhere in the writings of Shoghi Effendi do we find any specific guidance to National Spiritual Assemblies on how to formulate a plan and in what manner to execute it in an orderly fashion. However, by observing the manner in which Shoghi Effendi dealt with National Spiritual Assemblies on the matter of their teaching plans, one realizes that there were certain fundamental conditions that he observed. A tentative study of these developments reveals some of their essential features, such as:

1. The plan had to have concisely worded goals and objectives.
2. The beginning and end of the plan had to be clearly determined in terms of months or years, and announced to the friends.
3. The goals had to be formulated realistically, in terms commensurate with the capacities of the community.
4. The entire machinery of the institutions of the Faith, as well as the rank and file of the members of the community, had to feel committed to the execution of the plan, by supporting it wholeheartedly, with human and financial resources.
5. In some cases, particularly when the plan extended over a long period, it would be divided into distinct phases, to enable the agencies of the Administration as well as the body of believers to focus on the requirements of each phase.
6. The community had to be informed regularly of the progress achieved in attaining the prescribed goals.

The Administrative Order was mentioned in the Writings of the Báb Himself, where He writes about the appearance of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. The Báb was not only the Forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh, He was also the Herald of the appearance of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Shoghi Effendi used to stress this

point to the pilgrims. The Báb says in the Bayán: *‘Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá’u’lláh’* (*World Order* 146–7). In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Bahá’u’lláh clearly says that this Order is in the making, that it has a revolutionizing effect on human affairs, that it will upset the equilibrium of the world and that its features are unique. In addition, He wrote about the station of the Universal House of Justice and the lower levels of that Institution. He also made reference to the Hands of the Cause and elevated a few of the believers to that rank. Shoghi Effendi says that we find in the Heroic Age the rudiments of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. In addition, there came into being consultative meetings of the friends. There were no Local Assemblies as such, and no elections, but there were gatherings of friends to consult on the interests of the Cause. This evolved a little more during the time of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, but not formally or systematically, only in an elementary way. Thus, the Local Spiritual Assemblies were mostly called Boards of Consultation or Houses of Spirituality.

After the ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1921 we saw the rise of the Administrative Order. Teaching plans as such did not exist during the sixteen years between 1921 and 1937. We had functioning Assemblies, and elections, which were formal. We held Conventions in the proper way with elected delegates, meeting and electing the National Spiritual Assembly of each country. We had committees operating. We had the establishment of National and Local Funds. We had Bahá’í publications and review of publications. All these things happened during this period of the rise of the Administrative Order, except for teaching plans.

Even in 1937 we did not understand clearly what the requirements of a teaching plan were. Shoghi Effendi helped the Bahá’í community step by step, wisely, patiently, lovingly explaining how this should be done. We learned under the first Seven Year Plan in one country how there should be goals and that these goals should be precise, that there was a specified time by which the goals should be achieved, that there should be specific funds in order to carry these plans forward, that all the friends should be-

come aware of what the goals were and work in unison, and that there should be special committees to carry forward the teaching plan.

Now these things are common knowledge for us today but this was new in 1937. Other National Assemblies in the world at first did not realize what was happening in the United States and Canada. It was only as the plan developed and the news went out that the friends elsewhere learned that the Americans and Canadians had a Seven Year Teaching Plan. But they did not have their own teaching plans.

In the chart n. 3 attached as appendix there is a narrow column called ‘respite’. This is a term used by Shoghi Effendi for a period of relief between two plans and a period to consolidate what had been achieved. Shoghi Effendi gave a respite of two years to the North American believers from 1944 until 1946.

Rúhíyyih Khánum explained something very important in the article entitled ‘Twenty-Five Years of Guardianship’, which can be found in *The Bahá’i World*, volume XI, 1946–1950. She explained that, after the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá members of His family, as well as older and experienced Bahá’is from the East and the West, suggested to the Guardian, who was then twenty-four years old, that since he was young and since ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had provided for Hands of the Cause to be appointed to help him and as both Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had provided for the Universal House of Justice to be elected, that certainly the time was ripe for him to take steps for the election the Universal House of Justice and the appointment of Hands of the Cause.

Rúhíyyih Khánum wrote that Shoghi Effendi’s argument was that the Universal House of Justice was a dome. The foundations had to be built first and only then could the dome rest on them. This was the reason why he emphasized the importance of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies and their functioning. Delegates had to be elected for the National Convention, statistics had to be drawn up by Local Assemblies to see the number of adult believers because delegates had to be allocated according to the

numerical strength of each area. Thus, statistics were also important. When there were enough National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world, then finally the dome could be laid on top.

In 1946 Shoghi Effendi then launched a new Seven Year Plan. This was to be the second North American Seven Year Plan, from 1946 until 1953. In the course of the respite period some National Assemblies were anxious to move forward. One National Spiritual Assembly which Shoghi Effendi was proud of and which was wide awake was the British Assembly. Before all other communities in the world, this community wrote to Shoghi Effendi and asked him to give them goals. Nowadays National Spiritual Assemblies adopt their own goals but in those days it was just the beginning, so Shoghi Effendi gave them goals for a Six Year Plan.

After the British embarked on their plan, Shoghi Effendi started nudging other National Spiritual Assemblies. He prodded them, urged them, encouraged them so that they too would be part of a collective teaching activity. One by one the other National Spiritual Assemblies responded. By the end of 1953 he had every single National Spiritual Assembly in the entire Bahá'í world engaged in a teaching plan, some for six years, some for five years, others for three or two years. By the end of the second Seven Year Plan the entire Bahá'í world was engaged in the work of teaching plans, gaining experience on how to deal with organized teaching work. During this period, and also in earlier periods, we see in the Guardian's writings that he was constantly pointing to the day when there would be international interaction among the Bahá'ís in preparation for future events. He gave pointers to signify that we were approaching such a time.

The most moving passages from Shoghi Effendi were written in 1951. In 1951 he sent two messages, one to the United States and Canada and one to the British National Spiritual Assembly. In these messages, which are very similar in wording, he referred to the International Bahá'í Council, which was created in 1950 and was to be a preamble to the election of the Universal House of Justice. The friends thus knew that they had a preparatory or embryonic body

that was meant to develop through certain stages and culminate in the Universal House of Justice. Then he said that we were almost simultaneously to launch a Two Year Plan, which would be under the management of the British National Spiritual Assembly, and that he was calling on three other National Spiritual Assemblies to join the American and British – namely Iran, India and Egypt, making a total of five. He said the machinery of these five National Assemblies would be working together in one continent, namely Africa. To Shoghi Effendi this was extremely important from the point of view of the evolution of the organic work of the Bahá'í International Community, because for the first time the machinery of five National Assemblies would be working together in a given teaching field. This was, he said, a prelude to the time when all National Assemblies of the world would work together on one major international undertaking. On the one hand, Shoghi Effendi drew our attention to the impending election of the Universal House of Justice through the formation of the International Bahá'í Council. On the other hand, he was anticipating the stage of international collaboration when all National Assemblies would be interacting with one another. He was in fact preparing the Bahá'í world for the inception of the Ten Year Plan, which would for the first time call for a global interaction among all National Assemblies.

As we look at the Bahá'í world today we see that National Spiritual Assemblies are now accustomed to have teaching goals. Furthermore many active Local Spiritual Assemblies in various parts of the world now formulate their own local teaching and consolidation plans. This obviously is a very desirable development as it introduces method and system in carrying the Faith forward and promoting its interests.

Beyond National and Local Assemblies, the Universal House of Justice called on the individual Bahá'í to follow the example set by national and local institutions. The individual, too, was encouraged to conceive personal plans of action, particularly in pursuing teaching goals. In a letter dated 16 November 1969, the Universal House of Justice wrote:

. . . It is now imperative for every Bahá'í to set for himself individual teaching goals. The admonition of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to lead at least one new soul to the Faith each year and the exhortation of Shoghi Effendi to hold a Bahá'í Fireside in one's home every Bahá'í month are examples of individual goals. Many have capacities to do even more, but this alone will assure final and complete victory for the Plan (Lights of Guidance 248).

In formulating our own individual goals we might well benefit from some of the methods that Shoghi Effendi put into practice in helping National Assemblies to execute their teaching plans.

What a soul-uplifting spectacle it would be when we could witness the day that, under the broad guidelines set forth by the Universal House of Justice, every National Assembly, every Local Spiritual Assembly and every devoted lover of the Cause would formulate plans and lines of action, and make every effort prayerfully, constantly and selflessly to bring the adopted goals to fruition and to lay the harvest of such endeavours at the feet of the Blessed Beauty.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. In the Master's Will and Testament, He says that the choice of the new Guardian should be confirmed by nine Hands of the Cause. What would happen if the choice were not approved?

A. There is nothing in the Master's Will to tell us what would happen. Somebody asked Shoghi Effendi this question and the answer has been published. He asked him, how it was that 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave such authority to the Hands of the Cause to disagree with the Guardian? He answered that it was inconceivable that 'Abdu'l-Bahá would include in His Will and Testament a provision which would lead to a conflict of authority.

In other words there was some mystery here that the believers could not understand because outwardly there was a conflict in authority. Shoghi Effendi appoints his choice, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that the Hands of the Cause should then decide by secret ballot, meaning that any of the Hands of the Cause would be free to disagree with Shoghi Effendi. So perhaps the majority would not agree with Shoghi Effendi. But the Guardian is telling us that this is inconceivable. So what did actually happen? The situation did not arise. Shoghi Effendi never appointed anybody, never asked the Hands to elect nine from among themselves, and, of course, these nine never met. So the whole process was completely shelved and set aside. So when Shoghi Effendi says it is inconceivable that 'Abdu'l-Bahá would have provided something that would lead to a conflict of authority, probably by that he meant that such a situation would never arise and therefore we would conclude that 'Abdu'l-Bahá knew that such a conflict would never occur. This could be the meaning in the light of the facts and what actually took place.

Q. I wonder how the NSA of, for example, Australasia or Central Africa, met at all? Were the distances not a great hindrance to the believers, a great sacrifice of precious time? How did they manage to stay away so long from their jobs?

A. When Shoghi Effendi dealt with large geographic areas, he had two methods to deal with this question. In cases where two or three countries were part of the area of a given National Assembly, and the community in the country which was not the seat of the national body reached numerically and administratively an adequate degree of growth and stability, that community would then branch off and form its separate National Spiritual Assembly. The other method was for a very big region. In such cases the same process would naturally have to go through two or three stages. As to the question of National Spiritual Assembly meetings in such large areas, Shoghi Effendi's advice was to arrange the consultation through correspondence. In other words, they should try to meet once or twice or a maximum of three times a year and matters not discussed had to be settled through correspondence. Today if such a thing were to happen it would be very easy because we have Internet facilities. We did not have Internet in those days but we had cables, telegrams and airmail letters. It was possible to have consultation between the nine National Assembly's members by mail on all matters. This minimized the number of meetings to be held because the meetings were very costly. To have nine members from different parts of the region meet, let us say every two weeks, would have been impossible. So it had to be done very rarely, two or three times a year, and the rest of the work was done by correspondence. This was a temporary thing anyway, as it was an intermediary stage.

Q. Is there any specific prayer or Tablet the believers can offer for the institutions, at local and national levels and the Universal House of Justice?

A. You can offer any prayer you like. Certainly all the administrative bodies that you have named need a lot of prayers, I can assure you. Pick up any prayer and read it in their name and pray for them.

Q. Shoghi Effendi said that the elected members should rid themselves of the atmosphere of secrecy. At the same time, the Spiritual Assemblies observe confidentiality in certain matters. What does 'atmosphere of secrecy' refer to? How can we find the balance between keeping matters confidential and being unnecessarily secretive?

A. There is a difference between observing confidentiality and being secretive. Being secretive is when members of the National Assembly will never, ever tell the Bahá'ís what they are discussing and consulting about. This is being secretive. To have confidential matters is another thing. Bahá'ís may have certain problems that are purely confidential and they come to their Assemblies, open their hearts to them and confide in them. These are confidential matters. Usually very private and personal matters are confidential matters. But the work of the National Assembly should not be surrounded by secrecy, in the sense that National Assemblies and every administrative body should be very open and transparent in their activities.

The work of Local Assemblies on non-confidential matters should not be clandestine. This is why at the Nineteen Day Feast, for example, a Local Assembly should be very open about sharing with the community its problems, its concerns, its cares, the state of the fund and any general problem or difficulties it is having. Likewise the National Assembly, when meeting with the delegates at the Convention, has to be very open, to share with the delegates the situation in the country. This is to avoid secrecy. The friends should know what is happening. This is different from matters of confidence of those who have special problems and go to Spiritual Assemblies for assistance and guidance.

Q. When will the International Library be built on Mount Carmel?

A. The land on which the International Library is to be built has been clearly defined by Shoghi Effendi. The land now is in a built up area. This is a project that will take time.

The International Library will be directly facing the Archives building. In the meantime, the International Library has its quarters in the building which is known as the Centre for the Study of the Texts. All the books are there under controlled conditions in terms of humidity and temperature for preservation.

Q. The beloved Guardian wrote that his translations of the Holy Writings will be improved in the future by scholars. The Persian believers claim that Shoghi Effendi wrote this out of humility. What do you think about this?

A. Shoghi Effendi was the interpreter. It is true that when Shoghi Effendi released his translation of the Kitáb-i-Íqán, he wrote that this is one more attempt to put into English what should always be considered as the matchless utterance of Bahá'u'lláh. If, in the future, some Bahá'ís would like to try to translate the Writings, it should be with the approval of the Universal House of Justice.

Shoghi Effendi was not only a translator, he was also the interpreter. The importance of the translations of Shoghi Effendi is that he was interpreting for us what Bahá'u'lláh intended. This is why it is very important for us not to treat Shoghi Effendi as, let us say, the works of Marzieh Gail or Habib Taherzadeh. Shoghi Effendi's translations fall into a different category. They are not only translations, they are interpretations. So all these things have to be taken into consideration and then any changes that have to be made will only be made with the full approval of the Universal House of Justice.

Q. Did Shoghi Effendi not know that Mason Remey would become a Covenant-breaker? What wisdom was there in appointing him a Hand of the Cause?

A. There were Letters of the Living who were appointed by the Báb who did not accept Bahá'u'lláh. The destiny of each and every one of us is in our own hands. God chooses us, God gives us the opportunity but if we decide that our failings or our moral, ethical and spiritual weaknesses are stronger than our sense of duty and responsibility to God, then we fail. This failure is not because God wanted us to fail. God always wants everyone of us to succeed, at all times. But we fail basically because of our selfish motives. It is the ego which works on us. The ego leads us to pride, to jealousy and to doing things in the wrong way, in conflict with the spirit of the Faith. That is where we fail. Our failures are due to us, not because of God.

Of course, a competent teacher knows that a particular student is going to fail but he gives assignments to all students and He may give an assignment specially to this student in order to help him. So it may have been an opportunity for Mason Remey to develop. Now, if Mason Remey missed his chance, if a Letter of the Living did likewise, if one of the outstanding believers who had a title from Bahá'u'lláh also failed, the fault lies with them. Some of the outstanding believers who were recipients of Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh became Covenant-breakers during the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The very son of Bahá'u'lláh, Muḥammad-'Alí, who was not only the son of Bahá'u'lláh but was appointed to be a successor to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, broke the Covenant. He could not raise himself to a level of self-denial, and of self-abnegation, which is so important in order to be able to render a service acceptable in the sight of Bahá'u'lláh.

Q. Shoghi Effendi often quotes words, titles, expressions and sentences from the Writings (found between quotation marks and in italics) in his writings and major letters. Many times we

are not given the source of Shoghi Effendi's quotations. Is it easy to find them, as they may be useful when presenting certain arguments? Is there a collection of all the references in *God Passes By* to be found anywhere?

A. When Shoghi Effendi was writing, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá likewise, and they quoted from the Writings, they did not give the reference. They were not professors at a university to give us footnotes and references. It is our job to go and find these references.

God Passes By was not a paper that Shoghi Effendi was going to present to a professor at a university. He was writing as Guardian and interpreter of the Bahá'í Faith. The quotations are his own translations of a phrase, a clause or a sentence. It takes many scholars and many years of research finally to be able to find all the passages and words quoted by him. Many scholars have worked and are working to find all these references. A day will come when there will be a kind of a compendium, which will probably be published, giving us all the references.

II

The Tablets of the Divine Plan

When and where revealed and the territories mentioned

In all, there are fourteen Tablets of the Divine Plan which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá revealed over a period of nearly one year, from March 26, 1916 to March 8, 1917. The Hand of the Cause Hasan Balyuzi has given us in his book *‘Abdu’l-Bahá – The Centre of the Covenant* a list of these Tablets, their dates and the locations where they were revealed (some in Bahjí and others in Haifa) and those to whom they were addressed. The list is as follows:

- 1) Revealed on Sunday morning, March 26th, 1916, in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s room at the house in Bahjí, and addressed to the Bahá’ís of nine north-eastern states of the United States: Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York.
- 2) Revealed on Monday morning, March 27th, 1916, in the garden adjacent to the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh, and addressed to the Bahá’ís of sixteen southern states of the United States: Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas.
- 3) Revealed on Wednesday morning, March 29th, 1916, outside the house in Bahjí, and addressed to the Bahá’ís of twelve central states of the United States: Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas.

- 4) Revealed on Saturday morning, April 1st, 1916, in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's room at the house in Bahjí, and addressed to the Bahá'ís of eleven western states of the United States: New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, California Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington.
- 5) Revealed on Wednesday morning, April 5th, 1916, in the garden adjacent to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, and addressed to the Bahá'ís of Canada, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Manitoba, Alberta, Ontario, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Yukon, Mackenzie, Ungava, Keewatin, Franklin Islands and Greenland.
- 6) Revealed on Saturday morning, April 8th, 1916, in the garden outside the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, and addressed to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada.
- 7) Revealed on Tuesday morning, April 11th, 1916, in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's room at the house in Bahjí, and addressed to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada.
- 8) Revealed on Wednesday morning, April 19th, 1916, in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's room at the house in Bahjí; on Thursday morning, April 20th, in the pilgrims' quarters of the house in Bahjí; on Saturday morning, April 22nd, in the garden adjacent to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, and addressed to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada.
- 9) Revealed on Friday morning, February 2nd, 1917, in Ismá'il Áqá's room at the house of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Haifa, and addressed to the Bahá'ís of the nine north-eastern states of the United States.
- 10) Revealed on Saturday morning, February 3rd, 1917, in the same room in Haifa, and addressed to the Bahá'ís of the sixteen southern states of the United States.
- 11) Revealed in the forenoon of Thursday, February 8th, 1917, in Bahá'u'lláh's room at the house of `Abbúd in `Akká, and addressed to the Bahá'ís of the twelve Central States of the United States.

- 12) Revealed in the evening of Thursday, February 15th, 1917, in Bahá'u'lláh's room at the house of `Abbúd in `Akká, and addressed to the Bahá'ís of the eleven western states of the United States.
- 13) Revealed on Wednesday morning, February 21st, 1917, in Bahá'u'lláh's room at the house of `Abbúd in `Akká, and addressed to the Bahá'ís of Canada.
- 14) Revealed in the afternoon of Thursday, March 8th, 1917, in the summer-house (Ismá'il Áqá's room) at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house in Haifa, and addressed to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (*'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of the Covenant* 420).

What is the importance of 1916 and 1917? It was during the First World War, while 'Abdu'l-Bahá was confined to the Holy Land and also at a time leading up to the first centenary of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh. He was born in November 1817 and here we see 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of His Covenant, starting over one year ahead and revealing these Tablets for the spiritual conquest of humanity. In other words, He celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of the birthday of Bahá'u'lláh by revealing these Tablets.

We are now in the year 2005. In twelve years from now it will be the year 2017, when it will be the second centenary of the birthday of the Supreme Manifestation of God. We can visualize what will happen in the Bahá'í world. We can well imagine what the Universal House of Justice will do, what statements it will issue, calling on the Bahá'ís of the world to celebrate the birthday of Bahá'u'lláh as well as the first centenary of the revelation of the Tablets of the Divine Plan. After 2017 there is another date, 2019, and that will be the second centenary of the birthday of the Báb. He was born in October 1819. We can well imagine what will happen then. Again stretching our imagination we can see that, just two years later, it will be 2021, which will be the hundredth anniversary of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, of the disclo-

sure of the contents of the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and of the inception of the Formative Age of our Faith. So, what a panorama twelve years from now, fourteen years from now, sixteen years from now! I do not think I will be with you but you will be participants in this worldwide Bahá’í activity and celebration. You will certainly be not only among the participants but, I hope, among the organizers and administrators of the Bahá’í community at that time and that you will have ahead of you many, good and fruitful years of humble service at the Sacred Threshold of Bahá’u’lláh.

Referring to *God Passes By*, Shoghi Effendi considered the contents of the Tablets of the Divine Plan addressed to the believers in North America as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *‘signal mark of His special favour by investing them, on the eve of the termination of His earthly ministry . . . with a world mission’* (*God Passes By* 305). He furthermore stated that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had also invested the American Bahá’í community with a *‘spiritual primacy on which they could rely in the fulfilment of their high destiny’* (*World Order* 77). In his message to the American friends on 14th November 1936, he described these Tablets as a *‘Key which Providence has placed into the hands of the American believers whereby to unlock the doors leading them to fulfil their unimaginably glorious destiny’* (*This Decisive Hour* 14). And, in his message of March 16th, 1949, he stated: *‘The American Bahá’í community [is] exalted, singled out among sister-communities of East and West through [the] revelation of the Tablets of the Divine Plan . . .’* (*Citadel of Faith* 67).

In a summary of the goals and objectives of the Ten Year Crusade, which was published in 1953 as a supplement to his *World Statistical Bahá’í Summary*, Shoghi Effendi listed in alphabetical order the 120 territories mentioned by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His fourteen Tablets of the Divine Plan. The list is as follows (*Bahá’í Faith, STATS* 53-54):

THE TABLETS OF THE DIVINE PLAN

1)	Afghanistan	41)	Galapagos Island	81)	Nicaragua
2)	Alaska	42)	Germany	82)	Norway
3)	Andorra	43)	Gilbert Islands	83)	Orkney Islands
4)	Argentina	44)	Greater Antilles	84)	Panama
5)	Austria-Hungary	45)	Greece	85)	Paraguay
6)	Bahama Islands	46)	Guatemala	86)	Peru
7)	Balearic Islands	47)	Haiti	87)	Philippine Islands
8)	Belgium	48)	Hawaiian Islands	88)	Polynesia
9)	Belize (or British Honduras)	49)	Hebrides	89)	Portugal
10)	Bermuda	50)	Holland	90)	Puerto Rico
11)	Bismarck Archipelago	51)	Honduras	91)	Réunion Islands
12)	Bolivia	52)	Iceland	92)	Romania
13)	Borneo	53)	India	93)	Russia (Asia)
14)	Brazil	54)	Italy	94)	Russia (Europe)
15)	British Guiana	55)	Jamaica	95)	Saint Helena
16)	British Isles	56)	Japan	96)	Salvador
17)	Bulgaria	57)	Java	97)	Samoa Islands
18)	Canary Islands	58)	Juan Fernandez	98)	San Marino
19)	Cape Verde Islands	59)	Korea	99)	Santo Domingo
20)	Caroline Islands	60)	Lesser Antilles	100)	Sardinia
21)	Celebes	61)	Liechtenstein	101)	Serbia
22)	Ceram	62)	Low Archipelago	102)	Shetland Islands
23)	Ceylon	63)	Loyalty Islands	103)	Siam
24)	Chile	64)	Luxembourg	104)	Sicily
25)	China	65)	Madagascar	105)	Society Islands
26)	Colombia	66)	Madeira Islands	106)	Solomon Islands
27)	Corsica	67)	Malta	107)	South Africa
28)	Costa Rica	68)	Marquesas	108)	Spain
29)	Crete	69)	Marshall Islands	109)	Straits Settlements
30)	Cuba	70)	Mauritius	110)	Sumatra
31)	Denmark	71)	Melanesia	111)	Sweden
32)	Dutch Guiana	72)	Mexico	112)	Switzerland
33)	Ecuador	73)	Micronesia	113)	Tasmania
34)	Falkland Islands	74)	Moluccas	114)	Timor
35)	Faroe Islands	75)	Monaco	115)	Tobago
36)	Fiji Islands	76)	Montenegro	116)	Trinidad
37)	France	77)	New Caledonia	117)	Uruguay
38)	French Guiana	78)	New Guinea	118)	Venezuela
39)	French Indo-China	79)	New Hebrides	119)	Watling Island
40)	Friendly Islands	80)	New Zealand	120)	Zanzibar

In this list there are a number of names that you will not recognize in the geography of today but these names were current in the

days of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. For example, Number 40 is Friendly Islands. The new name is Tonga Island in the Pacific. Number 62 is Low Archipelago. The name today is the Tuamuto Islands, which is part of French Polynesia. Number 99 is Santo Domingo, whose current name is the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean.

Another interesting point about this list is that He excludes a number of countries. For example the United States and Canada are not mentioned because the letters were addressed to them. Other countries not included are Persia, Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Cyprus. The interesting thing about Cyprus is that at that time there were a few active Azalís, who were followers of Mírzá Yahyá, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá probably did not want the American believers to go there at that time. Of course, later on, when things changed Shoghi Effendi mentioned Cyprus in the Ten Year Plan.

Furthermore, some countries are included though there were already Bahá’ís residing in them. For example, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had already visited the British Isles where He had given many talks to the friends, and even in churches, yet we find that the British Isles are included. Regarding France, as you know, the first Bahá’í centre in Europe was in Paris. The first believer, Hippolyte Dreyfus, was already there and a local community existed. Germany has also been included. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had visited Germany and there were Bahá’ís in Stuttgart as well as in other parts of the country. India is mentioned, but ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had correspondence with the Bahá’ís there and had sent teachers. The most wonderful thing is that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions Russia in two entries, ‘Russia Asia’ and ‘Russia Europe’. In ‘Russia Asia’ He already had the Ish-qábád Temple.

In revealing the Tablets of the Divine Plan, the intention of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the conquest of the entire planet. It was not only that there would be a Bahá’í address in each country, or one individual Bahá’í, or one Local Spiritual Assembly, but, as Shoghi Effendi has explained, the ultimate objective was that the entire structure of the Administrative Order, in all its details, with all the aspects of its machinery, would be operative in every spot on

earth. We have a lot to do. During the Formative Age we may not succeed in fully obtaining this objective in every territory on the planet. At this time, there are still a number of territories that have not yet been opened to the Faith. Shoghi Effendi has clearly stated that in the goals of his Ten Year Crusade he did not include all the territories of the globe. He only included the ‘chief territories’. So there are a number of territories that are not in the category of ‘chief territories’. Therefore, the ultimate vision is to have the entire structure of the Administrative Order fully established and operative in every land, with its National Assembly and all its organs, its Local Assemblies, its local Ḥaẓíratu’l-Quds’, its local Bahá’í properties and maybe even its local Bahá’í temple! This is the vision we have ahead of us. The process will continue throughout the Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh.

Shoghi Effendi referred to these Tablets as ‘*the Charter for the propagation of the Faith throughout the world*’ (*Messages from the Universal House of Justice* 261). These immortal Tablets contain ‘Abdul’Bahá’s call to the friends to arise. They also contain beautiful and soul-stirring prayers for Bahá’í teachers.

I have tried to categorize the contents of these fourteen Tablets under nine headings. From the many salient points I have extracted a few, which in my view have special importance and I will comment on some of these points. When you study these lists you see that there is some overlap. For example, when He comments about teaching, He may refer to some of the spiritual qualities that individuals should have. He may again refer in different words to these qualities when explaining the role of the individual in the community.

These gems of divine guidance could be summarized under the following headings:

- A) The urgency of the teaching work
- B) Methods of effective teaching and propagation
- C) Spiritual qualities of those who teach
- D) Important individual attitudes of the believers

- E) The Cause of God in the world
- F) The individual in the community
- G) Potentialities of specific countries and populations
- H) Bahá'í life and the power of divine assistance
- I) Prayers

Salient points are listed here under each of the eight headings:

A) THE URGENCY OF THE TEACHING WORK

- 1) Bahá'ís are called upon to diffuse the divine fragrances in every city and village.
- 2) Guiding one soul to God's Holy Faith is better than all the riches of the world.
- 3) 'Abdu'l-Bahá is longing to travel through the territories mentioned by Him to promote the divine teachings, though on foot and in the utmost poverty.

B) METHODS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND PROPAGATION

- 1) Institutes of instruction should be established for the diffusion of the teachings, as well as for training youth in the proofs and precepts of the Faith.
- 2) Those who engage in the teaching work should either do it on their own initiative or be selected for this purpose.
- 3) There is an advantage in groups of men and women traveling together.
- 4) Learning the language of the people of the country to facilitate the teaching work is important.
- 5) Literature published in local languages is needed.
- 6) The national magazine must aim at promulgating the Cause in both East and West, giving news of most important events and issued with the utmost regularity.

On the subject of teaching 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to institutes of instruction, so the idea that we now have of Institutes is really based

on the Tablets of the Divine Plan, namely His vision of an institution that will help to develop our capacities to teach and our deeper understanding of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. There is no clergy in the Faith, as in all religions of the past. Bahá'u'lláh abolished professional clergy. The Hands of the Cause and today the Counsellors are bereft of decision-making authority. They can and should advise, give counsel, make recommendations and encourage. The decision-making authority has been given to elected institutions. It has been taken away from appointed individuals and given to elected institutions. This is one of the distinctions of the Administrative Order which is later to become the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

In the absence of clergy, we get together and read the writings with perhaps a facilitator to help us. This facilitator is not a clergyman. He has merely a little more experience. Consultation is one of the distinctive features of this Faith. It is not only applicable to Local Spiritual Assemblies when they discuss the administrative work. Through consultation we exchange views and deepen our understanding. A study circle provides a form of consultation. Through the interaction and exchange of opinions and ideas, we are able to learn. The clergyman goes up on his pulpit and he gives a sermon, which gives his understanding of the text. Bahá'u'lláh has taken this practice away from His system. But of course this does not mean that if someone knows something he cannot share it with others. In a local community we exchange ideas, we work together, we learn together and that is how we develop.

This existence of Institutes is very important in the Faith. Therefore, the deepening runs through two parallel lines. One way is through individual effort and the other is through collective effort, that is through the organized activities of the Institutes and the study circles. But this does not take away from us our individual responsibility to deepen ourselves at home, by ourselves, because Bahá'u'lláh tells us, *'Recite ye the verses of God every*

morn and eventide’ (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* ¶149) and ‘*Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words*’ (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* ¶182).

Somebody asked ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when He was in the United States, ‘I want to live the Bahá’í life. What shall I do?’ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that the first thing the believer must do is to have a thirst for spirituality. In order to have this thirst, one has to pray, to read the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and think about life after death. The third condition implies that we are not in this life forever, that death is at our door, that there is another life and that we are here to prepare ourselves for the next life. This awareness is an essential part of developing our Bahá’í life and living the Bahá’í life. I repeat, thus, the three essential requirements of beginning to live the Bahá’í life are prayer, reading the Writings and reflection on life after death (*Compilation of Compilations* vol. I, 202).

When we are reading the Writings, we have to meditate on the words and ask ourselves, ‘What is the intention or purpose of Bahá’u’lláh? What is He telling me?’ We have to try and probe into what Bahá’u’lláh says, not only read the words. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers in one of His prayers to ‘*the murmur of syllables and sounds*’ (*Bahá’í Prayers* 70). According to the Catholic Church and the Muslim concept, the mere murmur of syllables and sounds is important. For example, poor people in Africa who are Muslims try very hard to read Arabic. They don’t understand the Arabic words but to them the murmur of syllables and sounds is important. So they try to pronounce, for example, the letter ‘*ayn*’ gutturally for it to have an effect. This concept does not exist in the Faith. Bahá’u’lláh advises us to read, understand, reflect, meditate and allow the words to sink in and to become part and parcel of our lives. He says in His *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*: ‘*Read ye the Tablets that ye may know what hath been purposed in the Books of God, the All-Glorious, the Ever-Bounteous*’ (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* ¶36).

C) SPIRITUAL QUALITIES OF THOSE WHO TEACH

- 1) Bahá’í teachers should be severed, holy, sanctified and filled with the love of God.

- 2) Bahá'í teachers should be heavenly and radiant, embodied spirits, personified intellects, moved by the spirit of self-sacrifice.
- 3) Their eyes should be turned to Kingdom of God.
- 4) Those who travel in the paths of service should be free from every attachment.
- 5) Teachers should be entirely severed from the physical world and become angels of heaven.
- 6) The intention of the teacher must be pure, his heart independent, his spirit attracted, his mind at peace, his resolution firm. He should be like a torch, burning with the fire of the love of God.
- 7) The motive of the Bahá'í teacher should be noble and exalted.
- 8) Those who arise should be free from the world of nature, vivified with the breaths of eternal life, with luminous hearts and eloquent tongues.

There is no end to the perfections that each one of us can attain in developing spiritual qualities. Mrs May Maxwell, the mother of Rúhíyyih Khánum, once said that the Faith is a university. We register, but we never graduate. We learn all the time. Likewise, it is so with spiritual qualities. We develop our spiritual qualities throughout our lives, but absolute perfection is never reached, as it can only be a characteristic of the Manifestations of God. The embodiment of every Bahá'í virtue is 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the perfect Exemplar. Shoghi Effendi in the *Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* writes:

No Guardian of the Faith, I feel it my solemn duty to place on record, can ever claim to be the perfect exemplar of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh or the stainless mirror that reflects His light. Though overshadowed by the unfailing, the unerring protection of Bahá'u'lláh and of the Báb, and however much he may share with 'Abdu'l-Bahá the right and obligation to interpret the Bahá'í teachings, he remains essentially

human and cannot, if he wishes to remain faithful to his trust, arrogate to himself, under any pretence whatsoever, the rights, the privileges and prerogatives which Bahá'u'lláh has chosen to confer upon His Son (World Order 151).

There will never be another Perfect Exemplar during this Dispensation. That door has been closed. This will prevent some fool someday to say: 'I am a great scholar, I am this, I am that, therefore I am a perfect exemplar'. We are all just trying to be Bahá'is and we will all continue to try. We will gain degrees of perfection but we will never ever reach absolute perfection. The Faith is perfect. The teachings are perfect. The Exemplar is perfect. We are not perfect. We cannot be perfect, but we will develop along this path towards perfection, gradually, drop by drop, step by step. We should never give up.

D) IMPORTANT INDIVIDUAL ATTITUDES OF THE BELIEVERS

- 1) The pursuit of material rest, luxury and attachment to the material world will in the end result in utter loss and regret.
- 2) Men should not follow the example of animals and birds and be occupied only with the requirements of this physical life.
- 3) Every outward glory and splendour will in the end vanish and disappear but God's sovereignty and majesty are everlasting.
- 4) We should strive day by day to become more illumined and draw nearer to God's Holy Threshold.
- 5) Man, who is born from the womb of the mother, should then be born from the womb of the world of nature.
- 6) Bahá'is should be baptized with the water of life, acquire a large portion of the heavenly banquet, and even be satisfied with little material food.

- 7) We should detach ourselves from material possessions and sacrifice our all in the path of service.
- 8) Bahá'ís should close their eyes to material comfort and long for eternal life, the development of the spirit, the promotion of the Word of God and the guidance and happiness of humanity.
- 9) We should purify ourselves from this world and focus on the welfare of others.
- 10) Man has been created for the acquirement of infinite perfections, for the attainment of nobility and for drawing ever nearer to God's Holy Throne
- 11) If the friends become intoxicated with the wine of His love and be preoccupied with the affairs of the realm of the spirit, they will regard sovereignty over the entire planet as a plaything for children
- 12) We should not look upon the smallness of our numbers in the face of the multitudes of the nations; five grains of wheat will be endowed with heavenly blessing but one thousand tons of tares will yield no result.

The obligation to teach the Cause is something that we often forget and ignore. Shoghi Effendi has advised that we should teach the Cause every day. We should mention the name of Bahá'u'lláh once every day. That means I have to mention the Faith three hundred and sixty-five times in a year. Do I do it? I was so thrilled when our friend from Turkey said yesterday that his friends were saying: 'Where are you going? When you go to Acuto, you cannot teach anyone there! Remain here and you will be able to teach!' This is the Bahá'í spirit. We have to teach every day at least once. When we mentioned earlier about having personal individual goals, this should be at the top of the list.

Another individual goal in the teaching work is, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, that we should aim to bring into the Cause one person every year (*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 265). 'Do I do it?' You know my age by now. If, as I am talking to you,

I have a heart attack and go to the next world and I see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, He will ask: ‘Alí, you have come! My first question is this! Who are the seventy people you taught, who have become Bahá’ís through your teaching? You were in a Bahá’í family for fifteen years, you are now eighty-five; eighty-five less fifteen is seventy. Who are those seventy people?’ I think every one of us should think like this. My suggestion is for you to see how many years you have been a registered Bahá’í and see how many Bahá’ís you have brought into the Cause. This is a responsibility of each one of us. The importance of the Tablets of the Divine Plan is because they are designed to promote the teaching work.

We are very good in administration. We love administration but somehow we are afraid to teach the Cause. This is a weakness in the Bahá’í community. We leave it to the Assembly or special committees to worry over the teaching work, to arrange for speakers to give public talks and to run teaching projects here and there. We are satisfied about discharging other spiritual obligations, but when it comes to teaching, I have heard some Bahá’ís say, ‘I don’t like teaching. I am afraid of teaching. I don’t know much. If I start teaching the Faith and people realize that I don’t know much, it is not good for the Faith!’ We rationalize our behaviour and that is wrong. We should put our trust in Him, we should speak and mention His Name. He assures us that He will help and inspire us. Shoghi Effendi wrote: ‘*Let the doubter arise*’ (*Messages to America* 17). If I am afraid I must decide to change. Through His divine assistance I have to transform myself. I have to find a way to teach the Cause.

Teaching at its basic level does not need time. Yes, some teaching activities need time. I agree that to have a fireside at home needs time. But we should look at other possibilities of teaching the Cause. For example, when I go to my work I meet people. I’m mixing with people all the time in life. When I am out in the world, I am meeting people. I should see where are the receptive souls. Shoghi Effendi says in one of his letters, ‘*To find these receptive souls and teach them, with tact and understanding,*

is the duty and privilege of every single Bahá'í' (Compilation of Compilations, vol. II 319). He has also said that we have to pray everyday, 'Oh Bahá'u'lláh! Send me one receptive soul today, to whom I can mention the Faith'. This is so fundamental in the teaching work.

E) THE CAUSE OF GOD IN THE WORLD

- 1) All countries long for peace and there is not a soul who does not yearn for universal concord and conciliation.
- 2) The outward world should become a symbol of the inner world. The mirror of the earth should reflect the ideals and virtues of the Kingdom.
- 3) The Divine Collective Centre is more important than collective centres based on national, patriotic, political, cultural and intellectual interests, which by their very nature have no permanent or abiding influence.

F) THE INDIVIDUAL IN THE COMMUNITY

- 1) The importance of fellowship and love among the believers.
- 2) Should one Bahá'í meet another, it must be as though a thirsty one, with parched lips, has reached the fountain of the water of life.
- 3) The importance of firmness in the Covenant.
- 4) Contention is absolutely forbidden in the Cause. If two souls quarrel and contend about a question regarding the Faith, both are wrong.

On the subject of love, unity and harmony in the community, this is an eternal principle of all divine Revelations. In one of His Tablets 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that there are some Bahá'ís who love to see differences in the community. We should be of those who love harmony. There is a prayer by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in which He says '*Grant that I may become...the promoter of concord amongst Thy loved ones*' (*Bahá'í Prayers p.29*). Some people are promoters of

discord among men and the instrument they use is backbiting and gossip. This does nothing but instill poison in the minds and hearts of the friends. Instead we should look at the good qualities of others and praise them. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gives the example of Jesus Christ looking at the white teeth of a dead dog. He was walking with His disciples and they passed by the corpse of a dead dog. All the disciples complained about the smell and appearance of the dead dog. Jesus Christ instead said, ‘Why don’t you look at its white teeth?’ He found a good thing in this corpse of a dog. We have to look for the white teeth in everybody and praise them. We should not say this believer does not deserve any praise from me. If I see a good thing, I must appreciate it. And that is one way to promote unity.

I must be humble. I must not be proud and arrogant. I must try to chase out jealousy from my heart. This is a fundamental requirement. If we are not united in the community, how can we teach the Cause? Why are we teaching the Cause? Are we inviting people to come to a divided community? Is this how we intend to establish the oneness of mankind? We should be aware of the importance of promoting unity in the Bahá’í community, wherever we are.

Another question you find referred to in this section is the Covenant and the importance of firmness in the Covenant. The Covenant is not just something that began with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and ended with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says in several Tablets that His ministry was the morning of the Covenant. The period of twenty-nine years of His ministry was the morning of the Covenant, as if it were seven o’clock in the morning. Now we are under the shadow of the Universal House of Justice. It may be about eight-thirty or nine o’clock. This Covenant is designed to continue not only until the end of the Formative Age but until the end of the Golden Age, into the next Dispensation. The duty of the Universal House of Justice would certainly be to recognize the next Manifestation and introduce Him. The active force of the Covenant is ongoing. We are sitting here under the Covenant of

Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The centre and pivot of our Covenant is the Universal House of Justice. It is the central institution of the Faith throughout the rest of the Dispensation. Think of the wonderful day when we have the zenith, the sun of the Covenant reaching its highest point. This is yet ahead. We will continue to be under this Covenant till the end of this Dispensation. Our love for the Universal House of Justice, our eagerness to understand the intentions of the House of Justice, our longing to execute the plans of the Universal House of Justice – such are the requirements of firmness in the Covenant today.

G. POTENTIALITIES OF SPECIFIC POPULATIONS AND COUNTRIES

America and the American continent:

- 1) The members of the North American Bahá'í community are addressed as '*apostles of Bahá'u'lláh*'.
- 2) The continent of America is a land wherein the splendours of His light and the mysteries of His Faith will be revealed and where the righteous and the free will assemble.
- 3) When the Divine Message is carried by the American believers to other continents, their community will find itself established on the throne of an everlasting dominion.
- 4) Thus far the labours of the American friends have been untiring, but their exertions should increase a thousand fold.

Canada:

The future of Canada is infinitely glorious and very great, whether from a material or a spiritual standpoint.

Greenland:

Should the fire of the love of God be kindled in Greenland, all the ice of that country will be melted.

Eskimos:

- 1) Reaching the Eskimos is important.

- 2) Diffusion of the divine fragrances among the Eskimos will have great and far-reaching effects.

Indian aborigines:

The Indian aborigines of the American continent have the capacity to shed illumination upon the world, when they are educated and properly guided.

Panama:

Once the Faith is established there, it will become a means of unity.

H) BAHÁ'Í LIFE AND THE POWER OF DIVINE ASSISTANCE

- 1) Unless a soul is detached, he cannot teach severance to others.
- 2) A sanctified breath of a detached Bahá'í would even affect a rock and can change a stone into a brilliant ruby, a mere shell into a pearl and dead soil into a rose garden. Through these pure breaths the blind become seeing, the deaf acquire hearing and dead are quickened.
- 3) It has often happened that one blessed soul has become the cause of the guidance of an entire nation.
- 4) The cohorts of the Kingdom will confirm the Bahá'í teachers and the favours of Bahá'u'lláh will surround them.
- 5) The breaths of the Holy Spirit can perform miracles.
- 6) A drop can become a sea and an atom a sun, through the bounties of God.
- 7) The harvest of the seeds of divine teachings is abundant. One grain will bring forth seven sheaves and every sheaf shall contain a hundred grains.

Among the requirements of a Bahá'í life is detachment. Sometimes it is referred to as severance. This word 'detachment' is a

special Bahá'í term. If you look up the entire range of religious scripture, you will not find the word 'detachment'. Look up the Bible, the New and Old Testament as well as the Qur'án and you will not find the word 'detachment' used in the way we understand it in Bahá'í texts. The concept of detachment, as explained in the Bahá'í Writings, does exist but it is expressed in different terminologies. For example, Christ speaks about self-denial and purity of heart, which are aspects related to detachment.

Detachment is something essential to Bahá'í life. As far as we are concerned, our children, grandchildren and descendants throughout the Dispensation will continue to try to become detached but never will we or can we become one hundred per cent detached. We can only achieve relative detachment.

In a Tablet revealed by Bahá'u'lláh He explains that detachment has different levels. He speaks of a ladder that exists between man and God and has three steps.

The first step, He says, is detachment from material things, that is, from pleasures and temptations, from the vanities and attachments of this world. It means an inordinate attraction to money, sex, power, ambition, etc. In other words, each one of us has an ego, a self, inside of us. This self that we are born with is animalistic. We will never be able to subdue it fully and completely as we all have weak points. Each one has to know her or his own weak points. Bahá'u'lláh tells us in the Hidden Words to examine ourselves every day. He says: *'Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning'* (Hidden Words Arabic 31). This means self-examination. Self-examination can be of two kinds: positive or negative. Self-examination can become negative to the point where we are paralyzed and can do nothing. That is bad. But self-examination can be positive when it leads to improvement, when a person strives to gain a little more perfection, draw a little closer to the standard, step by step and little by little.

The second step is to be detached from the benefits of the next world. What does that mean exactly? Does it mean that there will be no rewards in the next world? That is impossible because He

says there are rewards and punishments. I understand this to mean that if I am rendering a service here, I might be expecting a rich reward in the next world and the sole purpose of my efforts is to receive the expected reward. This, as I see it, is not acceptable in His sight. He wants us to be pure and detached. It should not matter whether there is a reward or not. Our love should be pure, as the love that parents have for their child is pure. The parents love their child without expectations. Whatever the mother and father do is done for the benefit of the child. The thought that this child will grow up and will compensate for the love now received, does not occur to loving parents because they are motivated by selfless love. Love can be of two kinds. It can be selfish love or it can be selfless. What Bahá'u'lláh wants for us is selfless love without any anticipation or expectation, in this world or in the next.

The third step is very difficult. This is why I think we may never be able to fully reach it. It is to be detached from the world of 'names'. 'Names' here implies a desire that my name may be mentioned by Him. This is a form of attachment to this desire. In the *Hidden Words* He says: '*O Son of Being! Make mention of Me on My earth, that in My heaven I may remember Thee, thus shall Mine eyes and thine be solaced*' (*Hidden Words Arabic* 43). This is a subtle reward. He is just mentioning my name but I have become attached to this acknowledgment of my name. I must detach myself from my own name. There will be an identity of souls in the next world, so I will never lose my identity. But He does not want me to be attached to anything, including my name and my existence. That is the third stage on the scale of detachment.

Bahá'u'lláh has also told us to '*soar on the wings of detachment*' (*Prayers and Meditations* 103). Detachment gives us wings. We become birds and we fly. Without detachment we are earthly. We get stuck and fixed on this earth all the time. We become worms, instead of flying birds. The wings of detachment give us joy. I am sure some of you must have had dreams that you were flying. It is a wonderful and thrilling experience. It is a sign that our souls long to become detached.

Another important thing for our spiritual growth is trust and confidence in Him. If we do not have trust in the Almighty, we do not receive this divine confirmation. Trust is different from mere faith. Faith is to recognize the Manifestation of God. Through love, effort, study and service, faith develops into certitude. However, trust is something else. Trust is when I move, when I start doing something for Bahá'u'lláh. I must have trust in His help, trust in His confirmation, trust that He is near me, sees me, knows me, will help me, will assist me, will strengthen me, will inspire me, will teach me. Bahá'u'lláh says, '*Fear ye God; God will teach you*' (*Kitáb-i-Íqán* 69). Fear here really means love of God. The love of God and the fear of God are the same. They are two sides of the same coin. If I love God, if I fear God; and He will then teach me. He will teach me and I will learn. He will inspire me. He will enable me to know things that I did not know before, that I never thought of before. That is how He comes to my aid. This is a reality, not only a theory. In practice, it has happened in the past and it will always happen throughout the Dispensation.

I. PRAYERS

The fourteen Tablets are interspersed with nine prayers for Bahá'ís engaged in the teaching work. These are usually included in prayer books.

With the exception of two of the fourteen Tablets, which address the assemblies and meetings of the believers of God in the United States and Canada, all the rest are addressed to the general body of the '*believers of God and the maidservants of the Merciful*' or similar titles. In the text of the Tablets, the duties and responsibilities are either assigned to the general membership of the North American community and regions within it or represent an appeal and exhortation to the individual believer to acquire the essential

prerequisites for successful teaching. Indeed, the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and other Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá are, for the most part, similar in tone. The guidance given by the Heads of our Faith during the Heroic Age are invariably directed to the individual believer to arise, to immerse himself in the teachings, to deliver the message and to pursue a life acceptable in the sight of God.

Out of the fourteen Tablets, five of them, revealed in 1916, were sent to the United States before the Holy Land was cut off from that country because of the First World War. However, the remaining Tablets were held by the Master and sent after the war was ended. It was only at the convention in 1919 that the Tablets were formally presented. Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum was present at that gathering and she describes the occasion in the following words:

. . . a pleasant ceremony was held, called the 'unveiling of the Divine Plan', at which pairs of children and young people (myself included) pulled strings and one of the Tablets duly appeared on the draped background of the platform (Priceless Pearl 437).

Copies of the Tablets were sent to the friends in the East and were eventually published in the series of volumes of *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, printed in Egypt. The fourteen Tablets were all included in volume II of this series.

It was only during the Formative Age that Shoghi Effendi drew, in ever greater measure, the attention of the friends to the significance of these epoch-making Tablets, which had worldwide implications. For example, he described these Tablets as a '*primary factor in the birth and efflorescence of the World Order itself, in both the East and the West*' (*This Decisive Hour* 122). In another context, he referred to the principal recipients of these precious Tablets, that is the Bahá'í community of the United States, as the '*chief executors of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan*', to the Canadian Bahá'í community as their '*allies*' and to the Latin

American Bahá'í communities as their 'associates' (*Messages to the Bahá'í World* 144). As to the rest of the Bahá'í world, he considered their national plans as accessory and supplementary to the Divine Plan conferred upon the North American community. For example, he wrote in 1949 the following: *'[These national plans] are but supplements to the vast enterprise whose features have been delineated in those Tablets and are to be regarded, by their very nature, as regional in scope, in contrast with the world-embracing character of the mission entrusted to the community of the champion builders of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, and the torch-bearers of the civilization which that Order must eventually establish'* (*Citadel of Faith* 70).

Shoghi Effendi pointed out that the Golden Age of our Faith will have its own epochs and crusades. He also indicated that the Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan had relevance to the developments of the Golden Age of the Faith. Thus, crusades during the Golden Age will fall under the shadow of the contents of the Divine Plan.

The emphasis laid by Shoghi Effendi on plans, objectives and goals has quite often, unfortunately, been misunderstood or perhaps misinterpreted by some of the believers. It has often been assumed that the urgency and importance of building up the framework of the Administrative Order cancelled out and replaced personal initiatives. This misapplication of the Guardian's directives is regrettably apparent even today, as we pursue collective efforts to win the goals of the Five Year Plan.

In the very early years of his Guardianship, in a letter dated March 12, 1923, he wrote:

But let us be on our guard... lest... 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 ... (Bahá'í Administration 42).

In February 1929 he wrote again: ‘. . . *the administration of the Cause is to be conceived as an instrument and not a substitute for the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh . . . It is surely for those to whose hands so priceless a heritage has been committed to prayerfully watch lest the tool should supersede the Faith itself . . .*’ (World Order 9). The secret of right living and serving under the Administrative Order is for every believer to strike a healthy balance between his commitments to the institutions and agencies of the Faith and his obligation to seek avenues for individual initiative, most particularly in the teaching field.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

Q. What happened to the Tablets of the Divine Plan? They haven't been heard of (in terms of executing them) for ages. We have been in their second epoch for a long time. Are they somehow 'on hold'? What are the features of the second epoch?

A. Chart n. 2 shows the Tablets of the Divine Plan and it is stated that these Tablets were kept in abeyance for twenty years. Then in 1937 the First Epoch of the Divine Plan began. Shoghi Effendi himself said in his messages that in 1963 the First Epoch of these Tablets would end. The Universal House of Justice has to decide when the Second Epoch of the Tablets of the Divine Plan will end. This has to do with the letter of Shoghi Effendi dated 4 May 1953 in which he comments about diffusion, penetration and suffusion. The House of Justice will no doubt wish to refer to this passage when considering its implication in their consultations on when to end this Epoch. Whatever the House of Justice will decide is of God and we will welcome its decision with heart and soul.

III

Time Periods: From Cycles to Phases

In order to fully grasp the significance of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh in the context of the history of humanity, and the glorious destiny that awaits it in the future, it would be helpful to peruse and meditate on statements made by Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi on the potentialities of this Dispensation, which He Who is the Promised of all ages, has inaugurated.

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

I testify before God to the greatness, the inconceivable greatness of this Revelation. Again and again have We in most of Our Tablets borne witness to this truth, that mankind may be roused from its heedlessness.

In this most mighty Revelation all the Dispensations of the past have attained their highest, their final consummation.

That which hath been made manifest in this preeminent, this most exalted Revelation, stands unparalleled in the annals of the past, nor will future ages witness its like (World Order 103–4).

It is evident that every age in which a Manifestation of God hath lived is divinely ordained and may, in a sense, be characterized as God's appointed Day. This Day, however, is unique and is to be distinguished from those that have preceded it (World Order 107).

Through the movement of Our Pen of glory We have, at the bidding of the omnipotent Ordainer, breathed a new life into every human frame and instilled into every word a fresh potency. All created things proclaim the evidences of this worldwide regeneration (World Order 107).

This Day . . . is unique, and is to be distinguished from those that have preceded it. The designation 'Seal of the Prophets' fully revealeth its high station. The Prophetic Cycle hath, verily, ended (Gleanings 60).

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

[This is] a cycle that must extend over a period of at least five hundred thousand years (World Order 102).

We are in the cycle which began with Adam, and its supreme Manifestation is Bahá'u'lláh (Some Answered Questions 161).

In connection with the Manifestations destined to follow the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes this definite and weighty declaration: 'Concerning the Manifestations that will come down in the future "in the shadows of the clouds", know verily that in so far as their relation to the source of their inspiration is concerned they are under the shadow of the Ancient Beauty. In their relation, however, to the age in which they appear, each and every one of them "doeth whatsoever He willeth"' (World Order 111).

From the Writings of Shoghi Effendi

After Bahá'u'lláh many Prophets will, no doubt, appear, but they will be all under His shadow. Although they may abrogate the laws of the Dispensation, in accordance with the

needs and requirements of the age in which they appear, they nevertheless draw their spiritual force from this mighty Revelation. The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh constitutes, indeed, the stage of maturity in the development of mankind. His appearance has released such spiritual forces which will continue to animate, for many long years to come, the world in its development. Whatever progress may be achieved in the later ages – after the unification of the whole human race is achieved – will be but improvements in the machinery of the world. For the machinery itself has already been created by Bahá'u'lláh. The task of continually improving and perfecting this machinery is one which later Prophets will be called upon to achieve. They will move and work within the orbit of the Bahá'í cycle (Lights of Guidance 473).

'From time immemorial', Bahá'u'lláh, speaking of God, explains, 'He, the Divine Being, hath been veiled in the ineffable sanctity of His exalted Self, and will everlastingly continue to be wrapt in the impenetrable mystery of His unknowable Essence . . .'

'The door of the knowledge of the Ancient of Days', Bahá'u'lláh further states in the Kitáb-i-Íqán, 'being thus closed in the face of all beings, He, the Source of infinite grace . . . hath caused those luminous Gems of Holiness to appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence . . .'

That Bahá'u'lláh should, notwithstanding the overwhelming intensity of His Revelation, be regarded as essentially one of these Manifestations of God, never to be identified with that invisible Reality, the Essence of Divinity itself, is one of the major beliefs of our Faith – a belief which should

never be obscured and the integrity of which no one of its followers should allow to be compromised.

Nor does the Bahá'í Revelation, claiming as it does to be the culmination of a prophetic cycle and the fulfilment of the promise of all ages, attempt, under any circumstances, to invalidate those first and everlasting principles that animate and underlie the religions that have preceded it (World Order 113–114).

Referring to the Martyrdom of the Báb, Shoghi Effendi has written:

Thus ended a life which posterity will recognize as standing at the confluence of two universal prophetic cycles, the Adamic Cycle stretching back as far as the first dawning of the world's recorded religious history and the Bahá'í Cycle destined to propel itself across the unborn reaches of time for a period of no less than five thousand centuries. The apotheosis in which such a life attained its consummation marks, as already observed, the culmination of the most heroic phase of the Heroic Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation. It can, moreover, be regarded in no other light except as the most dramatic, the most tragic event transpiring within the entire range of the first Bahá'í century. Indeed it can be rightly acclaimed as unparalleled in the annals of the lives of all the Founders of the world's existing religious systems (God Passes By 54–55).

[This is] a Revelation, hailed as the promise and crowning glory of past ages and centuries, as the consummation of all the Dispensations within the Adamic Cycle, inaugurating an era of at least a thousand years' duration, and a cycle destined to last no less than five thousand centuries, signaling the end of the Prophetic Era and the beginning of the Era of Fulfilment, unsurpassed alike in the duration of its Author's

ministry and the fecundity and splendour of His mission . . . (God Passes By 100).

With 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ascension... there draws to a close the first and most moving chapter of Bahá'í history, marking the conclusion of the Primitive, the Apostolic Age of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. It was 'Abdu'l-Bahá Who, through the provisions of His weighty Will and Testament, has forged the vital link which must for ever connect the age that has just expired with the one we now live in – the Transitional and Formative period of the Faith – a stage that must in the fullness of time reach its blossom and yield its fruit in the exploits and triumphs that are to herald the Golden Age of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh (World Order 98).

The Formative Period, the Iron Age, of that Dispensation was now beginning, the Age in which the institutions, local, national and international, of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh were to take shape, develop and become fully consolidated, in anticipation of the third, the last, the Golden Age destined to witness the emergence of a world-embracing Order enshrining the ultimate fruit of God's latest Revelation to mankind, a fruit whose maturity must signalize the establishment of a world civilization and the formal inauguration of the Kingdom of the Father upon earth as promised by Jesus Christ Himself (God Passes By 324).

The last twenty-three years of the first Bahá'í century may thus be regarded as the initial stage of the Formative Period of the Faith, an Age of Transition to be identified with the rise and establishment of the Administrative Order... (God Passes By 325).

The opening years of the second century of the Bahá'í Era have synchronized with the termination of the first epoch of

the Formative Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation, a Dispensation which posterity will recognize as the most glorious and momentous in the greatest cycle in the world's religious history.

The first seventy-seven years of the preceding century, constituting the Apostolic and Heroic Age of our Faith, fell into three distinct epochs, of nine, of thirty-nine and of twenty-nine years' duration, associated respectively with the Bábí Dispensation and the ministries of Bahá'u'lláh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This Primitive Age of the Bahá'í Era, unapproached in spiritual fecundity by any period associated with the mission of the Founder of any previous Dispensation, was impregnated, from its inception to its termination, with the creative energies generated through the advent of two independent Manifestations and the establishment of a Covenant unique in the spiritual annals of mankind.

The last twenty-three years of that same century coincided with the first epoch of the second, the Iron and Formative, Age of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh – the first of a series of epochs which must precede the inception of the last and Golden Age of that Dispensation – a Dispensation which, as the Author of the Faith has Himself categorically asserted, must extend over a period of no less than one thousand years, and which will constitute the first stage in a series of Dispensations, to be established by future Manifestations, all deriving their inspiration from the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation, and destined to last, in their aggregate, no less than five thousand centuries.

We are now entering the second epoch of the second Age of the first of these Dispensations. The first epoch witnessed the birth and the primary stages in the erection of the framework of the Administrative Order of the Faith – the nucleus and pattern of its World Order – according to the precepts laid down in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament, as well as the launching of the initial phase of the world-

encompassing Plan bequeathed by Him to the American Bahá'í Community (Citadel of Faith 4–5).

The epoch we have now entered is destined to impart a great impetus to this historic, this twofold process. It must witness, on the one hand, the consummation of a laboriously constructed Administrative Order, and, on the other, the unfoldment of successive stages in the development of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Plan beyond the confines of the Western Hemisphere and of the continent of Europe (Citadel of Faith 6).

The Divine Plan of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is divided into epochs. The first Seven Year Plan constituted the first stage of the first epoch; the second seven year plan constitutes the second stage; while the 10 year Crusade will constitute the third stage of the first epoch of the Divine Plan. The first epoch of the Divine Plan will conclude with the conclusion of the 10 year Crusade (Lights of Guidance 487).

From the above texts we can draw the following conclusions:

1) We are now in the course of the evolution of an all-embracing universal cycle, extending over a period of 506,000 years (*Some Answered Questions* 161).

2) This all-embracing cycle is divided into two parts: the first part is the Adamic cycle (see chart n. 1 p. 155), which began with Adam and ended with the Declaration of the Báb in 1844, and it consists of a period of 6000 years; the second part is the Bahá'í cycle, whose duration is at least 500,000 years.

The Bahá'í cycle is different from the Bahá'í Dispensation. The Bahá'í Dispensation is one thousand years. We are some 160 years into it. The Bahá'í Dispensation is part of the Bahá'í cycle, which will go on for 500,000 years under the shadow of Bahá'u'lláh. The Adamic cycle is also called the Prophetic Era,

and the Bahá'í cycle the Era of Fulfilment (*God Passes By* 100). As you know, the Prophet Muḥammad said that He was the 'Seal of the Prophets'. This could mean that He certified who the Prophets were and He put His seal on Prophethood. There is another meaning which is valid and is revealed in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. This meaning indicates that Muḥammad brought to an end the Prophetic Era. We have now entered the Era of Fulfilment. It is the fulfilment of the prophecies of the past that humanity will attain its stage of maturity. We are now beginning to get closer and closer to the stage when humanity will indeed reach maturity and Bahá'u'lláh has given us signs of humanity's coming of age (see *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* pp. 250–251).

Bahá'u'lláh has said that His Dispensation will cover a period of at least one thousand years. He does not give us the maximum, only the minimum. Beyond this, nobody knows. This is in the knowledge of God.

I) Each cycle is divided into Dispensations. The Adamic cycle, which covered a period of 6000 years, included the prophets of all religions whose followers are residing throughout the planet, namely the Hindu, the Jewish, the Buddhist, the Zoroastrian, the Christian and Muslim Dispensations. These Dispensations were all designed to pave the way and announce the advent of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh. They are all component parts of what Shoghi Effendi has described as the Prophetic Era. The Bahá'í cycle, described by Shoghi Effendi as the Era of Fulfilment, is composed of an undisclosed number of Dispensations.

The duration of the Prophetic Era, namely of 6000 years, has been given to us by Shoghi Effendi. This is, of course, an approximation. In other words, the period from the time of Adam until the time when the Bahá'í cycle and the Bahá'í Dispensation began in the year 1844, we should regard as a period of 6000 years.

Now, Adam is considered by the Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities to be the first created man and Eve the first cre-

ated woman. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá deals with this matter in *Some Answers and Questions*. He says this story ‘cannot be accepted by any intelligent person’ (*Some Answered Questions* 125). It is symbolic. And then He gives His interpretation of the meaning of Adam and Eve. It is very clear from the Writings that Adam was a Manifestation of God and that before Adam there were many Prophets sent by God to the world but the records of their teachings and activities disappeared because of the passage of time. You will find this statement that I am summarizing in *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh* (*Gleanings* 172–173).

So we start with Adam because His period was the beginning of recorded religious history. At the time of Moses, 1500 B.C., what the people knew about Adam and His teachings were written down and recorded. Then we have, of course, not the Semitic line but the Indo-Aryan line in the Indian subcontinent; for example Krishna in 3000 B.C. Then Abraham, Who is of the Semitic line, lived around 2000 B.C., and Moses of the Semitic line in 1500 B.C. Zoroaster, Who was of the Aryan line, was in Iran in 900 B.C. Then Buddha was on the Indian subcontinent in 560 B.C. (All these dates are approximations. The exact dates will depend on future research.) Then there was Christ in 1 A.D. There is question about whether 1 A.D. is correct or not. Some believe it should be 4 B.C. when He was born. Muḥammad declared His mission in 612 A.D. Then we have 1844 A.D. From the time of Adam until 1844 is 6000 years. If you deduct 1844 from 6000, we get 4156. The beginning of the Adamic Dispensation according to the years that have been recorded by scholars of the Bible is 4004 B.C. But this has again been questioned as to whether it is correct or not. Shoghi Effendi fixed the beginning of the Adamic Dispensation to be 6000 years ago; therefore by implication we arrive at the year 4156 B.C.

II) The Manifestations destined to appear after the Bahá’í Dispensation, according to the texts above, are under the shadow of the Blessed Beauty, but as they occupy the station of ‘*He doeth what-*

soever He willeth’, they are invested with the authority to change the laws, ordinances and institutions of the Most Holy Book, as circumstances require in each subsequent Dispensation.

We believe in progressive revelation, therefore it is logical to say that Manifestations can change the laws of Bahá’u’lláh. Just as science evolves, so does divine revelation. But we are told that these Manifestations of God will be under the shadow of Bahá’u’lláh. This is why we are calling the cycle of 500,000 years the cycle of Bahá’u’lláh, the Bahá’í cycle. How and why is it that the Manifestations of God will be under the shadow of Bahá’u’lláh? Bahá’u’lláh in His Writings states that this is the *‘Day which shall never be followed by night’*, the *‘Springtime which Autumn will never overtake’*. In His Writings Bahá’u’lláh refers to the word ‘Day’ in two ways. Sometimes the word ‘Day’ is used to refer to His Dispensation, that is the minimum of one thousand years. This is how it is used in the passage we find in *God Passes By* (p. 98), as quoted above. At other times, such as in *God Passes By* page 245 in the passage *‘This is the Day which shall never be followed by night’*, the word ‘Day’ is used to denote His own ministry over a period of thirty-nine years. In the former case Bahá’u’lláh is describing the greatness of His Dispensation, while in the latter usage He is extolling the power and influence of the Lesser Covenant, namely the ministries of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, of the Guardianship and of the Universal House of Justice, as the focal points of God’s Covenant during Bahá’u’lláh’s Dispensation. When quoting for the second time the passage in question, Shoghi Effendi makes it clear that the statement made by Bahá’u’lláh was a *‘solemn affirmation’* assuring the *‘lovers of the Cause’* of the *‘continuity of that unerring guidance vouchsafed to it since its birth’* (*God Passes By* 245).

When Shoghi Effendi was asked by pilgrims about future Manifestations as indicated above, he said it will be the duty of the House of Justice to recognize and introduce to the Bahá’í community the future Manifestation. The degree of opposition will be minimal compared to previous Revelations. The next

Manifestation will have opposition but not to the same degree. This is why Bahá'u'lláh tells us, as quoted in Shoghi Effendi's 'Dispensation', '*Deal not with Him as ye have dealt with Me*' (*World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 117). He is telling humanity not to oppose Him the way He Himself was opposed.

III) As to the Bahá'í Dispensation, it is divided into the following three Ages:

- a) The Heroic Age, also referred to as the Primitive Age and Apostolic Age; consisting of seventy-seven years.
- b) The Formative Age, also described as '*the Iron Age*', '*the Age of Transition*' (*God Passes By* 324–325), and '*the Age of Frustration*' (*World Order* 171), the duration of which is unknown. '*The term "Iron Age" suggests the age of labour, of construction; a relatively primitive epoch as opposed to a "Golden Age", an age of fulfilment, fruition, [and] attainment*' (*Lights of Guidance* 487–8).
- c) The Golden Age, which is to witness the fruition of the Bahá'í Faith, will witness the maturation of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh.

IV) The Heroic Age is divided into three epochs of nine, thirty-nine and twenty-nine years' duration, totalling seventy-seven years and representing respectively the ministries of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

V) Shoghi Effendi anticipated two initial epochs for the Formative Age, the first covering a period of twenty-three years, and the second of nineteen years for a total of forty-two years. The twenty-three years had in turn two parts: a period of sixteen years during which the local and national institutions of the Administrative Order took shape, followed by the seven years of the first American Seven Year Plan. The second epoch of the Formative Age was to last nineteen years, ending with the centenary of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh's mission in 1963.

VI) The end of this second epoch was to coincide with the end of the first epoch of the Divine Plan of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. As stated above, this epoch, according to Shoghi Effendi's letters, began in 1937 with the inception of the first American Seven Year Plan and was to cover a period of twenty-six years (i.e. 7+19).

In order to bring our thoughts to the present time, it would be good to refer to the developments of the Faith in terms of epochs of the Formative Age under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.

The third epoch of the Formative Age covered the period of twenty-three years, from 1963 to 1986, and covered three plans under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, namely the Nine Year, the Five Year and the Seven Year Plans.

The fourth epoch of the Formative Age lasted fifteen years, up to the year 2001, and witnessed the execution of four plans, namely the Six Year, Three Year, Four Year and Twelve Month Plans.

The fifth epoch of the Formative Age began in 2001. Its duration will be determined by the Universal House of Justice. The first of the series of plans during this epoch is the current Five Year Plan.

Among the attached charts there are two (see charts n. 2 and 3 pp. 156-157) that show the Epochs of the Heroic and Formative Ages and those in the Evolution of the Tablets of the Divine Plan.

As indicated above, the third epoch covered a period of twenty-three years and witnessed the formulation and execution of three plans. The goals of all three plans of this epoch were defined by the Universal House of Justice and conveyed to the National Assemblies for execution. In 1986, however, the House of Justice felt that National Assemblies throughout the world had, to all intents and purposes, achieved a degree of fitness and acquired enough experience to adopt their own goals within the time period

stipulated by the World Centre. Such goals had to be adopted after full consultation with the responsible Counsellors of the area. A copy of the formulated goals had, of course, to be submitted to the Universal House of Justice and regular reports sent to the World Centre on the progress achieved.

As to the fourth epoch and the decision of the Universal House of Justice to open a new epoch with a new Five Year Plan, the reason for such a step was the fact that a stage had generally been reached in the Bahá'í world when a new culture had begun to prevail and a new sense of ownership and participation to evolve. If this sense existed in some old and experienced national communities, it had to be enhanced. The time had come for Training Institutes to become formally and universally established as a permanent feature of the work of every National Spiritual Assembly. This Institute was designed to produce facilitators and tutors who would develop and promote the activities of study circles. Devotional meetings and children's classes also had to become fixed patterns in every Bahá'í community throughout the world. These core activities would be conducted in such a manner as to open the doors of the community to sympathetic seekers and non-Bahá'ís, both adults and children.

There was a need to divide the country into clusters and to categorize clusters depending upon whether they were virgin or not, and if already opened to the Faith, for these clusters to be classified according to their strengths. These new features were so fundamental in nature that the House of Justice felt that they had to accompany the dawn of the new epoch.

Another feature was to be the operation of Regional Councils, both elected and appointed, as approved by the Universal House of Justice. In countries where the establishment of such Councils was justified, the supervision of the teaching work, the much-needed stimulation to be given to Local Assemblies, groups and isolated believers and the urgency to improve the administrative

machinery in each of the regional areas became ongoing functions of these Regional Councils.

The final determination of all these details was, of course, within the jurisdiction of National Spiritual Assemblies but they were urged by the Universal House of Justice to invite the Counsellors, to seek their views and to engage in full consultation with them about the various aspects of this new stage in the development of the Faith.

How often has it been seen that in countries where the collaboration between the Counsellors and the National Spiritual Assemblies was genuine, intimate and sustained, the work of the Faith progressed, rapidly and healthily, both the teaching work and in the administrative field of Bahá'í service.

It will, of course, devolve upon the Universal House of Justice to determine when the current epoch will end and to decide how many more epochs separate us from the Golden Age of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh. As already stated, Shoghi Effendi has visualized, in his letter of May 1953, that even the Golden Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation will be divided into epochs and will have its own crusades (*Messages to the Bahá'ís of the World* 154).

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. We know the beginning of the process of disintegration is the year 1844. How can we respond to people who argue that the evidences of disintegration, the decadent events in history, have been occurring from before 1844 and therefore do not accept the Bahá'í view.

Q. Will destruction and integration, according to the idea given by the two lines, always coexist? Does this mean that in the Bahá'í civilization there will also be destructive events?

Q. In these days we have been talking about the two main processes of integration and disintegration; my question is, have they always coexisted since the beginning of human history? Or this is something that belongs only to the Bahá'í cycle in order to establish the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh?

A. These three questions are very closely related. For the word disintegration we can think of another word like decline or decay. It is because of decay and decline that the Prophets or the Messengers of God appear. God sends them because the disintegration process *does* exist before the appearance of the Manifestation of God. When a Manifestation of God appears, His appearance does not stop the disintegration, it accelerates it. Just as when the sun rises, if something is decayed, it dries it up (see chart n. 5 p. 159)

As to the question of whether the processes of integration and disintegration existed under previous Manifestations, they certainly did. This is a universal process. There is always disintegration in the world but this term has not been used and the concept has not been clarified in the way it is now, because it was localized in a country or applied to a region. Since we are now talking about the whole planet and the entire human race, this is why it has now become so dramatic and captures the imagination. But in

essence the two processes always existed in the past and will continue to exist in the future. The scale is different.

Q. Why is the Formative Age also called ‘the Age of Frustration’ in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*?

A. Shoghi Effendi uses this term ‘the Age of Frustration’ and it is mostly applicable to the Formative Age. But when we read his exact words about ‘the Age of Frustration’ you see that he is saying that the condition of frustration began even before the beginning of the Formative Age. With the First World War, the Age of Frustration began. Shoghi Effendi attached a great deal of importance to the First World War. In *God Passes By* he points out that the First World War was the first stage in the convulsions and the commotion that Bahá’u’lláh predicted (*God Passes By* 305). Remember he was writing this in *God Passes By* in 1944, when the Second World War was on. The Second World War was the second stage in the convulsions and the derangement of the equilibrium of the world that Bahá’u’lláh had predicted. The concept of ‘frustration’ is humanity’s realization that what it thought it could achieve, it had not achieved, as it failed to fulfil its hopes and its aspirations for happiness and welfare.

Q. Báb means ‘Gate’. Why is it that He is the starting point of the new era?

A. The Báb means ‘gate’. Of course, that means that He was a gate to Bahá’u’lláh. He was also a gate to a new era. At the confluence of two cycles stands one man, the Báb, and the era He opens is not called the Bábí cycle but the Bahá’í cycle. He is twenty-five years old. Now we come to the Dispensation itself. The Bahá’í Dispensation begins with the Heroic Age, including the Báb Himself, Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The Heroic Age comes to an end in 1921. There is another confluence here. At this confluence there is one man standing, Shoghi Effendi. He is

twenty-four years old and he is now opening a new Formative Age and this Formative Age will continue after the thirty-six years of his ministry into the stretches of time ahead. Then we have the Universal House of Justice and it will lead us into the Golden Age and later on into a new Dispensation.

The Báb was both a Manifestation of God and the Herald to Bahá'u'lláh. We call this the Bahá'í and not the Bábí cycle because its Supreme Manifestation is Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb was under the shadow of Bahá'u'lláh. Shoghi Effendi used to say that the Shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel was under the shadow of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, and he wrote that future kings coming to the Most Holy Land as pilgrims would first visit the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh and then visit the Shrine of the Báb because the Shrine of the Báb was under the shadow of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.

Q. Why do we commonly use the word 'Prophet' in connection with our Twin Manifestations, knowing that technically this does not apply to Them, since Muḥammad was the last one of these beings? We find this too in Shoghi Effendi's writings.

A. I can see the problem that the questioner has about the word 'Prophet' because this word has a double meaning. One is to be a prophet who prophesies about the advent of the Era of Fulfilment, and one is to be a Prophet, a Messenger or Manifestation of God. In the first sense of Prophet, the Prophetic Era is over. The Twin Manifestations, in the second sense of the word 'Prophet', are indeed divine prophetic figures.

IV

Plans Prior to the Ten Year Crusade

The first sixteen years of the Formative Age witnessed the formation and consolidation of Spiritual Assemblies, both Local and National. It was during this period that Shoghi Effendi was able to establish ten National Spiritual Assemblies in the world, which included two within the confines of the former Soviet Union. Listed below are the names of these National Spiritual Assemblies in alphabetical order:

- Australia and New Zealand
- Caucasus
- Egypt
- Germany and Austria
- British Isles
- India and Burma
- Iraq
- Iran
- Turkistan
- United States and Canada

Just prior to the beginning of World War II, and soon after, three of the National Spiritual Assemblies had to be disbanded. They were the National Assemblies of Caucasus, Germany-Austria and Turkistan. Thus in the year 1940-1941 the number of National Assemblies in the world was reduced to seven.

The National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria was re-elected soon after the end of the war. Some three years later, that is in 1948, that community was able to adopt its first nationally sponsored teaching Plan, namely its Five Year Plan ending in April 1953.

The two other National Assemblies were out of action for a much longer period, that is until 1990 when the former Soviet Union fell apart. It was then possible to form a number of new National Spiritual Assemblies in the former regional area of the Soviet regime. Among them were the National Spiritual Assemblies of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, which replaced the National Assemblies of the Caucasus and Turkistan.

It was at Riḍván 1937 that Shoghi Effendi felt that the time was ripe for the American Bahá'í community, whom Shoghi Effendi had described as the '*envied custodians*' (*Citadel of Faith* 120) of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets of the Divine Plan to be charged with the responsibility of executing, under his direct guidance, the first American Seven Year Plan, which was the initial collective teaching enterprise in the history of our Faith. It also opened, according to Shoghi Effendi, the first epoch in the evolution of the Divine Plan of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

A. The First (North American) Seven Year Plan

Any close observer will clearly note that Shoghi Effendi took this crucial step without pomp or ceremony. He introduced, however, the idea of a plan one year before its eventual inception by merely expressing a hope that the Bahá'í community of the United States and Canada, whose members he had labelled '*the spiritual descendants of the Dawn-breakers*' (*This Decisive Hour* 13), would fulfil a wish that he cherished in his heart. His exact words in a telegraphic message addressed to the Bahá'í convention at Riḍván 1936 were as follows:

FIRST CENTURY BAHÁ'Í ERA DRAWING TO A CLOSE. HUMANITY ENTERING OUTER FRINGES MOST PERILOUS STAGE ITS EXISTENCE. OPPORTUNITIES PRESENT HOUR UNIMAGINABLY PRECIOUS. WOULD TO GOD EVERY STATE WITHIN AMERICAN REPUBLIC AND EVERY REPUBLIC IN

AMERICAN CONTINENT MIGHT ERE TERMINATION
THIS GLORIOUS CENTURY EMBRACE LIGHT FAITH
BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AND ESTABLISH STRUCTURAL BA-
SIS OF HIS WORLD ORDER (*This Decisive Hour* 11).

One year later, in his message to the convention at Ridván 1937, he mentioned the term 'Seven Year Plan'. As it was important to complete the exterior ornamentation of the Temple by the end of the first Bahá'í century, it was clear that this latter goal had to be incorporated into the formulation of that plan.

The objectives of the first Seven Year Plan were as follows:

- 1) The completion of the exterior of the Temple in Wilmette.
- 2) The formation of a Spiritual Assembly in every state of the United States including Alaska as well as in nine provinces of Canada.
- 3) The establishment of a centre in each republic of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Its conclusion was to coincide with the celebrations of the centenary of the Declaration of the Báb in 1944, which marked the end of the first Bahá'í century.

Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, in *The Priceless Pearl*, has given us a digest of the various steps and phases through which the Seven Year Plan was guided by the beloved Guardian. She quotes from one of Shoghi Effendi's letters in 1939, addressed to the American Bahá'í community:

Through all the resources at their disposal, they are promoting the growth and consolidation of that pioneer movement for which the entire machinery of their administrative order has been primarily designed and erected (This Decisive Hour 34).

Following this quotation, this is how she picks up the story of the first Seven Year Plan:

It was the Guardian who had ‘*so laboriously erected*’ this ‘*machinery*’, with the help of willing and eager tools he found amongst the North American believers, who grasped his thought, obeyed his command and hastened to put into action his instructions. It was the Guardian alone who possessed the divine and indefeasible right to direct the battle of Bahá’u’lláh’s forces of light against the forces of darkness (*Priceless Pearl* 382).

A little over two years after the initiation of this historic teaching drive Europe went to war; another two years passed and the United States – and practically the whole planet – was at war. Its seven-year activity took place in the face of the greatest suffering and darkest threat the New World had ever experienced. The degree to which Shoghi Effendi watched over, encouraged and guided this first great Plan of the Divine Plan is unbelievable. Messages streamed from him to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada. In 1937 he informed them that to carry out the dual enterprises of this Plan would shed a ‘*lustre no less brilliant*’ on the closing years of the first Bahá’í Century, ‘*than the immortal deeds which have signalized its birth, in the Heroic Age of our Faith*’ [*This Decisive Hour* 16]. In 1938 he told them the ‘*deepening gloom*’ of the Old World invested their labours with a ‘*significance and urgency*’ [*This Decisive Hour* 24] that could not be overestimated. The Latin American campaign was ‘*one of the most glorious chapters in the international history of the Faith*’ [*Advent of Divine Justice* 59], and upon its success depended future Plans. It marked, he cabled them, the ‘*inauguration [of the] long-deferred world mission constituting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s distinctive legacy [to the] Bahá’í Community*

[in] *North America*' [This Decisive Hour 35]. It was the 'opening scene of the First Act of that superb Drama whose theme is no less than the spiritual conquest of both the Eastern and Western Hemispheres'[This Decisive Hour 41]. With all this it was still to be viewed as 'a mere beginning, as a trial of strength, a stepping-stone to a crusade of still greater magnitude . . .' [Advent of Divine Justice 12].

After two years of the Plan had run their course, when the exterior ornamentation of the Temple was satisfactorily progressing, and a series of ardent appeals from him (as well as a contribution of nine hundred pounds which he had felt 'irresistibly urged' and 'proud' [This Decisive Hour 26] to contribute toward the permanent pioneer settlement of the nine still unsettled states and provinces in North America) had ensured that all the preliminary steps had been taken on the home front – Shoghi Effendi waved his arm and directed the march of his forces down the coasts and over the islands of Central America, following, as he cabled, in a 'methodical advance along [the] line traced [by the] pen [of] 'Abdu'l-Bahá'[This Decisive Hour 32]. In spite of his own ever-growing burdens and anxieties he informed the friends he wished to keep personally in contact with pioneers in North, Central and South America. What those letters of his meant to the pioneers 'holding', as he said, 'their lonely posts in widely scattered areas throughout the Americas' [This Decisive Hour 87], only those who received them can truly judge, but I myself wonder if this, or later crusades would ever have been won without this communion he had with the believers. His love, encouragement and understanding kept them anchored to their posts. Not a few are still where they are because of letters signed 'Your true brother, Shoghi' (*Priceless Pearl* 385–386).

In looking back on those glorious and terrible years of the last war the success of the first Seven Year Plan seems truly

miraculous. While humanity was being decimated in Europe and Asia, while the World Centre of the Faith was being threatened with unprecedented danger on four sides, while the United States and Canada were engaged in a world conflict, with its attendant anxieties, restrictions and furor, a handful of people, lacking in resources but rich in faith, lacking in prestige but rich in determination, succeeded in not only doubling the number of Bahá'í Assemblies in North America and ensuring the existence of at least one in every state of the Union and every province of Canada, but in completing the extremely costly exterior ornamentation of their Mother Temple sixteen months ahead of the scheduled time, and establishing not only a strong Bahá'í group in each of the twenty Latin Republics, but in addition fifteen Spiritual Assemblies throughout the entire area . . . When the sun of the second Bahá'í Century rose, it rose on triumph. To his cohorts Shoghi Effendi said that he and the entire Bahá'í world owed them a debt of gratitude no one could *'measure or describe'* [*This Decisive Hour* 93]. Small wonder he wrote that such a community had *'abundantly demonstrated its worthiness to shoulder the superhuman tasks with which it had been entrusted'* [*This Decisive Hour* 64–65] (*Priceless Pearl* 387–388).

At the end of the Seven Year Plan, Shoghi Effendi was so proud of the achievements of the American Bahá'í Community that he outlined their accomplishments in his *God Passes By* in the following words:

Indeed, ere the expiry of that century not only had the work on the Temple been completed sixteen months before the appointed time, but instead of one tiny nucleus in every Latin Republic, Spiritual Assemblies had already been established in Mexico City and Puebla (Mexico), in Buenos Aires (Argentina), in Guatemala City (Guatemala), in

Santiago (Chile), in Montevideo (Uruguay), in Quito (Ecuador), in Bogotá (Colombia), in Lima (Peru), in Asuncion (Paraguay), in Tegucigalpa (Honduras), in San Salvador (El-Salvador), in San Jose and Puntarenas (Costa Rica), in Havana (Cuba) and in Port-au-Prince (Haiti). Extension work, in which newly fledged Latin American believers were participating, had, moreover, been initiated, and was being vigorously carried out, in the Republics of Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Panama and Costa Rica; believers had established their residence not only in the capital cities of all the Latin American Republics, but also in such centres as Veracruz, Cananea and Tacubaya (Mexico), in Balboa and Christobal (Panama), in Recife (Brazil), in Guayaquil and Ambato (Ecuador), and in Temuco and Magellanes (Chile); the Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís of Mexico City and of San Jose had been incorporated; in the former city a Bahá'í centre, comprising a library, a reading room and a lecture room, had been founded; Bahá'í Youth Symposiums had been observed in Havana, Buenos Aires and Santiago, whilst a distributing centre of Bahá'í literature for Latin America had been established in Buenos Aires (God Passes By 399–400).

Some explanation is necessary at this juncture to point out that we do not find the date of the end of the first epoch of the Formative Age and the beginning of the second epoch rigidly fixed in Shoghi Effendi's letters of the period. Within a clearly defined span of two years – i.e. between April 1944 and April 1946 – however, we see him allowing the cut off date to sway, depending on the receptivity of national communities to assume the responsibility of following plans.

This flexibility on his part is an indication of his wisdom. He wanted each national community to take its own time to warm up to the idea of adopting a teaching plan suitable to its particular circumstances.

B. The Second (North American) Seven Year Plan

The Bahá'í world entered the second Bahá'í century with the proud knowledge that the first epoch of the Formative Age had been terminated, that its light had now reached seventy-eight countries, that it had achieved a major step in the construction of the Mother Temple of the West and that it was now ready to further extend the range of its institutions and consolidate its administrative structure. Shoghi Effendi had been patiently and systematically educating and preparing the Bahá'í world for the implementation of the two broad objectives he had in mind for his unique ministry. The first, as already stated, was to strengthen the foundations of the structure of the Administrative Order, both locally and nationally, to enable it to sustain the weight of the dome of that structure, which he repeatedly identified in his letters, in English and in Persian, as the Universal House of Justice. The second broad objective was to train the nascent institutions of the Faith in the concept of collective action aimed at executing step by step each and every wish expressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Tablets of the Divine Plan.

After two years of respite given to the North American Bahá'í community, he called upon it to initiate its second Seven Year Plan – a plan designed to end with the centenary of the birth of the Bahá'í Revelation in 1953.

It was in April 1946 that Shoghi Effendi felt that the hour had now struck for the launching of the second Seven Year Plan of the North American community. These are his words in his cabled message, addressed to the 1946 American Convention:

TIME RIPE, EVENTS PRESSING, HOSTS ON HIGH
SOUNDING SIGNAL INAUGURATION SECOND
SEVEN YEAR PLAN, DESIGNED CULMINATE FIRST
CENTENNIAL YEAR NINE, MARKING MYSTIC
BIRTH BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S PROPHETIC MISSION
SÍYÁH-CHÁL, TĪHRÁN. TWOFOLD RESPONSIBILITY
URGENTLY CALLS VANGUARD DAWN-BREAKERS

WEST, CHAMPION-BUILDERS BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S ORDER, TORCHBEARERS WORLD CIVILIZATION, EXECUTORS 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S MANDATE, ARISE SIMULTANEOUSLY BRING FRUITION TASKS ALREADY UNDERTAKEN, LAUNCH FRESH ENTERPRISES BEYOND BORDERS WESTERN HEMISPHERE. FIRST OBJECTIVE NEW PLAN: CONSOLIDATION VICTORIES WON THROUGHOUT AMERICAS, INVOLVING MULTIPLICATION BAHÁ'Í CENTRES, BOLDER PROCLAMATION FAITH MASSES. SECOND OBJECTIVE: COMPLETION INTERIOR ORNAMENTATION HOLIEST HOUSE WORSHIP BAHÁ'Í WORLD, DESIGNED COINCIDE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY INCEPTION HISTORIC ENTERPRISE. THIRD OBJECTIVE: FORMATION THREE NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES, PILLARS UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, DOMINION CANADA, CENTRAL, SOUTH AMERICA. FOURTH OBJECTIVE: INITIATION SYSTEMATIC TEACHING ACTIVITY WAR-TORN, SPIRITUALLY FAMISHED, EUROPEAN CONTINENT, CRADLE WORLD-FAMED CIVILIZATIONS, TWICE BLESSED 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S VISITS, WHOSE RULERS BAHÁ'U'LLÁH SPECIFICALLY COLLECTIVELY ADDRESSED, AIMING ESTABLISHMENT ASSEMBLIES IBERIAN PENINSULA, LOW COUNTRIES, SCANDINAVIAN STATES, ITALY. NO EFFORT TOO GREAT FOR COMMUNITY BELONGING CONTINENT, WHOSE RULERS BAHÁ'U'LLÁH ADDRESSSED, IN MOST HOLY BOOK, WHOSE MEMBERS INVESTED SPIRITUAL PRIMACY BY 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, AND NAMED BY HIM, APOSTLES HIS FATHER, WHOSE COUNTRY WAS FIRST WESTERN NATION RESPOND DIVINE MESSAGE, AND DEEMED WORTHY BE FIRST BUILD TABERNACLE MOST GREAT PEACE, WHOSE ADMINISTRATORS EVOLVED PATTERN

EMBRYONIC WORLD ORDER, CONSUMMATED FIRST STAGE DIVINE PLAN, AND WHOSE ELEVATION THRONE EVERLASTING DOMINION, CENTRE COVENANT CONFIDENTLY ANTICIPATED (*This Decisive Hour* 112–113).

Since during the Second World War it would take two weeks for a letter from the Holy Land to reach the American National Assembly, he resorted to cables. In cablegram (cablese) style of writing one drops, auxiliary verbs, propositions, conjunctions and articles for practical reasons. When Shoghi Effendi was sending a cable to the American Bahá'í community it was sometimes a couple of pages long. At that time, there was a system in cable transmissions known as 'L.T.' which meant 'Late Telegram'. These L.T.s were sent after all the regular cables were sent; in other words, at night, and thus were less expensive. Shoghi Effendi did not mind writing a cable during the day and for its text to be received the next morning in America. So he sent cables by L.T., which gave him a cheaper rate. L.T. message had to have at least 22 words and anything over that was at a lower rate than the regular cables.

The American National Spiritual Assembly realized that the friends would find it difficult to understand the messages, as they had to guess the missing words. For example, in Shoghi Effendi's sentence 'TIME RIPE', the National Assembly would add 'the' before 'TIME' and 'is' before 'RIPE'. So in print the text would read: (The) TIME (is) RIPE. The added words would be in parenthesis to show that they were not in the original text.

The National Assembly, however, made mistakes sometimes when choosing, say, the preposition. Such mistakes could change the meaning of the sentence. Shoghi Effendi had in mind, for instance, 'for' as the missing word. The Assembly would think it was 'of' and by inserting 'of' instead of 'for', the meaning would be changed. That was a problem that Shoghi Effendi encountered. After the publication of the cables, Shoghi Effendi had to look carefully at these insertions by the National Assembly and would

then have to write or cable the Assembly to convey the corrections to be made. That is how much trouble he had to go through. These points are important to bear in mind as you read these cables.

A couple of weeks after his 1946 cable, Shoghi Effendi wrote a fourteen page letter explaining in detail the objectives of the plan and called on the friends to pioneer, to put the Cause first in their lives and to respond to the call voiced by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Tablets of the Divine Plan.

Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum in her *The Priceless Pearl* points out that the pioneer and teaching goals in Europe were the pre-eminent goal of this second Seven Year Plan and that among the American friends this plan was referred to quite often as the ‘European Campaign’ (*Priceless Pearl* 403). In addition to the distinctions that Europe had won in Bahá’í history, as indicated in the above-mentioned convention message, Shoghi Effendi in a later message to the American friends described Europe as a ‘*continent unconquered by Islam, rightly regarded as the mother of Christendom, the fountainhead of American culture, the mainstream of western civilization*’ (*Citadel of Faith* 4). Shoghi Effendi was fully aware of the challenges that pioneers and teachers in Europe would face. Referring to the mentality of the European people in general, he described them in one of his letters as ‘*intensely conservative by nature, steeped in tradition, bound, for the most part, by the ties of religious orthodoxy, sunk in materialism, and fully content with the standard they have achieved*’ (*Priceless Pearl* 405).

Amatu’l-Bahá picks up the thread of the story of the second Seven Year Plan. She writes, with reference to the date of the message to the 1946 Convention:

Six weeks later a cable from Shoghi Effendi informed the American National Assembly that ‘*nine competent pioneers*’ [*This Decisive Hour* 114] should be promptly dispatched to Europe to as many countries as feasible, that the Duchy of Luxembourg should be added to the Low Countries and

Switzerland also included. With these two and the previous eight, the ‘*Ten Goal Countries*’ [*Citadel of Faith* 110] came into existence in our Bahá’í vocabulary. Some time later, in view of the marked progress being made in the north of Europe, Finland was also added to the scope of the Plan. Although, in addition to Britain and Germany, there were still Bahá’ís living in France, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and perhaps other places, they were for the most part too isolated or too suppressed to undertake large-scale teaching activities. The opening of this systematic well-organized Plan in ‘*wartorn, spiritually famished*’ [*This Decisive Hour* 112] Europe meant that the American Community now found itself ‘*launched in both hemispheres on a second, incomparably more glorious stage, of the systematic Crusade designed to culminate, in the fullness of time, in the spiritual conquest of the entire planet*’ [*This Decisive Hour* 135; *Priceless Pearl* 403)

The continent of Europe was ‘*turbulent, politically convulsed, economically disrupted and spiritually depleted*’ (*Citadel of Faith* 42). But it was the arena where the American Community must now carry out the ‘*first stage of its transatlantic missionary enterprise*’ (*Citadel of Faith* 41) ‘*amidst peoples so disillusioned, so varied in race, language and outlook, so impoverished spiritually, so paralyzed with fear, so confused in thought, so abased in their moral standards, so rent by internal schisms...*’ (*Citadel of Faith* 47).

“When these ‘*trail-blazers*’ [*This Decisive Hour* 85] of the second Seven Year Plan began their mission there were only two European Bahá’í communities worthy of the name, those of the British Isles and Germany, both long-standing and both of which had had active National Assemblies before the war; the first had never ceased to function; the sec-

ond, dissolved by the Nazi authorities in 1937 when all Bahá'í activity was officially suspended, was now reconstituted and heroically gathering its war-torn flock about it. With these the European Teaching Committee of the American National Assembly and the ever-swelling group of pioneers in the Ten Goal Countries closely co-operated. The progress was so rapid that by the second year of the new Plan there were already eight new local Assemblies functioning in these countries and, as the work continued to rapidly spread, the Guardian extended its objectives to include Finland.

With the same degree of burning interest with which he had guided the exploits of the first Seven Year Plan he now followed the course of the second one. In 1948 he informed the friends that the '*primacy*' of the American Bahá'í Community was '*reasserted, fully vindicated, completely safeguarded*' [*Citadel of Faith* 49]; that '*intent on maintaining its lead among its sister communities*' [*Citadel of Faith* 51] it had excited '*feelings of admiration and envy in several communities, East and West*' [*Citadel of Faith* 46]. The victories won in Europe were all the more meritorious, Shoghi Effendi pointed out, because the environment and circumstances were more adverse and challenging than had been the case in Latin America (*Priceless Pearl* 404–405).

In the middle of this great European undertaking, which had truly fired the imagination of the Bahá'ís all over the world, including the new communities of Latin America – who were even able to send some of their own pioneers to assist in this new Crusade – the hard-pressed American Bahá'ís found themselves faced by a serious crisis. Owing to a sudden increase in costs the expense of completing their beloved Temple, through clothing its interior with designs little less elaborate than its exterior and of the same material, had risen heavily. Shoghi Effendi's army was in difficulties. He investigated the situation carefully and then immediately

decided on the action necessary to save it. It is illuminating to see what he considered could be safely jettisoned and what was essential: the budgets allocated to the all-important European work, to the spread and maintenance of the precious Assemblies and centres created in Latin and North America, must not be curtailed; the holding of the American National Convention and the publication of *Bahá'í News* he considered imperative; but all other activities, such as proclamation, publications and summer schools, should either be '*drastically curtailed or suspended during two years*' [*Citadel of Faith* 65] (1949 and 1950). Like any great general conducting a campaign he safeguarded three things: his front lines of battle, his '*essential base*' [*Citadel of Faith* 102] (as he called it) of operations and his lines of communication. Other considerations, however, were to persuade the Guardian, in 1951, to not only prolong this period of intense economy in America but to enlarge it to embrace the whole Bahá'í world. The construction of the Shrine of the Báb – for the entire stonework of which he had recently signed a contract – as well as the formation of the International Bahá'í Council and the general expansion of the work in the Holy Land, led him to appeal to all National Spiritual Assemblies, local Assemblies and individual believers to curtail their budgets and through a great effort and sacrifice rally to the support of the World Centre. '*Austerity period*', he cabled, '*previously affecting fortunes American Bahá'í Community unavoidable prolonged now extended entire Bahá'í world in recognition pressing needs paramount importance glorious international task*' [*This Decisive Hour* 130]. The American Bahá'ís had already, by 1950, raised half-a-million dollars for the interior ornamentation of their Temple, thus breaking the back of a particularly heavy commitment (*Priceless Pearl* 405–406).

Yet with all their burdens, their triumphs during the last years of the second Seven Year Plan continued to multiply (*Priceless Pearl* 407).

In 1952 he cabled that ‘*ere termination American Community's second Seven Year Plan*’ the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Italy and Switzerland should be formed . . . [*Messages to the Bahá'í World* 22] (*Priceless Pearl* 407).

He explained he was planning to entrust this youngest Assembly of the Bahá'í world with a specific plan of its own as part of the Global Crusade to be embarked upon between the second and third Century celebrations. It had become an established procedure of the Guardian for these new National Bahá'í babies to be born with a plan in their mouths!

It may well be imagined how excited, how heartened, all the followers of Bahá'u'lláh were by news so thrilling as this. They saw what seemed to them little short of miracles taking place, and their loving ‘true brother’, in his humility, his praises and kindness, led them to believe such miracles were all theirs. That Italy should have, from a vacuum, succeeded in one decade in building up a foundation of local Assemblies strong enough, with its Swiss companion, to bear the weight of an independent National Assembly was a feat far beyond anyone's fairest dreams (*Priceless Pearl* 407–408).

A just and loving God does not require of any soul what He will not give it the strength to accomplish. Privileges involve responsibilities, for peoples, nations, individuals. To the degree to which they arise to meet their responsibilities they are blessed and sustained; to the degree they fail they are automatically deprived and punished. Shoghi Effendi had written at the beginning of the first Seven Year Plan that

'failure to exploit these golden opportunities would . . . signify the loss of the rarest privilege conferred by Providence upon the American Bahá'í Community' [This Decisive Hour 27]. *'The Kingdom of God'*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had said, *'is possessed of limitless potency. Audacious must be the army of life if the confirming aid of that Kingdom is to be repeatedly vouchsafed to it . . .'*' [This Decisive Hour 28]. It was in pursuance of the operation of this great law that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh who had been entrusted with the Divine Plan, rising to meet their challenge, pulling down from on high through their services an ever-greater measure of celestial aid, discharging their sacred responsibility in so noble a fashion, found destiny hastening to meet them, a step in advance. A victorious army, having swept all barriers before it, is often so exhilarated by its exploits it needs no respite. It is ready to march on, fired by its victories. This was the mood of the Bahá'í world as 1953 approached and it was about to enter the Holy Year (*Priceless Pearl* 408).

Shoghi Effendi took the Centenary – this great golden wheel in his tapestry – and fashioned it in such a way that two entirely different things were made to react on each other and at the same time blend into each other in one great creative centre of force. One was the past, the commemoration of such soul-shaking events as the martyrdoms, the imprisonment of Bahá'u'lláh, His mystic experience of His own station in the *Síyáh-Chál*, His exile and all that these events signified for the progress of man in his journey towards his Creator; the other was the marshalling, this time of all the organized Bahá'í communities of the planet, in a vast Plan, the next step in the unfoldment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan.

Moved by the spirits of those two Exalted Beings Who, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had promised in His *Will and Testament*, would infallibly guide him, his whole heart and attention fo-

cused on the propagation of that Faith of which he had been made Guardian – and Guardian is a very weak English equivalent for what the original Arabic ‘Valiyy-i-Amru’llah’ means, Defender of the Faith, Leader, Commander-in-Chief – Shoghi Effendi set about devising the next stage of the Master’s Plan (*Priceless Pearl* 409–410).

Bahá’u’lláh was imprisoned for four months in the Síyáh-Chál from August until December 1952. When one reads from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh Himself about the experience He had in this prison, one sees that the intimation He received occurred about half way through this four-month period. Shoghi Effendi judged that half way would be October and thus decided to start a Holy Year from October 1952 until October 1953.

This was not supposed to be a respite. While activities of the plans were being pursued, at the same time the Bahá’ís of the world were called upon to celebrate the Holy Year and to call to mind the events of the Síyáh-Chál.

Shoghi Effendi explained in *God Passes By* and in his letters to the Bahá’í world both in Persian and in English that the announcement of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh occurred in three stages. Shoghi Effendi described the first stage as an ‘intimation’, the second stage as ‘declaration’ and the third stage as ‘proclamation’ (*God Passes By* 103, 121, 152 and 170). The ‘intimation’ took place in Tehran in the Síyáh-Chál, at the midway point of these four months. The ‘declaration’ was in Baghdád, when He declared Himself to be ‘Him Whom God made manifest’ in the Ridván Garden in 1863, over a period of twelve days. The ‘proclamation’ happened in Adrianople and continued until He was in ‘Akká during a period of over five years.

Every Prophet had experiences to indicate the dawn of His Revelation. In *God Passes By* Shoghi Effendi compares the experience of Bahá’u’lláh in the Síyáh-Chál with the one of ‘Moses when confronted by the Burning Bush in the wilderness of Sinai; of Zoroaster when awakened to His Mission by a succession of

seven visions; of Jesus when coming out of the waters of the Jordan He saw the heavens opened and the Holy Ghost descend like a dove and light upon Him; of Muḥammad when in the Cave of Hira, outside of the holy city of Mecca, the voice of Gabriel bade Him “cry in the name of Thy Lord”; and of the Báb when in a dream He approached the bleeding head of the Imám Ḥusayn, and, quaffing the blood that dripped from his lacerated throat, awoke to find Himself the chosen recipient of the outpouring grace of the Almighty’ (God Passes By 93).

As clearly stated in the Writings of our Faith, the Manifestations of God from early childhood displayed exclusive and distinctive qualities of spiritual and intellectual excellence. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that Bahá’u’lláh as a child was known to possess ‘*extraordinary power*’, ‘*wisdom*’ and ‘*intelligence*’ (*Promulgation of Universal Peace* 25). The Báb is reported to have manifested in His childhood ‘*remarkable evidences of superhuman wisdom* as well as a ‘*mysterious power*’ (*Nabil’s Narrative* 75–76). And Jesus is said to have ‘*astonished*’ Jewish doctors of religion in the Temple through His ‘*understanding*’ and the ‘*questions*’ He was asking them (*Luke* 46–48).

In *Some Answered Questions* ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that God’s Manifestations are themselves cautious of Their own powers before unveiling Their stations to others. He says: ‘*Verily, from the very beginning that Holy Reality (the Manifestation) is conscious of the secret of existence, and from the age of childhood signs of greatness appear and are visible in Him. Therefore, how can it be that with all these bounties and perfections He should have no consciousness?*’ (*Some Answered Questions* 155) Furthermore, when commenting on Bahá’u’lláh’s statement that He was asleep and the divine breeze wafted over Him, referring to the inauguration of His ministry, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains: ‘*Sleeping is the condition of repose, and wakefulness is the condition of movement*’ (*Some Answered Questions* 85). He further explains ‘*A man sleeping or waking is the same man . . . The time of silence is compared*

to sleep, and manifestation and guidance are compared to wakefulness' (Some Answered Questions 153).

Shoghi Effendi decided that the centenary of the momentous intimation of Bahá'u'lláh in the Síyáh-Chál should be celebrated. Thus from October 1952, a hundred years after the midway point of Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment in the Síyáh-Chál, until October 1953 a Holy Year would take place and there would be worldwide celebrations and intercontinental conferences, at which the goals for a new plan would be announced.

When announcing the objectives of the second Seven Year Plan in April 1946, Shoghi Effendi had called on the North American Bahá'í community to prepare itself for a third Seven Year Plan. Between the second and third Seven Year Plans there would be a three-year period of respite, so that the third Seven Year Plan would end in 1963. This is the way he announced this projected development:

UPON SUCCESS SECOND SEVEN YEAR PLAN DEPENDS LAUNCHING, AFTER RESPITE THREE BRIEF YEARS, YET MORE MOMENTOUS THIRD SEVEN YEAR PLAN WHICH WHEN CONSUMATED, THROUGH ESTABLISHMENT STRUCTURE ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER REMAINING SOVEREIGN STATES CHIEF DEPENDENCIES ENTIRE GLOBE, MUST CULMINATE IN, AND BE BEFITTINGLY COMMEMORATED THROUGH, WORLDWIDE CELEBRATIONS MARKING CENTENNIAL FORMAL ASSUMPTION BY BAHÁ'U'LLÁH PROPHEPIC OFFICE, ASSOCIATED BY 'ABDU'L-BAHA DANIEL'S PROPHECY AND WORLD TRIUMPH BAHÁ'I REVELATION, SIGNALIZING TERMINATION INITIAL EPOCH EVOLUTION PLAN, WHOSE MYSTERIOUS RESISTLESS PROCESSES MUST CONTINUE TO SHED EVER-INCREASING LUSTRE ON SUCCESSIVE GENERATIONS, BOTH FORMATIVE GOLDEN AGES FAITH

BAHA'U'LLAH (*This Decisive Hours* 113, cablegram of 23 April 1946).

Four and half years later Shoghi Effendi announced that instead of a three-year respite and a third Seven Year Plan, there would be a global Ten Year Plan. This time the plan was not aimed only at the American community; it was for the entire Bahá'í world: a momentous and unprecedented Ten Year Crusade. Everybody was excited to see what was in store and what Shoghi Effendi had in mind.

C. ACCESSORY PLANS

Shoghi Effendi's policy was to have Bahá'í communities vie with one another. It can be compared to a spiritual race. You have your line and you run! Another person next to you also runs! Therefore there is a competition here. You look at your friend as he runs, then you vie with him and you are stimulated by him. This is how Shoghi Effendi drew attention to the goals and encouraged the friends. For example, I was on pilgrimage, coming from Africa, and the work in the Pacific was developing. So he said: 'We have so many Bahá'ís now in the Pacific Islands. Look at the Gilbert and Ellice Islands for example; they have so many Bahá'ís. The Pacific is moving forward. When you go back, you should ask the African friends if they are ready to see the Pacific Islanders overtaking them.' This was a healthy method of motivating and stimulating the friends.

This is why it is very important to be an example in our personal lives. We don't have to advertise ourselves but we have to live the Bahá'í life. If we live the Bahá'í life, other people will see us and will want to be like us.

Once 'Abdu'l-Bahá said: 'If you are asleep, wake up! If you are awake, do not lie down, sit up! If you are seated, stand up! If you are standing, march! If you are marching, run!' This is a

process that God wants us to follow. He does not say: if you are asleep, run! Gradually, step by step, we change.

Shoghi Effendi, in one of his letters, says: *‘The Cause has the spiritual power to recreate us’* (Unfolding Destiny 442)... *‘We should try to change, to let the Power of God help recreate us and make us true Bahá’ís in deed as well as in belief. But sometimes the process is slow, sometimes it never happens because the individual does not try hard enough’* (Unfolding Destiny 440).

One has to tap this celestial power and the way one can do it is through prayer. One has also to decide to arise and to move in line with the wishes of the Universal House of Justice, for that Supreme Body is the light that one should follow, as it is today the central institution of the Covenant. And this has to be done while one is detached from undesirable acts of omission or commission of others. One should arise selflessly and love selflessly. This is when action has an effect.

In the Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet to Náṣiri’d-Dīn Sháh He says:

They that surround thee love thee for their own sakes, whereas this Youth loveth thee for thine own sake, and hath had no desire except to draw thee nigh unto the seat of grace, and to turn thee toward the right hand of justice. Thy Lord beareth witness unto that which I declare (Summons of the Lord of Hosts 99).

In other words, those around you show love towards you for their own profit but I do not want anything from you and I love you for your own sake. This is pure love and it is how one should serve the Cause, with an unadulterated, unalloyed and pure love. Such love attracts divine confirmation, and without it we can do very little because we will be alone. With divine confirmation, blessings come, and we can see the signs of His guidance and thus become stronger in our faith and grow spiritually. This is one explanation of what Shoghi Effendi means by *‘the Cause has the power to recreate us’*.

Divine confirmations transform, change and strengthen us. If we are timid, we become brave; if we have doubts, we become full of certitude; if we feel inadequate, we should still offer ourselves, and if our motives are pure, He will use us. We become instruments in the hands of God, however inadequate we may be. I often say that when I look at myself I see that I am like a knife. I look at my knife. I see that my blade is old and rusted. I look at the handle of the knife and I see that it is dirty. I know I am inadequate, unworthy and with many failings but I offer myself nonetheless. And believe me, our Blessed Beauty extends His arms and I feel that somebody is holding me, and using me, though rusted. I do not consider myself worthy at all but I offer myself. And we should trust that He watches over us and that He helps us.

As to the accessory plans, as already stated, the first National Assembly to come forward in 1944 was the British Assembly. Two years later, in 1946, the United States and Canada started their own second Seven Year Plan and at the same time Shoghi Effendi had succeeded in encouraging Iran to have its own teaching plan, a Forty-five Month Plan, which began in 1946. The same year, India, Pakistan and Burma were also encouraged to have their own plans. The following year, in 1947, he was able to join to this group two other National Assemblies, that of Australia and New Zealand, and that of Iraq. Then, in 1948, he was successful in moving Egypt and Germany/Austria.

Unfortunately, the Second World War prevented Germany from coming aboard but in 1948, with the encouragement of the beloved Guardian, Germany and Austria as one community began their own teaching plan. In total, at that time, there were eight National Spiritual Assemblies.

Shoghi Effendi was wisely but surely nudging, in direct and indirect ways, each of the National Assemblies, operating in different parts of the world, during the same seven years, to follow the example of the American community, so that each National Spiritual Assembly would, within its jurisdiction, adopt goals in the teaching and consolidation work.

As these goals were being carried out, Shoghi Effendi was monitoring every movement made in each country from reports that he received. Through letters and cables, he would constantly push them to do better, to translate more books and create more Local Assemblies and he would shower these National Spiritual Assemblies with love and encouragement. And when they followed his instructions and when they did well, he would praise them generously, lovingly and bountifully. His letters were filled with love, encouragement and gratitude for their achievements. And these communities really felt that they were among the spiritual champions of the planet. So they derived more courage and forged ahead.

Something new developed in the course of the Seven Year Plan: new National Assemblies were asked to ‘spin off’ and became independent. In other words, a new National Assembly separated itself from a mother Assembly. To illustrate this initiative, one should look at the two communities of United States and Canada. They started the second Seven Year Plan together in 1947. However, one year later Shoghi Effendi felt that Canada was ready to be independent, so it was asked to spin off and create its own National Assembly in 1948. As soon as this new Assembly was born, he sent them a new message with a new plan for the rest of the Seven Year Plan. It became the subsidiary Six Year Plan of the Canadian National Spiritual Assembly.

Then, in 1950, Shoghi Effendi decided that Central America and South America, since each of these regions was composed of some twenty countries, should form two National Assemblies. As a result, South America became a Regional Spiritual Assembly including all of the various southern countries of the western hemisphere, and Central America, including the Caribbean, became another Regional Assembly. Shoghi Effendi started the second Seven Year Plan with one National Spiritual Assembly in the region, for North America, and by the end of the Seven Year Plan in 1953 there were four National Assemblies: the United States, Canada, Central America and South America. Because he wanted

to have twelve of what he called ‘generals’ of the Ten Year Crusade, he needed one more National Assembly. He combined Italy and Switzerland together and it became the Italo-Swiss Assembly. It was born on the same day that launched Riḍvân 1953. He thus welcomed this National Assembly as one of his ‘generals’ of the Ten Year Crusade. These are examples of the way Shoghi Effendi operated; he was on top of everything.

Each of the seven National Spiritual Assemblies is listed below in alphabetical order, followed by passages from the Guardian’s messages, as well as relevant data related to the adoption of these seven national plans. The same types of details have then been given regarding the subsidiary plans of the three National Spiritual Assemblies that span off from the National Spiritual Assembly in North America.

At the end of this section a compilation is included, described as ‘Addendum Part I’, which lists the objectives of the concurrent and supplemental national plans of the Bahá’í world. Part II of the Addendum includes the objectives of the three subsidiary plans.

D. DETAILS OF ACCESSORY PLANS

1) Australia and New Zealand

The Six Year Plan, 1947 – 1953

Shoghi Effendi called on the National Assembly to devise a teaching plan and execute it systematically. On March 1947, he wrote:

The initiation of a Plan, carefully devised, universally supported, and designed to promote effectively the vital interests of the Faith, and attain a definite objective within a specified number of years, would seem, at the present hour, highly desirable and opportune, and will, as a magnet, attract, to an unprecedented degree, the blessings of

Bahá'u'lláh on the members of both communities, both individually and collectively.

Now that the structural basis of the Bahá'í Administrative Order has been firmly and definitely laid in those far-away lands, and the National Headquarters of that Order established, a systematic effort must be exerted to widen the basis of that Order, by multiplying the Administrative institutions and forming the necessary nuclei, which, as they develop and are consolidated, will have to be utilized as the divinely ordained and most effectual instruments for the proclamation of the Faith to the masses.

I fully realize how small are your numbers, how circumscribed are your means, how vast the distances that separate the centres already established. But I firmly believe that the initiation of a Plan to remedy the very deficiencies from which the infant Administrative Order is now suffering, and a firm resolve to carry out its provisions, as well as a sustained effort to make the necessary sacrifices for its consummation, will set in motion forces of such magnitude, and draw upon both communities blessings of such potency, as shall excite the wonder of the believers themselves, and cause their Faith to enter an era of unprecedented expansion and marvellous and fruitful development (Messages to the Antipodes 246).

In response to this call the National Assembly adopted its first teaching plan at Ridván 1947. The objectives of the plan were to establish two new Spiritual Assemblies in Australia and nineteen groups in Australasia. As a result of this Plan five new Assemblies were established, bringing the total number in Australia and New Zealand to seventeen. Twenty-one groups established beyond the goals of the Plan brought the total number of groups to forty (*Bahá'í World* vol. XII 67).

In the course of their plan, the National Spiritual Assembly received twenty-four messages in all from the Guardian, drawing their attention to the historical significance of their first plan to

promote the Faith in the Antipodes. Shoghi Effendi knew that the active Bahá'ís in Australia and New Zealand were few but he could see the receptiveness of their homelands and continuously urged them not to lose hope, to labour unitedly and assiduously and to be confident that the confirmations from on high would come to their aid and lead them to ultimate victory.

2) British Isles

The Six Year Plan, 1944 – 1950

From its convention in April 1944, the delegates cabled the Guardian, stating that the convention wished Shoghi Effendi would set goals for a Six Year Plan for the British Bahá'í community, coinciding with the hundredth anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Báb. The Guardian cabled as follows:

WELCOME SPONTANEOUS DECISION. ADVISE FORMATION NINETEEN BAHÁ'Í SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLISE SPREAD OVER ENGLAND WALES SCOTLAND NORTHERN IRELAND AND EIRE PRAYING SIGNAL VICTORY (*Unfolding Destiny* 169).

During this period Shoghi Effendi sent the British National Spiritual Assembly, and a few of its important national committees, 108 messages, some by cable and the rest by regular mail. To several of these he appended long postscripts, written in his own handwriting. Most of the messages dealt directly with issues related to the plan. In these messages he gave the institutions directions, appreciated their efforts, urged them to concentrate on unfinished tasks, guided them in their endeavours and assured them of a glorious destiny, if the responsibilities facing them would be successfully achieved.

The Two Year Plan, 1951 – 1953

In the same message congratulating the British community on the achievements under the Six Year Plan, Shoghi Effendi gave them

a year of respite, to be followed by a Two Year Plan, later referred to as the African Campaign.

In the course of this plan, which ended in April 1953, Shoghi Effendi sent this National Spiritual Assembly and/or its national committees, seventy-five messages. The messages were partly by cable and the rest by ordinary mail. In the latter category there were long messages, running over several pages as reproduced in the compilation of his letters published by the British National Assembly. He followed with close attention and supervision the work in Africa. He considered the creation of the International Bahá'í Council and the simultaneous inception of the African Campaign, which involved the collaboration of several National Spiritual Assemblies in one common field of pioneering and service, as twin compelling evidences of the resistless unfoldment of the embryonic, divinely appointed World Order of Bahá'u'lláh (*Unfolding Destiny* 256–257).

3) Egypt and Sudan

The Five Year Plan, 1948 – 1953

Like other National Assemblies of the Bahá'í world, the National Assembly of Egypt and the Sudan was likewise encouraged by Shoghi Effendi that, despite the disabilities from which they were suffering, the adoption of a teaching plan was advisable. It should be noted that Egypt was in a leading position both in the Islamic and the Arab world. The Islamic canonical code known as the Shari'ah was regarded to be binding on the civil authorities.

At the end of the plan the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies was raised to nine, six virgin provinces were opened, a plot for a permanent summer school was purchased, three new centres were established in the Sudan, a new locality was opened in Eritrea, two Bahá'í centres were established in Libya, a pioneer settled in Algeria and a Spiritual Assembly was formed in Tunisia.

The Guardian was very pleased with these accomplishments and invited them to join the Ten Year Crusade as one of its generals.

4) Germany and Austria

The Five Year Plan, 1948 – 1953

The Bahá'í communities in these two countries were subjected to persecution and the banning of their institutions during the period of the Second World War. However, as the friends regained their freedom at the end of the war, they were able, under the guidance of Shoghi Effendi, to rehabilitate their local communities and re-establish their National Spiritual Assembly. On the 11th of May 1948, Shoghi Effendi wrote to them as follows:

At this propitious moment in the evolution of the Faith in your country . . . it is only fitting for a community as old and honoured as yours, which has survived such cruel blows, which occupies so enviable a position in the heart of Europe, the recipient of so great a measure of bounty and loving-kindness from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, to formulate its own Plan, preferably a five year Plan, destined to culminate in 1953, the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh's Mission in the Síyáh-Chál of Tíhrán.

As to the objectives of the Plan, in both Germany and Austria, I feel that your Assembly should carefully consider them, and after mature deliberation announce them to the believers and ensure, by every means in its power, the attainment of every goal you set yourselves to achieve. (Lights of Divine Guidance, vol. I, p. 138)

In the forty-one letters and messages sent to Germany and Austria, Shoghi Effendi repeatedly reminded the friends in these two countries, particularly the German Bahá'í community, of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's great hopes for the Bahá'ís of that country to become a centre of illumination throughout Europe. He also enumerated for them their exceptional capacity for scholarship, their erudition in the fundamental verities of the Cause and the destiny that awaited

them in their future achievements in Eastern Europe and as far as the lands of the Far East.

5) India, Pakistan and Burma

On its own initiative, and in order to promote the expansion of the Faith in its area the National Assembly of the Indian Sub-Continent adopted in 1938 a rudimentary Teaching Six Year Plan, which, although not instigated directly by Shoghi Effendi received his commendation and encouragement.

The Four and a Half Year Plan, January 1946 – July 1950

On December 1945 the Guardian felt that the National Spiritual Assembly of India, Pakistan and Burma had to set an example to other National Assemblies of the East in adopting a plan for teaching and the consolidation work in their area of jurisdiction. The following was written on his behalf to the National Assembly:

The Indian believers are finding themselves increasingly called upon to shoulder heavy responsibilities; they are becoming more numerous, have spread to many new centres, undertaken a large publishing programme, increased the number of their institutions, and are gradually becoming known to their fellow-Indians as followers of a new and glorious Faith. In view of this he feels your Assembly should constantly exhort the friends to be more conscious of their duties, and to be very careful of having differences of opinion which are so strong as to lead to disputes and thus humiliate our beloved Faith in the eyes of non-Bahá'ís. (Messages to the Indian Subcontinent 264).

He appended in his own handwriting the following words:

The reconstitution of dissolved Assemblies, the extension of relief to the needy, the promotion of the teaching work, the dis-

semination of Bahá'í literature, the construction of the Hazíratu'l-Quds, the re-establishment of schools and committees are all vitally urgent, and should be carried out fully, systematically, and with the utmost speed. I long to hear of the progress of your labours in this important field, upon which the future welfare of the Burmese community depends, and with which the destinies of the Indian believers are closely interwoven (Messages to the Indian Subcontinent 264–265).

Following this general advice, the National Assembly adopted its first Four and a Half Year Plan. Shoghi Effendi expressed admiration and joy at what he called ‘*a spontaneous decision*’ (*Messages to the Indian Subcontinent* 266) to inaugurate this plan. As the plan unfolded, the National Assembly added additional objectives.

The Nineteen Month Plan, September 1951 – April 1953

A year after the conclusion of its first plan the National Spiritual Assembly decided to initiate a second one, from September 1951 to April 1953.

Shoghi Effendi responded on August 30th by cable expressing his joy over this ‘*momentous, highly meritorious Nineteen Months Plan*’ (*Messages to the Indian Subcontinent* 324). In this cable he ‘*heartily approved*’ the chosen objectives and advised the National Assembly to terminate the plan by Ridván 1953.

During the period of over six years, which witnessed the execution of the two plans of the Bahá'ís in the Indian Subcontinent, Shoghi Effendi sent a total of over eighty messages in letters and cables commenting on the progress made, the priorities to be established and the requirements in terms of financial and human resources. Although restricted in their material means and in the number of active Bahá'ís in their respective areas, the Bahá'ís in the three countries exerted their utmost to win the good-pleasure of the Guardian and meet his expectations.

6) Iraq

The Three Year Plan, 1947 – 1950

Like its sister communities in Persia and in Egypt, the Bahá'í community of Iraq suffered under oppressive persecution and restrictive measures generated by the bigotry, hatred and prejudices of the general public and instigated by an ever antagonistic clergy as well as a suspicious and timid system of government. Notwithstanding these restrictions and in harmony with the rest of the Bahá'í world, a Three Year Plan was devised.

By the end of the plan the construction of the National Bahá'í Hall, which was part of the Bahá'í Headquarters, was completed. This spacious hall could seat an audience of 500 people. The National Fund was adequately reinforced and, in addition to the increase of the number of Local Assemblies and the consolidation of the Faith in the south, several translations of Bahá'í literature into Arabic and a number of pamphlets introducing the Faith were published.

7) Persia (Iran)

The Forty-Five Month Plan, October 1946 – July 1950

Soon after the American community launched its second Seven Year Plan, Shoghi Effendi wrote the Persian National Spiritual Assembly that it would be highly desirable for the community in the Cradle of the Faith to adopt a plan similar in its general character to the plan of the North American Bahá'í community but adapted to the internal needs and conditions within the country, bearing in mind the needs of consolidating and opening territories in the neighborhood of Persia, to the importance of which he had referred in previous messages. This advice of the beloved Guardian led the Persian National Assembly to make a study of the type

of goals adopted and executed by the American Bahá'í community under the first Seven Year Plan as well as the goals and objectives it had been assigned under its second Seven Year Plan.

At the outset of the Plan, on February 21, 1947, Shoghi Effendi sent the following cable message to the Persian National Spiritual Assembly:

REJOICE MAGNIFICENT PLAN CONCEIVED NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES DEARLY BELOVED COMMUNITY BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S NATIVE LAND. THIS FAR-REACHING PROJECT WELL BEFITS COMMUNITY WHICH IN AGE, NUMBERS, RICHNESS HISTORY LEADS ENTIRE BAHÁ'Í 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 BAHÁ'U'LLÁH. GLORIOUS COMPANY HOLY FOUNDERS FAITH; THE LETTERS LIVING, HANDS CAUSE, SAINTS, HEROES, MARTYRS, ALL GAZING EXPECTANTLY FROM ABHÁ KINGDOM UPON PRIVILEGED CUSTODIANS PRICELESS LEGACY BEQUEATHED TO PRESENT GENERATION LABOURING CRADLE FAITH . . . UPON ITS SUCCESS APPOINTED TIME CHIEFLY DEPENDS RELEASE SPIRITUAL FORCES DESIGNED EMANCIPATE HASTEN RECOGNITION FAITH ÍRÁN (*Bahá'í World* vol. XI 35).

During the plan Shoghi Effendi was unsparing in his encouragement of the steps being taken vigorously by the Persian National Assembly. He expressed appreciation of the efforts exerted by the pioneers, who had arisen to settle in the home front as well as in territories specified in the plan, constantly reminding them of the need to exercise caution and wisdom in the endeavours being exerted to bring the plan and its objectives to a successful conclusion.

In view of the repressive attitude of the local population, which, unfortunately, was constantly provoked by the local clergy as well as the clerical establishment in the capital, many setbacks and reverses were experienced. A number of families found themselves forced to leave their pioneering posts and return to their original homes, in order to avoid the crises from becoming more intense and widespread. Regrettably, the civil authorities refrained from extending their protection to the Bahá'ís and, in some cases, were even in collusion with the fanatical clergy.

The Women's Four Year Plan, 1946 – 1950

Concurrent with the inauguration of the Forty-Five Month Plan, the need to relieve the Bahá'í women in Persia from the traditional shackles of lack of education received the urgent attention of the National Assembly. Women's conferences were called for to discuss this problem. As a result of these consultations the Four Year Plan was adopted by the National Assembly.

The Four Year Plan for Persian women proved to be an outstanding success. All the goals anticipated in the plan were carried out systematically and efficiently. Bahá'í women and girls in Persia demonstrated their ability to serve their Faith on an equal footing with the men. The degree of literacy among them rose dramatically and was virtually a unique accomplishment in relation to the conditions of the social environment of the country. The periodical envisaged in the plan proved to be of inestimable value in raising the standard of living among Bahá'í women and girls – an achievement of high distinction when compared with the inadequacies of the Muslim population, particularly in rural areas.

E. DETAILS OF SUBSIDIARY PLANS

In the course of the seven years under discussion, four new National Assemblies were formed, the fourth being the Italo-Swiss National Spiritual Assembly. With the exception of this National Assembly, which was formed in the very year the Ten Year Cru-

sade was launched, each of the other three National Assemblies was given a plan by the Guardian to end by April 1953. These National Assemblies are as follows in chronological order:

1) Canada

Shoghi Effendi decided that in April 1948 the Bahá'í community of Canada should be separated from the community in the United States and be enabled to elect its own independent National Spiritual Assembly. In his message to the Convention at Ridván 1948, he wrote:

HEARTS UPLIFTED THANKSGIVING BAHÁ'U'LLÁH
EPOCH-MAKING EVENT COMING AGE DEARLY BE-
LOVED CANADIAN BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY FORMA-
TION FIRST NATIONAL CONVENTION CITY MONT-
REAL FORTHCOMING ELECTION CANADA'S NA-
TIONAL ASSEMBLY CONSTITUTING NINTH PILLAR
INSTITUTION UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE. AC-
KNOWLEDGE REVERENT GRATITUDE DEEPEST
JOY MARVELLOUS INFLUENCE OPERATION INI-
TIAL STAGE 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S DIVINE PLAN ENA-
BLING NORTHERNMOST COMMUNITY FOLLOWERS
FAITH AMERICAN CONTINENT PASS STAGE IN-
FANCY ATTAIN STATUS ASSUME FUNCTIONS IN-
DEPENDENT EXISTENCE WITHIN WORLD BAHÁ'Í
COMMUNITY (*Messages to Canada* 103).

In this message he advised the National Assembly to initiate a Five Year Plan.

Less than seven months later, on the 4th of November, he advised the National Assembly to avoid red tape and to preserve the elasticity of the Administrative Order. In the letter written on his behalf by his secretary, he pointed out:

The fundamentals laid down in the Bahá'í Administration must, of course, be adhered to, but there is a tendency for

Assemblies to constantly issue detailed procedures and rules to the friends, and he considers this hampers the work of the Cause, and is entirely premature. As far as is possible cases which come up should be dealt with and settled as they arise, and not a blanket ruling be laid down to cover all possible similar cases. This preserves the elasticity of the Administrative Order and prevents red tape from developing and hampering the work of the Cause. You must likewise bear in mind that you are now a wholly independent National Body, and must consider the administration of the affairs of the Faith within your jurisdiction as your separate problem. There is no more need for you to follow every single rule laid down by the American National Spiritual Assembly, than there is for the British or the Australian and New Zealand National Spiritual Assemblies to do this. Uniformity in fundamentals is essential, but not in every detail. On the contrary, diversity, the solving of the local situation in the right way, is important (Messages to Canada 106).

During this five-year period Shoghi Effendi wrote this National Assembly and national committees and agencies forty-five letters and/or cables. Most of these deal with the goals of the plan, his advice on the priorities to be upheld, his praise of the progress being made and his assurance of the great destiny, as intimated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, which awaits them.

2) Central and South America

The territories included by the Guardian for each of these two Regional National Assemblies were as follows:

Central America: Mexico, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, the Greater Antilles, Haiti, Cuba, Dominican Republic.

South America: Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela (See Messages to the Bahá'í World 82).

Both National Assemblies were formed in 1951. In a joint message addressed to the two new National Spiritual Assemblies to be formed, Shoghi Effendi called on them to preserve the prizes won, incorporate a greater number of Spiritual Assemblies, enrich Bahá'í literature in Spanish and Portuguese, win converts among the Indians and enrich the spiritual life of the individuals and of the community. A list of these goals is included in the addendum.

In response to Shoghi Effendi's advice, the South American National Assembly was able to formulate a Two Year Plan, 1951 – 1953, based on Shoghi Effendi's stated objectives.

The Central American National Assembly, owing to conditions in the community, could only formulate a One Year Plan, following Shoghi Effendi's advice. The goals adopted followed the general advice given by the beloved Guardian.

3) Italo-Swiss

As the Italo-Swiss National Assembly came into existence at the very outset of the inception of the Ten Year Crusade, Shoghi Effendi's message to this National Assembly, dated Ridván 1953, outlined the ten objectives to be pursued by it. A summary of these objectives appears in the attached addendum.

F. SHOGHI EFFENDI'S ENCOURAGING REMARKS AS THE PLANS ENDED

At the end of each of these plans, Shoghi Effendi acknowledged the efforts exerted for the winning of the projected goals. If the achievements were well over the range of the objectives originally formulated, his praise of the endeavours of the friends was generous and exhilarating. For example, the Six Year Plan of the British

Bahá'í community, which had achieved a high mark of distinction, won these words of appreciation: *'I feel moved to reaffirm my feelings of exultation, joy and gratitude for the superb triumph that marks such a great turning point in British Bahá'í history'* (*Unfolding Destiny* 250), while the success of the Two Year Plan was greeted by him with the statement that the victories won *'exceeded'* his *'highest hopes'* (*Unfolding Destiny* 297). To Germany and Austria he gave the assurance that their achievement marked *'a chapter of the highest importance in the annals of the Faith in both Germany and Austria and will be regarded by posterity as a milestone of historic significance in the evolution of the Faith on the European continent'* (*Lights of Divine Guidance*, vol. 1, 199). The successes of the plans of the National Assembly of India, Pakistan and Burma led him to refer to the region comprising the three countries as the *'second stronghold' of the institutions of the Faith on the Asiatic continent, after the Cradle of the Faith* (*Messages to the Indian Subcontinent* 337–338). He lauded their exertions as a *'notable' 'record of service'* and encouraged them to *'march resistlessly forward... plumbing still greater depths of heroism and self-sacrifice'* (*Messages to the Indian Subcontinent* 314).

G. ADDENDUM, Part I

OBJECTIVES OF CONCURRENT NATIONAL PLANS

1. AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

Six Year Plan, 1947 – 1953

- 1) To establish two new Spiritual Assemblies in Australia
- 2) To establish nineteen groups in Australasia

2. BRITISH ISLES

Six Year Plan, 1944 – 1950

- 1) To raise to nineteen the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies

- 2) To double the membership of the community
- 3) To settle pioneers in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Eire

Two Year Plan, 1951 – 1953

- 1) To strengthen the nineteen Spiritual Assemblies already established in the British Isles
- 2) To form nuclei in three dependencies of the British Crown in East or West Africa
- 3) To translate, publish and disseminate Bahá'í literature in three additional African languages

3. EGYPT AND SUDAN

Five Year Plan, 1948 – 1953

- 1) To raise to nine the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies
- 2) To raise to thirty-three the number of localities where Bahá'ís reside
- 3) To send pioneers to Tunisia, Algeria and Libya
- 4) To acquire property for a Bahá'í school
- 5) To issue a Bahá'í magazine.
- 6) To consolidate the community in Ethiopia.

4. GERMANY AND AUSTRIA

Five Year Plan, 1948 – 1953

- 1) To double the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies from fourteen to 28, increasing the Bahá'í membership in each community
- 2) To raise the number of localities in Germany and Austria where Bahá'ís reside
- 3) To deepen the understanding of the friends in the operation of the Administrative Order
- 4) To encourage deeper study of the teachings
- 5) To construct the National Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds in Frankfurt

- 6) To enrich Bahá'í literature with two publications by March 1949, fifteen by March 1950, six by March 1951 and nine by 1952

5. INDIA, PAKISTAN AND BURMA

Four and a Half Year Plan, January 1946 – July 1950

- 1) To increase the number of Local Assemblies from twenty-one to sixty-three
- 2) To give special attention to areas marked by sharp cultural and political divisions

As the plan unfolded, the National Assembly added the following additional goals:

- 3) To publish the Esslemont book in eighteen new languages
- 4) To acquire a National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds in New Delhi
- 5) To carry the Bahá'í message to Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Thailand

Nineteen Month Plan, September 1951 – April 1953

- 1) To offer Rs 2,500,000 to the Shrine of the Báb Fund
- 2) To enrich Bahá'í literature in local languages
- 3) To send pioneers to Malaysia, Singapore, Nepal, Vietnam, Zanzibar and Madagascar
- 4) To increase the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka
- 5) To enhance the status of the Bahá'í New Era School in Panchgani.

6. IRAQ

Three Year Plan, 1947 – 1950

- 1) To increase the number of Bahá'í centres
- 2) To complete the construction of the National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds

- 3) To raise contributions to support the National Fund
- 4) To establish ten new Local Assemblies
- 5) To encourage Bahá'í communities in the south of the country.

7. PERSIA (IRAN)

Forty-Five Month Plan, October 1946 – July 1950

- 1) To consolidate all local Bahá'í communities
- 2) To reestablish sixty-two dissolved assemblies
- 3) To form twenty-two new groups.
- 4) To establish thirteen new centres
- 5) To establish Local Assemblies in Kabul (Afghanistan), Mecca (Arabia) and Bahrain (Gulf area)
- 6) To form four new groups in the Arabian Peninsula
- 7) To send pioneers to India and Iraq

Women's Four Year Plan, 1946 – 1950

- 1) To hold literacy classes for girls and adult women
- 2) To hold regional conventions semi-annually for Bahá'í women
- 3) To hold a national convention annually with the participation of representatives of regional committees
- 4) To issue a periodical covering topics of both Bahá'í and general history, science, literature, health, hygiene, house-keeping and care of children

H. ADDENDUM, Part II

OBJECTIVES OF SUBSIDIARY NATIONAL PLANS

1. CANADA

Five Year Plan, 1948 – 1953

- 1) To incorporate the National Spiritual Assembly
- 2) To establish national endowments

PLANS PRIOR TO THE TEN YEAR CRUSADE

- 3) To increase to thirty the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies
- 4) To increase to one hundred the number of localities where Bahá'ís reside
- 5) To form a group in Newfoundland
- 6) To form a group in Greenland
- 7) To enroll Eskimos and Native Indians in the Faith

2. SOUTH AMERICA AND CENTRAL AMERICA

- 1) To consolidate Local Spiritual Assemblies
- 2) To multiply the number of groups
- 3) To expand the process of Bahá'í incorporation
- 4) To translate and publish Bahá'í literature in Spanish and Portuguese
- 5) To develop the Bahá'í Funds
- 6) To organize the teaching work among the Indians
- 7) To take measures to proclaim the Faith
- 8) To deepen the spiritual life of the individual believers and increase their understanding of the principles of the Faith
- 9) To cement the unity of all local communities

V

Launching of the Ten Year Crusade

It is not difficult to differentiate the developments achieved under the Guardian's Ten Year Crusade from activities in the Bahá'í world prior to the inception of that Crusade. Shoghi Effendi's letters show distinctly that the Ten Year Plan had been destined to be a culmination of the processes at work ever since the inauguration of the Formative Age and was meant to be a springboard for the unimaginably glorious victories to be won throughout the epochs and stages ahead.

A) The manner in which Shoghi Effendi anticipated the launching of the Ten Year Plan

As far back as 1948, in his message to the American Bahá'í community dated 8 November, Shoghi Effendi refers to future tasks which will be assigned before the end of the first epoch in the evolution of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan, which he could see would have to be in 1963. We must recall that these words were written during the second year of America's second Seven Year Plan. '*. . . upon the outcome of the assiduous efforts now being collectively exerted . . . must solely depend the timing as well as the nature of the tasks which must be successfully carried out ere the closing of an epoch of such transcendent brightness and glory*' (*Citadel of Faith* 62).

Over two years later, on the 25th of February 1951, referring to the uniqueness of the African Campaign, which linked the administrative machinery of five National Spiritual Assemblies, he wrote the following to the British National Spiritual Assembly:

‘On the success of this enterprise, unprecedented in its scope, unique in its character and immense in its spiritual potentialities, must depend the initiation, at a later period of the Formative Age of the Faith, of undertakings embracing within their range all National Assemblies functioning throughout the Bahá’í World’ (Unfolding Destiny 261).

From these two quotations we can confidently draw the conclusion that the ‘*future tasks*’ referred to in 1948, and the worldwide ‘*undertakings*’ mentioned three years later in the second passage, were hints by him of the forthcoming rise of the orb of the Ten Year Crusade above the horizon of the community of the Most Great Name.

Another act on the part of Shoghi Effendi was his cablegram of 30 November 1951 in which he announced that the celebrations of the Holy Year would be marked by the convocation of four intercontinental conferences. These conferences would inaugurate the ‘*long anticipated intercontinental stage in administrative evolution of Faith*’ (*Messages to the Bahá’í World* 17). These conferences were to be successively held in Kampala, Uganda for Africa; Wilmette, United States for the Americas; Stockholm for Europe and New Delhi for Asia and Australasia. The first time that Shoghi Effendi disclosed to the Bahá’í world that a Ten Year Plan was in store was in his Ridván message of 1952 addressed to the Bahá’í community in North America. In this message he gave the glad-tidings that the goals of the plan would be announced in the four projected intercontinental conferences.

In a letter in English addressing the entire Bahá’í world, he not only stressed the highly significant nature of the plan which he was intending to announce to the Bahá’í world, but he lifted the veil on its salient features and made a poignant appeal to every Bahá’í residing anywhere on the planet to consider it a binding obligation to lend his or her share in bringing this forthcoming plan to a triumphant conclusion. This message appeared in print in nine pages. I will only quote for you the last part, where his fervent appeal was made:

Under whatever conditions, the dearly loved, the divinely sustained, the onward marching legions of the army of Bahá'u'lláh may be labouring, in whatever theatre they may operate, in whatever climes they may struggle . . . I direct my impassioned appeal[to them] to obey, as befits His warriors, the summons of the Lord of Hosts, and prepare for that Day of Days when His victorious battalions will, to the accompaniment of hozannas from the invisible angels in the Abhá Kingdom, celebrate the hour of final victory . . .

No matter how long the period that separates them from ultimate victory; however arduous the task; however formidable the exertions demanded of them; however dark the days which mankind, perplexed and sorely-tried, must, in its hour of travail, traverse; however severe the tests with which they who are to redeem its fortunes will be confronted; however afflictive the darts which their present enemies, as well as those whom Providence, will, through His mysterious dispensations raise up from within or from without, may rain upon them, however grievous the ordeal of temporary separation from the heart and nerve-centre of their Faith which future unforeseeable disturbances may impose upon them, I adjure them, by the precious blood that flowed in such great profusion, by the lives of the unnumbered saints and heroes who were immolated, by the supreme, the glorious sacrifice of the Prophet-Herald of our Faith, by the tribulations which its Founder, Himself, willingly underwent, so that His Cause might live, His Order might redeem a shattered world and its glory might suffuse the entire planet – I adjure them, as this solemn hour draws nigh, to resolve never to flinch, never to hesitate, never to relax, until each and every objective in the Plans to be proclaimed, at a later date, has been fully consummated (Messages to the Bahá'í World 37–39).

A little over two months after this message was sent, that is on the 30th of June 1952, addressing in English once again Bahá'ís in all

lands, he disclosed the unprecedented global dimensions of the great plan ahead and he called on them, individually and collectively, to commit themselves to its execution.

I remember the deep emotion of those days in 1952, when these messages were received. They had an electrifying impact on the minds and hearts of the friends. Indeed, a few of us even thought that the plan Shoghi Effendi had in store might be considered as part of his Will and Testament, for in it he refers to the grievous *'ordeal of temporary separation from the heart and nerve-centre'* (*Messages to the Bahá'í World* 39) of the Faith. In October 1952, as the Holy Year was inaugurated, Shoghi Effendi sent yet another world message in English to the entire Bahá'í world. It was in this message that he more specifically defined, however briefly, the goals to be achieved over a period of ten years. The message ended once again with a heart-rending entreaty to the friends to lend their full support to the plan soon to be announced.

While this preparation was going on and during the years just preceding it, Shoghi Effendi simultaneously turned his attention to the necessity to expand the institutions at the World Centre and to broaden the base of their operation. His first decision was to inaugurate the construction of the superstructure of the Shrine of the Báb in the heart of Mount Carmel. As soon as the project was under way, he created the International Bahá'í Council and introduced it as the forerunner of the Universal House of Justice. This was soon followed by the appointment of the first contingent of the Hands of the Cause of God, four of whom were designated by him as Hands residing in the Holy Land, and, a short time later, the second contingent, raising the number of these distinguished Stewards of the Faith to nineteen. He soon after created the institution of the Auxiliary Boards, one for each continent. Through the instrumentality of the International Bahá'í Council and negotiations with the newly established State of Israel, he embarked upon acquiring needed Bahá'í historic sites. He also proceeded to furnish buildings associated with the exile of Bahá'u'lláh and

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, to purchase vitally required properties surrounding the Báb’s Shrine in Haifa and land adjacent to the Most Holy Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh in Bahjí. He also arranged for a design to be made for the future Temple on Mount Carmel.

B) The nature and scope of the guidance given by Shoghi Effendi almost up to the midway point of the Crusade

It was early in 1953 that Shoghi Effendi set himself the task of spelling out internationally, continentally and nationally the objectives and goals that the friends throughout the world were expecting to hear. On the international level, Shoghi Effendi set forth these goals and objectives in his message to the Intercontinental Conference for the Western Hemisphere. He simultaneously released an over-arching document of twenty-seven pages in which he listed under twenty-four headings the goals and objectives for the Bahá’í world of a decade-long crusade, unprecedented in the annals of our precious Faith. He arranged for this document to be published in the United States and in Britain as a reference booklet for the Bahá’ís and the general public.

On the continental level, he included in his message to each of the four conferences the major objectives that concerned that continent.

On the national level, he wrote twelve messages addressing each of the newly designated ‘*generals*’, announcing to them their share of the major objectives. In these messages he incorporated supplementary objectives appropriate to each national or regional area. This will be discussed in more detail in a subsequent section.

In his messages, immediately before the inception of the Crusade and until the end of his life, which coincided with the first four and a half years of the Crusade, he described this collective enterprise of the Bahá’í world in such terms as these:

A world-embracing Crusade
A world-encompassing Crusade

A world-girdling Crusade

An epochal, global, spiritual, decade-long Crusade

This momentous and challenging Crusade

This irresistibly unfolding Crusade

This pre-eminent Crusade

This incomparably glorious Crusade,

This unspeakably potent Crusade

This systematic World Crusade

This prodigious Crusade

This gigantic, divinely propelled Crusade

This soul-stirring Crusade

This World Crusade which in its magnitude and potentialities transcends any previous collective Bahá'í enterprise

Apart from the soul-uplifting titles that he conferred upon this Crusade, Shoghi Effendi continued to send inspirational messages in both English and Persian, reminding the friends everywhere of the uniquely majestic and infinitely glorious characteristics of this Crusade. The following paragraph gives us an illustration of the fervour with which Shoghi Effendi inspired the hearts and souls of the friends and raised their expectations. The paragraph is from his message, dated 4th May 1953:

The avowed, the primary aim of this Spiritual Crusade is none other than the conquest of the citadels of men's hearts. The theatre 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 armour 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 'Aliyyu'l-A`lá (Messages to the Bahá'í World 152–153).

Shoghi Effendi upheld orderliness when executing undertakings at the World Centre or directing projects under the aegis of National Spiritual Assemblies. We should not be surprised therefore that in the implementation of the Ten Year Crusade he would not adopt the same method. For example, he divided the first five years of the Crusade into three phases, the first being one year and the other two designed to be two years each. He focused the attention of the friends on the themes and requirements of each of these three phases.

The first phase, from 1953 to 1954, was to be characterized by the opening of as many of the 131 virgin territories as possible. To encourage the friends to arise, he announced, on 28th May 1953, on the occasion of the anniversary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, that he was planning to open an illuminated 'Roll of Honour', which would carry the names of the pioneers who would arise and, as stated by him, '*capture the unsundered territories of the entire planet*' (Messages to the Bahá'í World 49). Upon

each of these spiritual conquerors would be conferred the title of '*Knight of Bahá'u'lláh*'. During this first phase, seven-eighths of the territories mentioned in his plan were opened.

During the second phase, forty-three National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds and ten Temple sites were acquired worldwide. During the third phase, sixteen new National Spiritual Assemblies were formed: three in 1956 in Africa and thirteen in the following year in the other four continents. Furthermore, during this third phase all but three National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds, all but one Temple site and all but two endowments were acquired and the number of localities where Bahá'ís resided reached the impressive number of 4500. The fourth phase of the plan was to be from 1958 to 1963 and would focus on completing the rest of the vital objectives assigned by him under the plan.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. Why did Shoghi Effendi, in his letter of April 1946 announcing the launching of the second Seven Year Plan, state that there would be three years of respite following this plan and preceding a third Seven Year Plan? Why did he then replace this with the Ten Year Crusade?

A. No one can read the mind of Shoghi Effendi. This is not the only time he has surprised the friends. The British National Assembly started their Six Year Plan in 1944 and they ended it six years later in 1950. They thought that as Shoghi Effendi was very pleased with them, they could now relax. Instead, Shoghi Effendi gave them only one year of respite to be followed by the Two Year Plan for Africa. He did the same thing with India. Now, why did Shoghi Effendi do this with the American community? Maybe initially he wrote of a third Seven Year Plan because they were used to the idea of Seven Year Plans, but since the entire Bahá'í world was now to be engaged in a world decade-long spiritual Crusade, it was only proper for them not only to join in but to be allocated the lion's share of the goals.

Q. In a letter of the Universal House of Justice, dated 9 March 1965, it is said: 'from that onward point [Riḍván 1963] unless the Faith were endangered, further divine guidance was essential'. Does this mean that, if in 1963 the Faith was not endangered, no divine guidance would be essential?

A. Surely not. What the House of Justice is saying is that if we did not have divine guidance through the institution of the Universal House of Justice as Head of the Faith, as the designer of future plans and as the focal point of the Covenant, then the Cause would obviously be in danger.

VI

The Ten Year Crusade is Launched

A) The twenty-seven objectives of the Ten Year Plan

Shoghi Effendi, in his message of 8th October 1952 (*Messages to the Bahá'í World* 40–45), announced to the Bahá'í world that the forthcoming Crusade would have four broad objectives: first, the development of the institutions at the World Centre; second, the consolidation, through carefully devised measures, of the home fronts of the administrative bases for the operation of the plan; third, the consolidation of all territories already open to the Faith. Fourth, the opening of chief virgin territories on the planet.

As to the specific objectives of the Ten Year Crusade, there were twenty-seven in number. Ten of these Shoghi Effendi had set aside as goals to be accomplished at the World Centre of the Faith. These goals related to the properties and endowments in Bahjí and Haifa, the establishment of Israel branches of National Assemblies, the development of the institution of the Hands of the Cause and of the International Bahá'í Council, the reinforcement of ties with the United Nations, the codification of the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and the holding of a World Congress at the end of the Crusade. The remaining seventeen specific objectives were divided by him among the twelve participating National Spiritual Assemblies.

Shoghi Effendi divided the world into three categories. The first was made up of nine home fronts. Those excluded from among the twelve generals were the Central American, South American and the Italo-Swiss home fronts. He called these the 'administrative bases' for the conduct of the Ten Year Crusade. The second category was what he called 'consolidation territories'. These were territories where there were Bahá'ís already but needed special assistance. The third category comprised 'virgin

territories'. In terms of the usage now current in the Bahá'í world, these three categories would be A, B/C and D.

There are few differences with the past. Instead of countries, we have clusters, and instead of three categories, we have four. Also, the National Assembly has to consider its territory to be its own globe, while inter-Assembly collaboration continues to be determined by the World Centre.

Blessed are those countries that can have an ever greater number of A clusters because the hope is to have as many National Assemblies as possible with the majority of their clusters in the 'A' category. The Bahá'ís can then really take the plunge into the great ocean, which is to spiritualize and attract the masses to the Cause of God.

The seventeen remaining specific objectives were therefore divided by him among the twelve existing National Assemblies in such a way as to make pioneering and teaching activities dependent upon the collaboration of six National Spiritual Assemblies in Africa, six in the combined zone of Asia and Australasia, and four in each of Europe and the Western Hemisphere. This meant that seven National Assemblies would each collaborate in two continents, four each in one continent, and the United States National Spiritual Assembly and its community in all continents, since they were the appointed chief executors of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan.

If a National Spiritual Assembly could not send pioneers to a virgin country, anybody, from anywhere in the world, was encouraged to fill the goal. And when Shoghi Effendi saw that there was a strong community anywhere in the world, he would call on the resident Bahá'ís and encourage them to go to nearby virgin territories.

The Twenty-Seven Objectives

1) *Adoption of preliminary measures to the construction of Bahá'u'lláh's Sepulchre in the Holy Land*

What one can see today is what the Bahá'ís have inherited from the Guardian's efforts for the beautification of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. When this goal was first announced, many Bahá'ís thought that this meant that Shoghi Effendi was planning to draw up plans for the construction of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.

This was not his intention. He explained to the Hands of the Cause residing in the Holy Land, to the members of the International Bahá'í Council and to visiting pilgrims that what he had in mind was to cleanse the precincts of the Most Holy Shrine, known as the Ḥarám-i-Aqdas, from the presence of the remnants of the Covenant-breakers. These Covenant-breakers had continued to live on the property ever since the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá more than three decades before. As Shoghi Effendi had just acquired the land adjacent to the Shrine, his goal was to create an exquisite garden in the quadrant facing the entrance of the Blessed Tomb, embellish it with beautiful plants, flowers, trees, ornaments and paths, and likewise electrify the area so that it would be illumined as a sea of light at night. As you all know, these goals were achieved in full glory.

2) Doubling the number of countries within the pale of the Faith, involving the opening of:

41 countries in Asia

33 countries in Africa

30 countries in Europe

27 countries in the American Continent

(Total: 131 countries)

The number of countries opened to the Faith in April 1953 was 128. This number was raised to 259 countries by the end of the plan. As you all know, the last virgin territory was Sakhalin Islands and when it was opened the House of Justice was able to complete the 'Roll of Honour' of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, and on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of His Ascension the Roll was deposited at the entrance of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh by

Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum in the very spot designated by the Guardian.

3) *Over twofold increase in the number of languages into which Bahá'í literature has been translated, printed or in the process of translation:*

40 in Asia

31 in Africa

10 in Europe

10 in America

(Total: 91 countries)

By the end of the plan the achievement in this area of activity exceeded the goal, thus the number of languages instead of being doubled was trebled.

4) *Doubling the number of Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs, through the initiation of the construction of:*

1 in Asia

1 in Europe

The Temple to be built in Asia was to be in the Cradle of the Faith. It was clear already in the days of Shoghi Effendi that this goal could not be achieved in the course of the plan. The conditions in Iran were such that they would not give the Bahá'ís a building permit to build the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Tehran. He therefore replaced it by two other Temples, one in Kampala, Uganda, and the other in Sydney, Australia. The erection of these two Temples was completed and they were opened to the public prior to the end of the Crusade. As to the Temple on the European continent, it was to be in Frankfurt, Germany. Its construction was started during the second half of the Ten Year Crusade and it was completed soon after 1963.

5) *Acquisition of the site of the future Mashriq'ul-Adhkár on Mount Carmel*

The location of the land had been identified by the Guardian and in 1955, with a special donation by Hand of the Cause of God Amelia Collins, this historic site was purchased – a property which had been blessed by the footsteps of the Blessed Beauty and was the site of the revelation of the Tablet of Carmel.

6) *Erection of the first dependency of the Mashriq'ul-Adhkár in Wilmette*

Shoghi Effendi advised that the first dependency should be the Home for the Aged. A property in the close neighbourhood of the Temple was bought and a Home for the Aged was erected and became operative before the end of the Crusade.

7) *Purchase of the land for eleven future Temples:*

3 in the American Continent

3 in Africa

2 in Asia

2 in Europe

1 in the Australian Continent

(Total = 11)

By the end of the plan the total number of Temple sites was forty-six, amply fulfilling the goal.

8) *Development of the functions of the institution of the Hands of the Cause*

This is a very important point. The enemies of the Faith have attacked us on the basis that the Hands of the Cause were not supposed to have administrative authority. They have argued that af-

ter the passing of Shoghi Effendi the Hands of the Cause assumed authority and they nominally and actively took the role of the Head of the Faith. As there was no House of Justice and Shoghi Effendi had passed away, the Hands of the Cause, who were not supposed to have administrative authority, took over the reins of the administration of the Cause. In his last major message to the Bahá'í world, Shoghi Effendi gave them the title of '*Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth*' (*Messages to the Bahá'í World* 127). When Shoghi Effendi uses the term '*embryonic World Commonwealth*' or '*embryonic World Order*', he means the Administrative Order. Thus, here by '*Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth*', he is referring to their role in the Administrative Order.

Stewards are those who in a *pro-tem* capacity are in charge of a task. The Oxford Dictionary gives the following definition as the first meaning of the word 'steward': '*a person entrusted with management of another's property*'. Webster's Dictionary defines a steward as '*one who actively directs affairs or one appointed to supervise*'.

Thus, they have to be temporary managers of God's property (i.e. His Cause) so that they can later hand over the responsibility to the authoritative Body. In the same message in which the title of 'Chief Stewards' is mentioned, Shoghi Effendi refers to them also as 'protectors of the Faith' and 'high-ranking officers of a fast evolving World Administrative Order' (*Messages to the Bahá'í World* 127–8).

In yet another message, of June 1957, written a few months before the message mentioned above, Shoghi Effendi says that the Hands of the Cause and the National Spiritual Assemblies are destined to work and consult together. He wrote:

Divinely appointed Institution of the Hands of the Cause, invested by virtue of the authority conferred by the Testament of the Centre of the Covenant with the twin functions of protecting and propagating the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, now en-

tering 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 . . .

Call upon Hands and National Assemblies, each continent separately, to establish henceforth direct contact and deliberate, whenever feasible, as frequently as possible, to exchange reports to be submitted by their respective Auxiliary Boards and national committees, to exercise unrelaxing vigilance and carry out unflinchingly their sacred, inescapable duties. 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 fulfilment 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, occupying, with the Universal House of Justice, next to the Institution of the Guardianship, foremost rank in the divinely ordained administrative hierarchy of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh (Messages to the Bahá'í World 122–123).

The wording of this message of June 1957 is so emphatic and dramatic that those who read that message at the time felt as though Shoghi Effendi was saying ‘good-bye’ to all of us, for the time had come for the two institutions to work together, as the ultimate destiny of the Cause was now to be in their hands.

At the outset of the Ten Year Crusade the number of these ‘high-ranking officers’ of the Bahá'í community was nineteen. By

1957, when Shoghi Effendi passed away, he had raised the number to twenty-seven.

9) *Establishment of a Bahá'í Court in the Holy Land, preliminary to the emergence of the Universal House of Justice*

As explained by Shoghi Effendi in his *The Advent of Divine Justice* and subsequently in other messages, he envisaged seven stages for the evolution of the Faith in different parts of the world. The fourth was for the independence of the Faith to be acknowledged by the authorities of a given country with a 'status of full equality with its sister religions' (*Advent of Divine Justice* 14). In his 'Unfoldment of World Civilization' he had explained also that 'in certain countries of the East, in which religious communities exercise jurisdiction in matters of personal status, Bahá'í Assemblies may be called upon to assume the duties and responsibilities devolving upon officially constituted Bahá'í courts. They will be empowered in such matters as marriage, divorce and inheritance, to execute and apply, within their respective jurisdictions, and with the sanction of civil authorities, such laws and ordinances as have been expressly provided in their Most Holy Book' (*World Order* 200).

In Israel the tradition of religious courts, as it existed throughout the Ottoman rule and the British Mandate, was not abolished by the government after its independence in 1948. It was in this context that Shoghi Effendi formulated the goal of establishing a Bahá'í court in the Holy Land. However, he explained to the Hands of the Cause in the Holy Land that this court was not to be a court of appeal for the Bahá'í world, nor an international court which would have any kind of jurisdiction over National Assemblies. It was meant to be a court which would be empowered by the authorities of the country to assume such duties in matters of personal status as are normally devolved upon legally constituted religious courts of other religions in the country.

From their conclave in November 1959 the Hands of the Cause announced to the Bahá'í world that as the extent of jurisdiction of religious courts in the Holy Land was being restricted (and this was due to the strong secular tendencies prevalent in the region) (*Ministry of the Custodians* 169), the fulfilment of this goal appeared to be unlikely. The International Bahá'í Council continued its efforts to determine the feasibility of implementing this goal but it was definitely concluded that, under current circumstances, any Bahá'í religious court in the Holy Land, if established, would be far more restricted in scope and authority in comparison to the religious courts of other religious communities existing in the country. This was an undignified position for the Faith to assume, when compared to the rights and privileges enjoyed by other Faiths, who in their turn were being subjected to a steady and systematic erosion of their authority.

10) *Codification of the laws and ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Mother Book of the Bahá'í Revelation*

The execution of this goal had been assigned to the World Centre. Shoghi Effendi had himself laid the foundations of the structure of this codification and had already achieved the major portion of the intended synopsis. Amatu'l-Bahá, after the election of the House of Justice, handed over, in the course of the transfer of documents from Shoghi Effendi's study, the detailed notes in Persian and in English written in his own hand. The Universal House of Justice commissioned a task force to complete the unfinished portion of the document and, as you know, at Riḍván 1973, the material was published in book form.

11) *Establishment of the six national Bahá'í courts in the chief cities of the Islamic East:*

Tíhrán
Cairo

Baghdád
New Delhi
Karachí
Kabul

The explanation given above about religious courts in the Holy Land applies to this objective as well. An added factor was, and still is, the unwillingness of the authorities of the countries concerned to give such concessions to the Bahá'ís. Since the entire Bahá'í world is committed to the objectives formulated by Shoghi Effendi for his Crusade, it is, of course, hoped that the believers in these countries, under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, will take steps to implement these goals, if circumstances permit.

12) Extension of international Bahá'í endowments in the Holy Land, on the plain of 'Akká and the slopes of Mount Carmel

The area of land dedicated to the Shrines of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb at the outset of the Ten Year Plan was 354,000 square metres. At the end of the plan the total area reached 487,000 square metres. The purchase of needed properties after the Ten Year Crusade continued and at the present time their area exceeds half a million square metres.

13) Construction of the International Bahá'í Archives in the neighbourhood of the Báb's Sepulchre

As you all know, the construction of the Bahá'í International Archives began in March 1955, during the lifetime of Shoghi Effendi. Its construction was underway at the time of his passing and through the efforts of the Hands of the Cause in the Holy Land, the building was completed during the interregnum period. The Tablets, relics and other artefacts were transferred and deposited in the new building and later, with greater technical facilities, in

its newly-built extension. The Archives building was to be the first of the administrative buildings to be erected round the Arc.

14) *Construction of a tomb for the wife of the Báb in Shíráz*

As you are all aware, the unfavourable conditions in Iran did not make it possible to carry out this important goal of the Ten Year Crusade. We can all be sure that the Universal House of Justice regards this responsibility as its own and, as soon as favourable conditions prevail, appropriate action will be taken to ensure the execution of this noble goal.

15) *Identification of the resting places of the father of Bahá'u'lláh and the mother and cousin of the Báb for reburial in the Bahá'í cemetery in the vicinity of the Most Great House*

Five months before the passing of Shoghi Effendi it was possible to transfer the remains of the father of Bahá'u'lláh, Mírzá Buzurg, to the Bahá'í cemetery in Baghdád. The news of the fulfilment of this goal was shared by Shoghi Effendi with the Bahá'í world at that time. It was not possible to do the same thing in connection with the remains of the mother and the cousin of the Báb. The friends should be sure, however, that in the future the friends in Iraq, under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, will accomplish this goal.

16) *Acquisition of the Garden of Riḍván in Baghdád, site of the Síyáh-Chál in Ṭíhrán, site of the martyrdom of the Báb in Tabríz, and of His incarceration in Chíhriq*

The site of the Síyáh-Chál was purchased in Shoghi Effendi's own lifetime, likewise the fortress in Chíhriq. However, after the recent revolution in Iran these properties, together with all the other holdings of the Bahá'í community in the country, were confiscated by the authorities. The acquisition of the Garden of Riḍván in Baghdád and the site of the martyrdom of the Báb in Tabríz

was not possible in the past. Unfortunately, the current situation is not very much different in these two countries. We must be confident that these wishes of our beloved Guardian will certainly materialize in the future, as soon as circumstances permit.

17) More than quadruple the number of the National Spiritual Assemblies

This objective was particularly close to the Guardian's heart because he had repeatedly stated that National Assemblies were pillars sustaining the dome which was the Universal House of Justice. The greater their number, the more secure will be the final unit crowning the edifice of the Administrative Order. At the close of the Ten Year Plan fifty-six National Spiritual Assemblies had been established, which outstripped the goal.

18) Multiply seven-fold the number of the national Ḥazīratu'l-Quds, their establishment in the capital cities of the chief Sovereign States and chief cities of the principal Dependencies of the planet:

21 in America

15 in Europe

9 in Asia

3 in Africa

1 in New Zealand

By the end of the plan, forty-nine new buildings had been acquired to serve as National Ḥazīratu'l-Quds.

19) Framing of national Bahá'í constitutions, establishment national Bahá'í endowments in same capitals and cities of same States and Dependencies

and

20) More than quintuple the number of incorporated National Spiritual Assemblies

Forty-seven National Assemblies acquired national endowments and in thirty-four of these, national Bahá'í constitutions were officially registered.

21) *Establishment of six national Bahá'í Publishing Trusts*

By the end of the plan, seven Publishing Trusts had been established and were operating worldwide.

22) *Participation of the women of Persia in the membership of national and local Assemblies*

This goal was welcomed with great jubilation in Iran. Nine other countries in the Muslim East had either preceded Iran or presently followed suit. These were Iraq, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Libya, Arabian Peninsula, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

23) *Establishment of seven Israel branches of National Spiritual Assemblies:*

2 in Europe

2 in Asia

1 in America

1 in Africa

1 in Australia – totalling seven Israel branches

By the end of the plan, nine Israel branches had been established.

24) *Establishment of a national Bahá'í printing press in Tíhrán*

As in the case of other goals related to Iran, this National printing press could not be established, as Shoghi Effendi had envisaged. However, some facilities were provided by the National Assembly of Iran to duplicate Bahá'í literature and thereby to meet the needs of the community. Undoubtedly, in the future this wish of the beloved Guardian will be fully realized.

25) Reinforcement of the ties binding the Bahá'í World Community to the United Nations

We should recall that the Bahá'í International Community was registered in 1947 as a Non-Governmental Organization under the auspices of the UNDP. In the course of the Ten Year Crusade, the Bahá'í International Community succeeded in forging ties with UNICEF, UNIFEM, WHO and WFP. In the spirit of this objective, after the Ten Year Crusade, the Bahá'í International Community was recognized as an NGO with consultative status in the sessions of the Economic and Social Council. In 1970 and in 1976 it was granted a similar status with UNICEF. We should be confident that, in the days and years to come, these ties will be further reinforced.

26) Inclusion, circumstances permitting, of eleven Republics comprised within Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and two European Soviet-controlled States within the orbit of the Administrative Order of the Faith

Owing to the prevailing situation in the Soviet Union, throughout the period of the Ten Year Plan it was not possible to send pioneers to these thirteen countries. However, some three years after the inauguration of the plan Shoghi Effendi received news that in four of these republics, namely Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, there were resident Bahá'ís who were remnants of earlier communities that existed during the previous Russian rule. The nine remaining territories were opened as soon as the Soviet Union fell apart and it was possible for Bahá'í visitors and particularly pioneers to settle in these territories. As stated earlier, the last unopened territory of the Soviet Union was Sakhalin Islands and its opening occurred just prior to 1992, when the Roll of Honour was completed.

27) Convocation of a World Bahá'í Congress in the vicinity of the Garden of Riḍván, Baghdád, third holiest city in the Bahá'í world, on the occasion of the worldwide celebrations of the Most Great Jubilee, commemorating the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh to the Throne of His sovereignty

It was not difficult to see that this last goal of the Ten Year Crusade had to be realized not in Baghdád but elsewhere because of the restrictive conditions under which the Iraqi Bahá'í community was functioning. As Shoghi Effendi had passed away in London, the Hands of the Cause of God determined that the capital of the British Isles would be the most suitable location for this first World Bahá'í Congress. As you all know, nearly 7000 Bahá'ís attended the Congress in Albert Hall at Riḍván 1963 and they were able to visit the resting place of Shoghi Effendi. Those who were present at the Congress can recall that it was a very moving experience. The Hands of the Cause were present, as were the members of the Universal House of Justice, who had just been elected in Haifa. They were introduced to the congress on a special occasion. One can imagine how many were the eyes that shed tears as they looked at an institution that is ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and the establishment of which was a central theme of the work of Shoghi Effendi throughout his Guardianship.

We should have no doubt that at a future date some major gathering of the friends will certainly be held in Baghdád, as an echo to the wish of our beloved Guardian.

B) Examples of supplementary goals

In his summing up of the major objectives of the Crusade, as presented by him on the international level, Shoghi Effendi did not include specific goals which were supplementary and suited to the specific circumstances of each of the twelve bases of operation. We see, for example, among the subordinate objectives for the

United States the following goals: the completion of the landscaping of the grounds of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Wilmette, the raising to three hundred the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies, the conversion to the Faith of members of the leading Indian tribes, the establishment of summer schools in each of the Scandinavian and Benelux countries as well as those of the Iberian Peninsula, the proclamation of the Faith through the press and radio and the formation of an Asian Teaching Committee. In this message he also refers to the American Bahá'í community as *'the standard-bearers of the all-conquering army of the Lord of Hosts'* who, as befits their rank, have been given the *'lion's share in the prosecution of a global crusade designed to diffuse the light of God's revelation over the surface of the entire planet'* (*Citadel Faith* 109).

Further examples of such subordinate goals can be seen in Shoghi Effendi's messages to Australia and New Zealand, the British Isles, Canada, Germany and Austria, India, Pakistan and Burma, and to the Italo-Swiss National Assembly:

Australia and New Zealand:

Doubling the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies, incorporating nineteen of them and establishing an Asian Teaching Committee.

Canada:

Doubling the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies, raising the number of incorporated Spiritual Assemblies to nineteen and the establishment of American and Asian teaching committees.

India, Pakistan and Burma:

Doubling the number of Spiritual Assemblies and localities in India, Pakistan and Burma, doubling the number of incorporated Spiritual Assemblies in India, Pakistan and Burma, expansion of the Panchgani School and formation of an Asian teaching committee.

The British Isles:

Doubling the number of Spiritual Assemblies and localities in the British Isles, the incorporation of nineteen Assemblies in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland and the formation of European and Asian teaching committees.

Germany and Austria:

Doubling the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies and localities in Germany, doubling the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies and localities in Austria, incorporation of nineteen Local Spiritual Assemblies in Germany and in Austria, and the formation of an European Teaching Committee.

Italo-Swiss:

Quadrupling the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies, trebling the number of localities in Italy and Switzerland, incorporation of Spiritual Assemblies in leading cities of each country, establishment of a first joint summer school, subsequently separate ones, and formation of a European Teaching Committee.

C) Subsidiary national plans and subordinate goals added to the objectives of the Crusade

In 1956 Shoghi Effendi found that it was time for three new Regional National Spiritual Assemblies to be added to the original number. Instead of twelve, there were now fifteen National Spiritual Assemblies. All the three new Assemblies were in Africa. There was only one National Assembly in Africa in 1953, i.e. the National Assembly of Egypt and Sudan; Shoghi Effendi enlarged its area of jurisdiction and named it the Regional National Spiritual Assembly of North East Africa, which now included Libya, Abyssinia, Eritrea and Somalia, in addition to Egypt and Sudan. Then he divided the rest of Africa into three big regions; in the south, the Regional National Assembly for South and West Africa, which comprised some fifteen countries and islands. Then he

formed the Regional National Assembly for East and Central Africa, which included nine territories. The rest of the continent, from Cameroon all along the coast to Tunisia and everything in between, which comprised twenty-five countries, formed the Regional National Assembly for North West Africa.

Shoghi Effendi described these regional National Spiritual Assemblies as ‘*Regional Interim*’ National Spiritual Assemblies. In other words, they were temporary, intermediary stages. The final stage would be when each country had its independent National Assembly.

One year later, in 1957, looking at the rest of the world, he created thirteen new National Spiritual Assemblies. These thirteen new National Spiritual Assemblies plus the three aforementioned, added up to sixteen National Assemblies but in the process the two Regional Assemblies of Central and South America ceased to exist. Thus the grand total became twenty-six National Assemblies at Ridván 1957.

Shoghi Effendi sat and wrote a special message to virtually all these National Spiritual Assemblies, as though he was bidding them farewell. It is heart-rending to read these messages of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assemblies. He did not give any indication that these messages were to be his last, but when reading them, one can see that he was expressing his hopes and aspirations for the future and sketching out the paths, sometimes thorny, that they had to tread.

To each of the new National Assemblies he gave a subsidiary plan. To those formed in 1956 he gave Seven Year Plans and to the other thirteen he gave each, the following year, Six Year Plans, all under the shadow of the Ten Year Crusade.

As the Crusade unfolded, new needs and challenges became apparent. Without any inhibition Shoghi Effendi called on the concerned National Assemblies to adopt additional subordinate goals. For example, in the case of the United States he appealed to the friends in that country not to congregate in large cities on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts and to engage in a ‘*veritable exodus*’

(*Citadel of Faith* 128) from cities such as New York and Los Angeles, fully confident that a bare number of fifteen adult believers left in each of these cities would be entirely adequate. In the case of Canada, he directed the National Assembly to form Minorities Teaching Committees, with subcommittees to specialize in the teaching of French-Canadians, Eskimos and Indians (*Messages to Canada* 64). And in the case of India, Pakistan and Burma, he instructed the National Assembly to consider the acquisition of burial grounds (see *Messages to the Indian Subcontinent* 415).

Shoghi Effendi was deeply interested in all supplementary achievements, whether specified by him or accomplished by the institutions on their own initiative. In the map of the world prepared by him on the progress of the Bahá'í World Crusade for the first five years, his lists of such achievements include additional virgin territories opened to the Faith, holy sites acquired, educational schools founded, burial grounds and summer school properties purchased, new local assemblies incorporated, and local endowments and local Ḥazíratu'l-Qudsés established.

D) The Ten Year Crusade - a glorious ending of the Guardian's ministry

As already stated, Shoghi Effendi in *God Passes By* describes one of his functions in the Formative Age of the Faith to be systematizing the teachings of the Faith (see *God Passes By* xvii). He was systematic and orderly in everything he did at the World Centre and expected systematization and orderliness to be observed by those who served under his guidance, whether as individuals or as institutions. We have already seen how in the execution of the Ten Year Plan he introduced phasing as a method of orderly implementation.

Shoghi Effendi's World Crusade differed from the first and second Seven Year Plans of the North American community because its scope was worldwide, ten of its objectives had been assigned by him as responsibilities of the World Centre, Hands of

the Cause had been appointed who consulted on his behalf with the twelve National Assemblies and acted as his representative at intercontinental and continental conferences and, finally, the nature of the goals were such as to necessitate close collaboration among National Spiritual Assemblies and to provide the means for Bahá'ís from different parts of the world to meet, be acquainted with one another and work on joint collaborative projects.

A careful observer will easily note that these measures were designed to prepare the Bahá'í world to elect the Universal House of Justice at the end of the plan. This, of course, was exactly what happened. Shoghi Effendi had given a number of pointers in his Writings, both in Persian and in English, that by the end of the Crusade it would be timely to place on the pillars of the Administrative Order its last unit, namely its dome. For example, Shoghi Effendi had clearly and repeatedly stated in his letters that the second epoch of the Formative Age would come to an end with the celebrations on the occasion of the centenary of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh in 1963. As early as 5th June 1947 – that is, the very year when the second American Seven Year Plan was launched – he had, in a letter addressed to the friends in North America, clearly stated that this second epoch would witness *'the consummation of a laboriously constructed Administrative Order'* (*Citadel of Faith* 5). Several paragraphs later in the same message he identified *'the last crowning unit in the erection of the fabric of the Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh'* as the *'Universal House of Justice'*. Furthermore, the year 1963 was identified by Shoghi Effendi as the prescribed year destined to witness the universal spread and world triumph of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh – an outcome envisaged by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and prophesied by Daniel, with reference to the year 1335 recorded in the last chapter of his book.

Furthermore, at the end of the first year of the Ten Year Crusade, in a general letter written in Persian, addressed to the friends in the East, Shoghi Effendi called on the believers to arise in service to the Cause and to scatter and settle in the territories that

needed pioneers' support, so that isolated believers may develop into groups, these groups into Local Assemblies, these Assemblies into National Assemblies and these National Assemblies may be blessed with emergence of the Universal House of Justice. The analogy he gives in this letter is the process of the development of a point into a book. Thus the isolated believer is likened to a point, groups to letters, Local Assemblies to words, National Assemblies to sentences and the Universal House of Justice to the 'Luminous Book', the 'Dome' and 'Crown' of the Administrative Order of God's Faith. This letter clearly foreshadows the emergence of the Universal House of Justice by the end of the World Crusade.

E) Messages of Shoghi Effendi to National Spiritual Assemblies during the last six months of his life

For several years prior to his passing it had become the practice of Shoghi Effendi to send a world message addressed to the national conventions throughout the planet. In these messages he would give an overview of the major accomplishments at the World Centre and national communities throughout the year, analyse the ever-deteriorating world conditions, relating them to the warnings and prophecies from the pens of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and draw the attention of the friends to the needs of the Cause and its current challenges. The last four convention messages made particular mention of the Crusade, its progress and the immediate tasks which called for urgent attention. His last world convention message of April 1957 consisted of eighteen pages. This particular message ended with two paragraphs which were extremely moving and filled with poignant emotion. He wrote:

I appeal . . . for a renewed dedication . . . on the part of the entire company of my spiritual brethren in every continent of the globe . . . be they in active service or not, of either sex, young as well as old, rich or poor, whether veteran or newly enrolled – a dedication reminiscent of the pledges

which the Dawn-breakers of an earlier Apostolic Age, assembled in conference at Badasht . . . willingly and solemnly made for the prosecution of the collective task with which they were confronted (Messages to the Bahá'í World 120).

The last paragraph read as follows: ‘*May this Crusade, on which the privileged heirs and present successors of the heroes of the Primitive Age of our Faith have so auspiciously embarked, yield, as it speeds on to its mid-way point, such a harvest as will amaze its prosecutors, astonish the world at large, and draw forth from the Source on high a measure of celestial strength adequate to insure its triumphant consummation*’ (Messages to the Bahá'í World 120).

From the messages Shoghi Effendi sent during the period from June to October 1957, it is clear that he was intent upon leaving for posterity some precious gifts as follows:

- 1) A message, dated June 4, 1957, addressed to the Hands of the Cause and National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world. Under the section of the Hands of the Cause the text of this message is quoted in full.
- 2) In a message dated October 1957 he announced the need to hold five intercontinental conferences successively in Kampala, Uganda, for Africa, in Sydney, Australia, for the Antipodes, in Chicago, U.S.A., for the Western Hemisphere, in Frankfurt, Germany, for Europe, and in Jakarta, Indonesia, for Asia, to be convened respectively in the months of January, March, May, July and September 1958, in order to mark the midway point of the World Crusade.
- 3) In the same above-mentioned message he appointed the last contingent of eight more Hands of the Cause of God, chosen from four continents of the globe, representing Christian, Muslim, Jewish and pagan backgrounds. This self-same message authorized the Hands to appoint an additional Auxiliary

Board, complementing the function of the original Board, with the specific duty of watching over the security of the Faith. And finally, in this same message, he bestowed upon the Hands of the Cause a further accolade, referring to them as '*Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth*' (*Messages to the Bahá'í World* 127), as indicated earlier in these notes.

- 4) In addition to the above, as I have stated already, he sent to virtually all the twenty-six National Spiritual Assemblies functioning at that time a specific message underlining what he considered to be the vital aspects and unfinished tasks of their work and entreating them not to relax in their efforts until the challenges of the Crusade were befittingly met. It would be of profound interest to future Bahá'í historians to analyse these last letters in order to identify those gems of divine inspiration which bedecked these immortal messages, many of which were written in longhand by his own pen as postscripts to the texts written on his behalf by his secretary. In these messages Shoghi Effendi praised each national community for the victories already won, focusing his comments on whatever he felt was vital, urgent and imperative for the unimpeded progress of the Faith in the country or region he was addressing.

For the sake of our study I have gleaned from the messages available to me such important points that could well have general application to the community of the Most Great Name labouring at this time to bring the Five Year Plan to a successful conclusion.

Duties incumbent on the National Assembly:

- 1) To regard the work of the National Assembly as the beating of a healthy heart in the community, pumping spiritual love, energy and encouragement.

- 2) The National Assembly to regard itself as a loving parent, not a stern judge.
- 3) To replace harsh measures with loving forbearance when dealing with the community in general. However, to make no compromises when the behaviour of any of the friends is fragrantly disgraceful to the Faith.
- 4) To avoid adding rules and regulations of procedure, as under-administration is better than over-administration.
- 5) To multiply the number of Local Assemblies, groups and localities where Bahá'ís reside, as well as the number of incorporated Spiritual Assemblies.
- 6) To increase the number of representatives of minorities converted to the Faith.
- 7) To consider summer schools as venues for the acquisition of greater knowledge of the Faith and means for closer Bahá'í companionship.
- 8) To attach importance to the national newsletter.
- 9) To maintain the policy of review of Bahá'í literature for the time being.
- 10) To broaden the base of the official recognition of the Faith's status in matters such as respecting the sanctity of Bahá'í holy days and the issuing of Bahá'í marriage certificates.

The point that requires some comment is number four: To avoid adding rules and regulations of procedures, as under-administration is better than over-administration (*Lights of Guidance* p. 38). This is a very important point. In the course of the week I have been telling you about how much Bahá'ís fall in love with the Administration because it is a beautiful thing. Frankly, there is no question about that but we seem to elaborate on the Administration, trying to make it bigger and more complicated. When National Spiritual Assemblies started issuing orders, instructions and new procedures, Shoghi Effendi did not like it. He would advise to keep the Faith simple, not to place extra burdens

on the shoulders of the Bahá'ís and to administer moderately. This is something that has to be kept in mind generally.

Duties incumbent on the community:

- 1) To appreciate the importance of unity and love among the believers.
- 2) To increase steadily the number of the avowed supporters of the Faith.
- 3) To realize that the path ahead is thorny and tortuous, with tests and trials abounding.
- 4) To welcome opposition which the rising fame of the Faith is destined to provoke.
- 5) To acquire a deeper understanding of the genesis, the significance, the workings and the present status and achievements of the Faith's Administrative Order as well as the Bahá'í Covenant, on which it is based.
- 6) To appreciate the necessity of supporting the National Fund.
- 7) To be aware that the maximum spiritual influence of the national institutions of the Faith depends on the degree of self-sacrifice of the contributors to the Fund.

Duties of the individual believer:

- 1) To participate in Bahá'í contributions and in teaching the Cause – duties incumbent on all believers.
- 2) To appreciate the importance of the individual believer as the fundamental unit for the revitalization, the expansion and enrichment of the home front.
- 3) To serve as travelling teachers on teaching trips to centres on the home front.
- 4) To deepen in the understanding of the Faith as well as in one's love for it.

- 5) To exert diligent, painstaking and sustained efforts when teaching the Faith.
- 6) To avoid apathy, timidity and complacency in the discharge of spiritual responsibilities.
- 7) To endeavour, daily and methodically, to rise to loftier heights of consecration and self-abnegation.

F) The importance of the Ten Year Plan as viewed by Shoghi Effendi in the process of the evolution of the Faith and of humanity

When Shoghi Effendi launched the Ten Year Crusade in 1953, in a message on the 4th of May of that year, he set forth a number of stages in the spiritual awakening and evolution of humanity. This evolution was described by him as a process in ten parts (see chart n. 4 p. 158).

The period from the dawn of the Adamic cycle to the prophet Muḥammad constituted the first part of the majestic process of the expression of the divine Will. According to this message, during the Dispensation of Adam, the Tree of divine revelation was planted in the soil of divine Will and this Tree was watered with the *‘vernal showers of blood shed by countless martyrs’* during the successive Dispensations of the Adamic cycle. In this message he pointed out that the second and third parts consisted of the appearance of the *‘perfect fruit’* of that Tree, namely the Báb, as well as the grinding of that *‘sacred seed’* in the *‘mill of adversity, causing it to yield its oil’* in the city of Tabríz. The following three parts, according to this message, cover the period of the ministry of Bahá’u’lláh through the *‘ignition of this oil by the Hand of Providence’* in the Síyáh-Chál of Tīhrán, followed by the appearance and diffusion of the *‘flickering light’* of divine revelation and the subsequent *‘spread of the radiance of that light’* in Adrianople and Akká, when its rays reached parts of the Asiatic and African continents. The seventh part was the shedding of the *‘illumination’* of this divine light upon twenty additional territories in the

American, European and Australian continents. The eighth part was the ‘diffusion’ of that same light in the course of the first thirty-two years of the Formative Age of the Faith over a further ninety-four territories of the planet. (see *Messages to the Bahá’í World* 154). Thus, the eight parts constituting the period from the inception of the Adamic cycle till the year 1953, when the Ten Year Crusade was launched, comprises a grand total of 6109 years (6000 + 77 + 23 + 9). Having thus brought us to the year 1953, Shoghi Effendi explained that in this inconceivably dramatic diffusion of the divine light, the ninth part was now to begin.

As we just saw, during this Crusade, so potently invested with power and might, the light of God’s Revelation was destined to reach 131 virgin territories – a feat incomparable in its magnitude as well as in its impact on the declining fortunes of a harassed humanity.

The beginning of the tenth part of this mysterious and historical process was in the year 1963, when the Ten Year Crusade ended and the Universal House of Justice was elected. Following Shoghi Effendi’s calculation, humanity had now traversed a period of no less than 6119 years. The tenth and last part of this process, in accordance with Shoghi Effendi’s message, is described by him in the following sentence:

And finally the tenth part of this mighty process must be the penetration of that light, in the course of numerous crusades and of successive epochs of both the Formative and Golden Ages of the Faith, into all the remaining territories of the globe through the erection of the entire machinery of Bahá’u’lláh’s Administrative Order in all territories, both East and West, the stage at which the light of God’s triumphant Faith shining in all its power and glory will have suffused and enveloped the entire planet (Messages to the Bahá’í World 155).

Four important points emerge when we analyse the above mentioned sentence:

- 1) It is clear that the tenth part, beginning in 1963, is meant to cover the entire range of the centuries leading to the end of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh.
- 2) We should expect successive epochs and numerous crusades and plans ahead of us until the end of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, throughout the remaining years of the Formative Age and the full duration of the Golden Age of the Faith. Undoubtedly, these will be formulated and executed under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.
- 3) Shoghi Effendi acknowledges that the Ten Year Crusade did not address the diffusion, in the full sense of the term, of the Cause of God to *every* spot on earth. The Crusade aimed at the opening of *all 'sovereign states'* and only what he considered to be the '*chief dependencies*', (in other words, not all the dependencies) of the world. This latter achievement was left by him for the tenth part when future plans would address, in Shoghi Effendi's words, '*all the remaining territories of the globe*' (*Messages to the Bahá'í World* 153).
- 4) The worldwide diffusion of the light of God's revelation would have been, *to all intents and purposes*, achieved through the execution of the Ten Year Crusade. After this diffusion two other stages are anticipated by Shoghi Effendi, namely the 'penetration' of the light and heat of God's revelation into the inner depths of the planet and the subsequent stage of the spread of that heat throughout its deeper layers. This development is described by him as the 'suffusion' of that light and heat. Of course, we should not

forget that this is a mere metaphor that Shoghi Effendi is using to illustrate the extent to which the driving force of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh will first penetrate the very hearts and souls of men, followed by a process of dispersion of the life-imparting warmth of God's Revelation into the deep strata and the frigid and lifeless tissues of the body of human society.

While the three terms of '*diffusion*', '*penetration*' and '*suffusion*' are not ambiguous in the vocabulary of the sentence constructed by Shoghi Effendi, what is unknown to us at this point of time is what penetration and suffusion, in their full sense, would mean in terms of future goals, objectives, plans and epochs. There is no doubt that when the time is ripe the Universal House of Justice, which is the divinely-ordained body in charge of the tenth part, will give the Bahá'í world the needed guidance.

Might we not venture to assume that, using Shoghi Effendi's metaphor in this sentence, the concept of penetration, as stated by him, would be '*the erection of the entire machinery of Bahá'u'lláh's Administrative Order in all territories, both East and West*'? (*Messages to the Bahá'í World* 155). This stage would naturally have its counterpart in the teaching work. Could we not, then, opine that this projected development would be the very stage towards which we are currently advancing, as we cross the threshold of 'entry by troops'.

The last stage, namely when both inwardly and outwardly the light and warmth of God's revelation has demonstrated its God-given capacity to spiritualize and unite the peoples of the world, could well be associated with the long-awaited stage of 'mass conversion', which Shoghi Effendi has described as a development which will synchronize with events destined to '*suddenly revolutionize the fortunes of the Faith, derange the equilibrium of the world, and reinforce a thousandfold the numerical strength as well as the material power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh*' (*Citadel of Faith* 117). This infinitely glorious

consummation will be a merger of God's Minor Plan with His Major Plan. This stage has been described by Shoghi Effendi in the following words with which he concludes his glorious message of May 4, 1953:

This final and crowning stage in the evolution of the plan wrought by God Himself for humanity will, in turn, prove to be the signal for the birth of a world civilization, incomparable in its range, its character and potency, in the history of mankind – a civilization which posterity will, with one voice, acclaim as the fairest fruit of the Golden Age of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, and whose rich harvest will be garnered during future dispensations destined to succeed one another in the course of the five thousand century Bahá'í Cycle (Messages to the Bahá'í World 155).

The important point in this passage is that when the three stages 'diffusion', 'penetration' and 'suffusion' have been traversed and the anticipated stage of the conversion of the masses, as well as the 'spiritualization' of these masses, has taken place, this will then be the signal for the birth of the 'incomparable' Bahá'í civilization, a fruit which the Golden Age of our Faith will eventually produce and which, in the course of future Dispensations, will enable humanity to witness the 'rich harvest' it has long awaited from time immemorial.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: Could you give us sure clarification of the goal on the establishment Israel branches, as indicated in objectives number 23?

A: It was Shoghi Effendi's wish that as a reward to outstanding services rendered by National Spiritual Assemblies, some holy places and properties in the Holy Land (and possibly in the future such international endowments with sacred associations in other countries) would be officially registered with the respective governments in the names of these National Assemblies. To start this process during the British Mandate, he established branches of a few National Assemblies in Palestine. These legal entities were registered with the government as societies with a very simple set of by-laws and needed the signatures of two officers, such as a president and a secretary, of the society. Shoghi Effendi's lawyer drew up the simple by-laws and he and his English secretary of the period signed as president and secretary of the society, respectively. When the State of Israel was formed the practice continued but since the country had changed its name, the new name, i.e. 'Israel', replaced the designation 'Palestine', and under a new law, they are now called 'Friendly Societies'.

This practice also gives status to our holy places, as properties belonging to the entire Bahá'í community, scattered across the world. It is furthermore a step which would be an additional measure taken for the protection of Bahá'í holy places. These properties would thus be, not only in theory, but through proper legal procedures, owned by properly constituted branches of National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world.

Q. Could you please give us more information on the Bahá'í religious courts in terms of their future function and jurisdic-

tion? Are they going to be separate from the Local and National Assemblies or will they be executing their function together with those Assemblies?

A. The idea of establishing religious courts is that the Assembly itself, whether Local or National, will become a religious court on the local or national level. The Publishing Trust performs an aspect of the work of the National Spiritual Assembly but incorporates itself as a Bahá'í publishing agency, because that is a specific activity. Likewise, the Local and National Assembly incorporate themselves or, if necessary, reincorporate themselves so as to be recognized by the civil authorities as religious courts. This does not necessarily mean that these Assemblies will actually deal with divorce cases, disputes between individuals and so on. Of course, if it is a small community they will do it but not when the community becomes large. Already in the days of Shoghi Effendi, in Iran, because of the great number of Bahá'ís in the country and particularly in the city of Tīhrán, the Local Assembly of Tīhrán was obliged to have special committees and these committees were more or less like courts. The Assembly would choose two or three outstanding Bahá'í lawyers or Bahá'ís experienced in legal matters, and these friends constituted themselves as, say, Bahá'í Legal Committee number 1 or number 2, and so on. When cases were presented to the Local Assembly of Tīhrán, they would automatically be referred to one of these special legal committees to deal with each case on behalf of the Local Spiritual Assembly. Recourse to appeal was also provided for.

When we say that a Local Spiritual Assembly will become a court it does not necessarily mean that the Assembly will have to judge every case. It could delegate this responsibility to committees or some subsidiary agencies, if it wants to, and as the need arises.

Q. What exactly was the International Bahá'í Council? What were its duties? Why did it not, as a forerunner of the Univer-

sal House of Justice, guide the Bahá'í world after the passing of the Guardian, to the end of the Ten Year Crusade? What happened to it after 1963?

A. The duties of the International Bahá'í Council, as appointed by the beloved Guardian, was first to help Shoghi Effendi in completing the Shrine and in starting the Archives building. The other duty was to reinforce the ties with the government of the country, build new bridges and reinforce ties with the newly formed State. The third duty assigned to the Council was to study laws that affect personal status; as we discussed, for example in cases of marriage and divorce, to see to what extent it was possible to get more prerogatives, more rights from the government of the land for the Bahá'í community. Already the rights to perform the solemnization of Bahá'í marriages had been acquired by the Guardian himself, before the appointment of the Council. To accomplish the task, the Council had to explore the possibilities of establishing a religious Bahá'í court in the holy land. As I told you, the result of this study was that it was impossible to have a court that was equal to the religious courts of other religions which, in turn, were becoming more restricted in their operation. Therefore it was decided that this was not possible at that time.

The other part of the question is that why was it that the International Bahá'í Council did not lead the Bahá'í world during the period of the interregnum. It was because Shoghi Effendi had in his last general message to the Bahá'í world referred to the Hands of the Cause specifically as the Chief Stewards. He did not give this title to the International Bahá'í Council or its members and therefore it was logical for the Bahá'ís of the world to turn to the Hands of the Cause.

Q. If the Universal House of Justice will announce the coming of the future Manifestation of God, how will humanity react according to the principle that the followers of the former

Faith should have purity of heart? Is not this a principle that should always distinguish the righteous from the wayward?

A. No one really knows how this matter will happen, when it is going to happen and under what conditions it will happen. Since Bahá'u'lláh says that He has fears and apprehensions, it means obviously that there will certainly be opposition. This is because in the Kitáb-i-Íqán Bahá'u'lláh says that all the Manifestations of God face opposition. The Guardian used to say to pilgrims that the degree of opposition will be far less than before. There will be opposition but not to the same degree and not with the same intensity. There is a Tablet revealed by Bahá'u'lláh which illustrates how difficult it is to visualize the conditions under which the next Manifestation will appear. He says that the proof of the validity of the claim of the next Manifestation of God will not be the revealed Word, as it has always been, but will be something else. It is impossible for us human beings, with our finite minds, to visualize how or what this will be.

Q. Do you think that the concept of ‘vying’ could be used by institutions today to encourage the friends to arise and help the Faith?

A. Very much indeed. We are not doing enough of it. I think that the reason Shoghi Effendi attached importance to national newsletters was precisely this: so that the National Assembly would be able to inform the Bahá'ís of the country of the victories that are being won by others. This is part of this vying process. So the more this is done, the better.

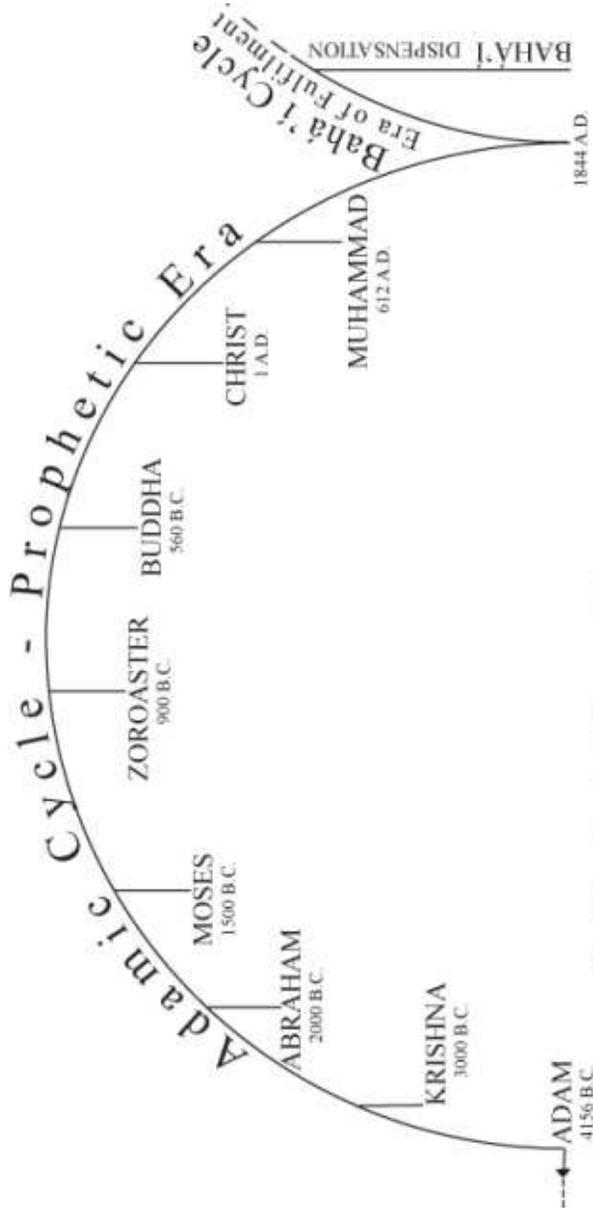
Q. Since I have colleagues who have no notion or understanding of God, with what should I start to talk – I mean what is our understanding of God? Could you give me some references about the concept of God, aside from those found in

***Some Answered Questions and Lights of Guidance?* (The background of my colleagues is ‘technical’ rather than ‘social’.)**

A. I think it is so important for Bahá’ís to be able to prove the existence of God. When Shoghi Effendi was asked by a Bahá’í youth what were the subjects that the youth should study, the first thing he said was to know how to prove the existence of God. Second, how to prove the existence of the immortality of the soul. Third, how to prove the need for a Manifestation of God and the need for religion. Fourth, what is the meaning of progressive revelation?

Some Answered Questions is full of proofs on these subjects. But there is another book which I strongly recommend to you which has these proofs, summarized and classified and that is *All Things Made New* by the Hand of the Cause John Ferraby. It is a beautiful book and it has a whole section on these subjects.

**Prophetic Era
Adamic Cycle
6000 Years**



Dates of Dispensations prior to A.D. are approximate

Chart n. 1

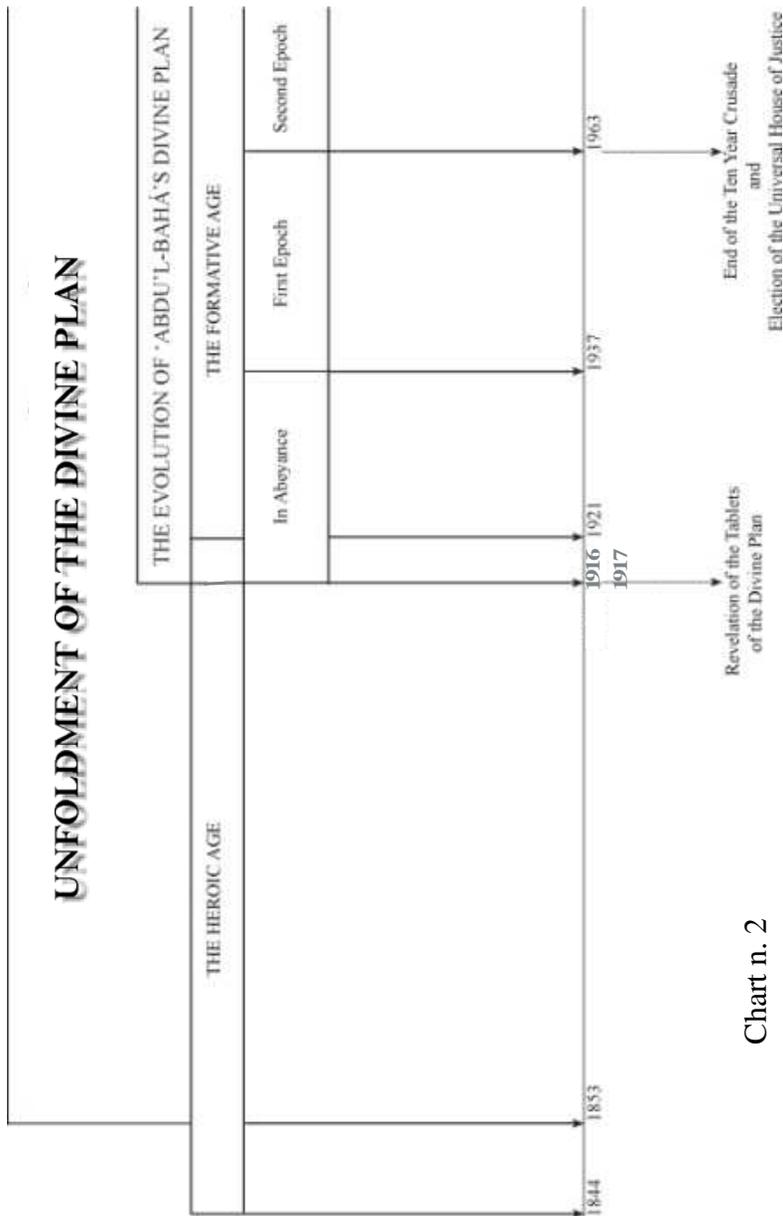


Chart n. 2

SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION OF HUMANITY

Parts		Towards the GOLDEN AGE ↑	
10	UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE	SUFFUSION (of Heat) spread of the life giving warmth of God's Revelation in the deep strata of human society	MASS CONVERSION?
		PENETRATION (of heat) Erection of the entire machinery of the Bahá'í Administrative Order in ALL territories	ENTRY BY TROOPS?
		Large scale DIFFUSION (of light)	
	1963		
9	HANDS OF THE CAUSE 1957	Unprecedented victories in expansion and consolidation	Over 250 countries and ALL sovereign states and chief dependencies.
	SHOGHI EFFENDI 1953		
8	SHOGHI EFFENDI 1921	First 32 years of the Formative Age	Further 94 territories
7	'ABDU'L-BAHA 1892	Further shedding of "illumination"	20 additional territories in the American, European, and Australian continents
6	BAHA'U'LLAH	Spread of the radiance of that Light	Diffusion in 15 more countries in Asia and Africa
5	BAHA'U'LLAH	Appearance and diffusion of the "fllickering light"	
4	BAHA'U'LLAH 1852-3	Ignition of This Oil In the Siyah-Chai	
3	THE BÁB 1850	Grinding of that "sacred seed... to yield its oil"	Spread of the Faith in 2 Countries
2	THE BÁB 1844	Appearance of the "Perfect Fruit"	
1	ADAMIC CYCLE 6000 YEARS		

ASCENDING DEVELOPMENT OF THE
TREE OF DIVINE REVELATION

Chart n. 4

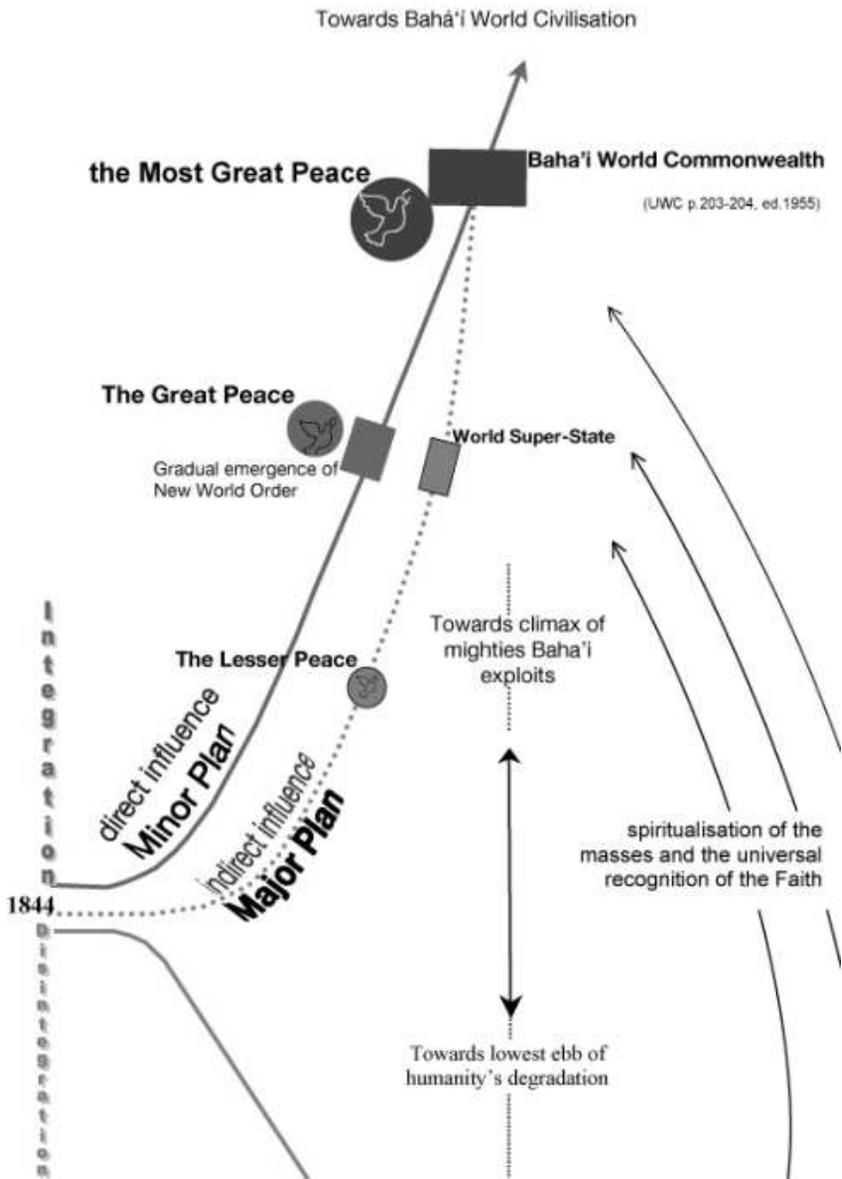


Chart n. 5

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