

he realized there was an insufficient understanding of Bahá'í administration to be able to proceed immediately to elect the supreme House of Justice. The supporting administrative framework would need to be developed on the local and national, or "secondary," levels first. "With these Assemblies, local as well as national, harmoniously, vigorously and efficiently functioning throughout the Bahá'í world, the only means for the establishment of the Supreme House of Justice will have been secured." [7]

This administrative building process took several decades. Local Spiritual Assemblies had to be formed in as many countries where possible, and where the local Assemblies were stable and functioning, National Spiritual Assemblies needed to be formed. Several of these were needed so that the international body would be truly international.

To manage this process of institution building the Guardian designed the first of the teaching plans which are now the international plans guided by the House of Justice. These plans insured a process of systematic and sustained growth. They called for an increased number of localities where Bahá'ís lived in hopes that new Bahá'í communities could be formed in those places, an increased number of such communities where local Spiritual Assemblies could possibly be formed, and a larger number of Assemblies.

In countries with no believers the object was to establish a few believers so that the entire process could begin. It is this process of community building that defined the experience of being Bahá'í for most believers in the twentieth century.

In the February 1951 issue of Bahá'í News appeared an announcement that surprised many believers. The headline read: "Epoch Making Decision Formation First International Bahá'í Council." The Guardian's announcement of the decision described the Council's functions and membership. These functions were three-fold: (1.) to build a positive relationship with the authorities of the newly founded state of Israel; (2.) to help the Guardian finish erecting the superstructure of the Shrine of the Báb; (3) to negotiate the legal matters regarding personal status. In a place where the court system is organized along religious lines, common in the Middle East, a similar system was needed for Bahá'ís. To these responsibilities, others would be added as time progressed.

The Guardian said the Council was a temporary step and referred to "its transformation into (a) duly elected body, its efflorescence into (the) Universal House of Justice, and its final fruition through (the) erection (of) manifold auxiliary institutions constituting (the) world Administrative Center..." [8] We see evidence of the achievement of this "final fruition" on the slopes of Mt Carmel today.

In *The Priceless Pearl*, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm, relates that the first members of the Council were chosen from among the Bahá'ís living at the World Center as well as others whom the Guardian had requested to come to Haifa at that time. She recounted, "...when Lotfullah Hakim (the first to arrive), Jessie and Ethel Ravel, followed by Amelia Collins and Mason Remey were all

gathered at table one day in the Western Pilgrim House, with Gladys Weeden and her husband Benn who were already living there, the Guardian announced to us his intention of constituting, out of that group, an International Council, we were all overcome by the unprecedented nature of this step he was taking and the infinite bounty it conferred upon those present as well as the entire Bahá'í world." [9]

This was as much a shock to them as to the rest of the Bahá'í world. The invitations to those not already living in Haifa were brief and gave no hint of the Guardian's intent. The invitation to the Revel sisters read simply, "Welcome your presence Haifa – Shoghi." [10] Obedience became a direct benefit to the development of the Faith.

The different members of the Council were designated by the Guardian as different "officers" to indicate some specialization of responsibilities. The members of the Council and the "offices" they held, were: Rúhíyyih Khánúm, liaison to the Guardian; Mason Remey, president; Amelia Collins, vice-president; Jessie Revel, treasurer; Lutfullah Hakim, eastern secretary; Ethel Ravel, western secretary.

Immediately the members of the Council were put to work and new responsibilities were added rapidly. A lengthy letter from the Council was published a few months later, in the June issue of "Bahá'í News." The letter informed Bahá'ís of the world of recent accomplishments at the World Center, the letter itself was one of the new duties of the Council. "...he (the Guardian) has given us the privilege and joy of keeping our fellow Bahá'ís informed..." [11]

The letter shares historical information about the construction of the Shrine of the Báb and details about the current phase of its completion and the extension of the terraces undertaken at the same time. It tells of visits of members of the Council with the Israeli Minister for Religious Affairs as well as with the mayors of Haifa and Akka, the military governor of Galilee and the United States Ambassador to Israel.

In Israel the creation of the Council itself was news. The establishment of the Council helped the authorities understand that the Faith was an independent religion because it was an institution unique from anything the Muslims, Christians or other groups had. This understanding brought unexpected benefits. One surprise to the Bahá'ís was the presentation to the Council of the keys to the cell of Bahá'u'lláh in the prison of Akka. This was signal recognition of the cell as a Bahá'í holy place, as it remains today.

A glimpse of the way the Council operated is provided by Rúhíyyih Khánúm. She wrote, "Its members received their instructions from him (the Guardian) individually, in the informal atmosphere of the dinners at the Pilgrim House table, and not formally as a body; its meetings were infrequent as all its members were kept constantly busy with the many tasks allotted to them." [12] The Council did not consult on actions to be taken, that was not its purpose; its purpose was to assist the Guardian. And that's what it did.

The role of the Council was to assist the Guardian in the operation of the World Center. There was no staff. It is difficult today to imagine the World Center with no personnel, no office space. The World Center existed in embryonic form. The Guardian carried all the statistics in a notebook in his pocket! Once he tapped his pocket and said, "The entire Bahá'í world is in here." [13] As changes have been dramatic in the past century, so they will be in future centuries to come.

In the eyes of non-Bahá'ís the Council became the first intimation that the World Center had an administrative structure. "Skillfully, Shoghi Effendi used this new institution to create in the minds of government and city officials the image of a body of an international character handling the administrative affairs at the World Centre." [14] The cordial relations and status given the World Center today is the direct result of this effort.

In its second year the membership of the Council was expanded and a more international nature was obtained. Ugo Giachery and Leroy Ioas were appointed in March 1952. They were given designations as member-at-large and secretary-general, respectively. Of the eight members, five were Hands of the Cause of God. Membership of the Council did not change again until 1955 when Sylvia Ioas was added bringing the number up to nine.

One of the responsibilities given to members of the Council was to represent the Guardian at different international conferences. Four such conferences were held in 1953. To the conferences in New Delhi, Stockholm and Kampala, the Guardian sent Mason Remey, Ugo Giachery and Leroy Ioas respectively. The fourth conference was held in Chicago and Rúhíyyih Khánúm was sent there. She was also the representative of the Guardian at the dedication of the House of Worship in Wilmette immediately following the conference. For the dedication, the House of Worship was presented with a copy of the portrait of Bahá'u'lláh, a gift from the Guardian.

The existence of the Council was a tremendous help to the Guardian. A letter from him, dated 19 July 1956, was sent to the American Bahá'í community in which he praised the "stupendous work" of the Council. The efforts included promoting the "expansion and consolidation of the international institutions of the Faith...The erection of the International Archives...the extension of the international Bahá'í endowments on the slopes of Mount Carmel; the formation of several Israeli branches of Bahá'í National Spiritual Assemblies; the embellishment of the precincts of the resting-places of both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh; the purchase of the site of the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of the Holy Land; the preparation of the designs for the International Bahá'í Archives on Mount Carmel, and the Mother Temples of Persia and Africa; the inauguration of the preliminary steps for the eventual construction of Bahá'u'lláh's Holy Sepulcher; the measures adopted, with the assistance of various officials of the State of Israel, for the eviction of the Covenant-breakers from the immediate precincts of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh..." [15]

The death of Shoghi Effendi necessitated changes at the World Center. Hands of the Cause had just been designated "Chief Stewards" of the Bahá'í community. This designation and their service directly under the Guardian on a transnational scale placed them in a position "senior" so to speak, to the National Spiritual Assemblies which could not function beyond their geographic area of jurisdiction. In the absence of any higher authority, they, in accordance with the Will & Testament of `Abdu'l-Bahá, elected nine of their number to administer the affairs of the Cause. "The Hands of the Cause of God must elect from their own number nine persons that shall at all times be occupied in the important services in the work of the Guardian of the Cause of God." [16] The Hands designated these nine as "Custodians."

The Hands could have maintained this arrangement for a considerable time, or violated the covenant and appointed someone to be a second Guardian, but they did neither. The Hands administered the Bahá'í community in trust until the current plans of Shoghi Effendi were fulfilled when they called the Bahá'í world to elect the "Supreme House of Justice" as ordained by Bahá'u'lláh and anticipated by `Abdu'l-Bahá.

It was not a smooth road.

The challenge was tremendous. First the World Crusade, planned and orchestrated by the Guardian, had to be successfully completed and, so the House of Justice could be elected, many new National Spiritual Assemblies had to be formed. At the same time the Faith had to be protected. One of the Hands, after signing with the others the statement that there was not and could not be a successor to Shoghi Effendi as a second Guardian, because the conditions set by `Abdu'l-Bahá were not and could not be met, he then declared himself to be a second Guardian. It was a difficult time. Finally, and to their regret, the Hands had to expel him, and others who followed him, from the Faith. It was not an easy time.

The Council was inadvertently involved in this spurious claim due to the fact that the one making the claim was the president of the Council and his claim hinged on that position. He reasoned that since the Guardian is the Head of the House of Justice and he was the president (the head) of the Council, then, because the Council was the forerunner of the House of Justice, he would be the head of the House of Justice and therefore: the Guardian.

Several facts were omitted: 1.) a successor Guardian could only be appointed by the present Guardian, 2.) the appointment has to be ratified by the Hands of the Cause, 3.) The Guardians can only be blood descendents of Bahá'u'lláh, and 4.) Shoghi Effendi indicated that the appointed membership of the Council was only a temporary measure, membership on the council would be elected and the House of Justice itself would be elected so no appointments were indicative of a permanent station as Mason Remey claimed. The first three of these conditions were set forth in the Will and Testament of `Abdu'l-Bahá. And finally, Mason Remey, himself, had certified that there was no successor Guardian to Shoghi Effendi, nor was it possible for there to be any. So his

claim was totally unsupportable, but it consumed the time of the Council and the Hands that could have otherwise been spent in carrying out Shoghi Effendi's plans and disrupted Bahá'ís around the world [17] The Hands, as Custodians, continued the Guardian's practice of dealing with the Israeli authorities through the Council. This was stated in the resolution of the Hands dated 25 November 1957.[18] This would provide continuity to the governmental authorities they were dealing with.

In a proclamation of the same date the Hands reaffirmed to the Bahá'ís of the world their intention of carrying out the plans of Shoghi Effendi for the Council. "As to the International Bahá'í Council, appointed by the Guardian and heralded in his communications to the Bahá'í world, that body will in the course of time finally fulfill its purpose through the formation of the Universal House of Justice, that Supreme Body upon which infallibility, as the Master's Testament assures us, is divinely conferred: "The source of all good and freed from all error." [19]

In the message from all the Hands, dated 4 November 1959, the final stage of the life of the Council had been reached. It would be, as indicated by Shoghi Effendi, transformed from an appointed body to an elected one. "We are happy to announce that another milestone in Bahá'í history will be reached with the election of the International Bahá'í council during Ridván 1961. The embryonic institution established and so highly extolled by the beloved Guardian will thus enter its final stage preceding the election of the Universal House of Justice. The members of all the National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'í world, duly constituted in Ridván, 1960, will take part in a postal ballot to elect nine members to the International Bahá'í council. This International Bahá'í council is to work under the direction and supervision of the Hands of the Cause residing in the Holy Land, serve a two year term of office, and cease to exist upon the occasion of the election of the Universal House of Justice." [20]

The Hands asked that none of their member be elected.

In addition, the Hands also announced two new duties of the Council, "To assist the Hands of the Cause in the care of the properties at the World Center, and in the establishments of the Universal House of Justice; and in any other functions which the Hands may assign from time to time." [21] Preparations for the election of the House of Justice would now be a primary activity at the World Center.

After that election, on 29 April 1961, the Hands cabled the successful completion of the first global election in the history of mankind, but not expressed in those terms. "DEEPEST GRATITUDE BAHU'ULLAH'S UNFAILING BLESSINGS ENABLING BAHAI WORLD EIGHTH YEAR CRUSADE ELECT INTERNATIONAL BAHAI COUNCIL SUCCEEDING FIRST HISTORIC BODY APPOINTED BY GUARDIAN JOYFULLY ANNOUNCE MEMBERSHIP JESSIE REVELL ALI NAKHJAVANI LOTFULLAH HAKIM ETHEL REVELL CHARLES WOLCOTT SYLVIA IOAS MILDRED MOTTAHADEH IAN SEMPLE BORRAH KAVELIN STOP INVITE BELIEVERS JOIN US ARDENT PRAYERS HISTORIC STEP MAY RELEASE SPIRITUAL IMPETUS

ASSIST ATTAINMENT GOALS SACRED PLAN SO DEAR HEART BELOVED GARDIAN." [22] It was also a trial-run for the election procedures for the House of Justice.

It is interesting to note that four of the earlier members of the Council were retained, the five Hands formerly on the Council were replaced. And further to note that five members of the Council would be later elected to the House of Justice. This resulted in a continuity of experience being passed along which was undoubtedly of benefit to the Cause.

The new Council first met on 25 June 1961 for a four day joint meeting. The members of the Council and the Hands gathered at the home of the Master then traveled together to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh for prayers. After prayers they held a joint meeting in the mansion of Bahjí. The Hands prepared a program of orientation for the Council covering the physical arrangements (the Council was given the former dining room of the Western Pilgrim House where the Guardian had met with the members of the first Council) and duties. To the previous responsibilities were added: legal protection of the endowments of the Faith at the World Center, supervision of the income-producing properties at the World Center, assist in preparations for the election of the House of Justice and for the World Congress, produce a news letter and handle the guiding at the shrines.

Information about this joint meeting is covered in the collection of documents relating to the period of time designated the Ministry of the Custodians in a volume of the same title compiled and introduced by Rúhíyyih Khánúm. Even excerpts from the minutes are published. One concern of that meeting involved who would be able to live in Haifa and how soon they could settle there. The meeting schedule of the Council was also determined and may appear surprising. The Council would meet three times a day: 9:00 – 12:00, 4:00 – 7:00 and 8:30 – 10:30. Membership was a full time job!

The agenda of this initial meeting for one full day concerned the World Congress and election of the House of Justice. Shoghi Effendi had hoped the Congress could be held in Baghdad where Bahá'u'lláh had proclaimed His mission but that proved to be impractical, so the decision was made to hold it in London near the grave of Shoghi Effendi.

The first concern was scheduling: when to hold the Congress, when to hold the election and when would National Spiritual Assemblies hold their elections – all within the twelve days of Ridván. The Council recommended to the Hands that the National Assembly elections be after Ridván. This had been done by the Guardian once before during the centennial celebration of the birth of the Faith in 1944. These elections could be by mailed ballots or at a convention.

The Council recommended that the congress be six days long near the end of the Ridván period, so that all local Spiritual Assemblies could be formed the first day of Ridván. And that the House of Justice could be elected on the Ninth Day of Ridván in Haifa. These plans were adopted by the Hands and carried out. Once the House of Justice was elected it's members flew immediately to London to present the House to the Bahá'í world represented at

the Congress. It was an awe inspiring moment.

Attending the Congress were representatives of every Bahá'í community that was possible. The Guardian had written of assembling "representative communities all sovereign states, chief dependencies, islands, entire planet." [23] This demonstration of the wide-spread victories of the Faith gave a boost to the Bahá'í community world wide. In just ten years the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh had more than doubled its geographic compass and the Congress was proof of that. Photographs from the Congress continue to be used to demonstrate the diversity of believers achieved.

In addition the Council recommended that a moment of thanksgiving to Bahá'u'lláh for these accomplishments be a part of the Congress proceedings and that a public meeting be held for seekers in conjunction with the Congress. An additional responsibility of the Council was to send out a newsletter from the World Center. Seven of these were issued on behalf of the Hands in the two years after the Council was elected. The first issue was sent just a few months after the election and was introduced by the Hands.

After the initial meeting with the Council the Hands of the Cause in the Holy Land informed the rest of the Bahá'í world, "HEARTS GREATLY ENCOURAGED BY ENTHUSIASM ENERGY DETERMINATION ELECTED INTERNATIONAL BAHAI COUNCIL DISCHARGE VITAL EVER INCREASING RESPONSIBILITIES..." [24] And a month later directly to the other Hands themselves, "We spent ten wonderful days with the IBC. ... we were delighted with the energetic enthusiasm and plans of this body." [25] Affairs were off to a good start.

The Council devoted the last months of its life to preparations for the first International Bahá'í Convention. To this all members of all National Spiritual Assemblies were invited to attend and cast their ballots for the first Universal House of Justice. The Council had to prepare for the possible attendance of 504 people. Of course not all could attend, those unable to would send in absentee ballots. In the end, 288 attended. "It was the greatest mass pilgrimage ever to have been made to the World Center of our Faith," reported a member of the United States N.S.A. [26] She would never have dreamed that number is now very near the normal size of pilgrim groups.

The last letter from the Hands of the Cause to the International Council, dated 12 April 1961, on the eve of the World Congress and the election of the House of Justice, begins with thanks and appreciation to the Council expressing, "...deep appreciation of the services they have rendered the Cause of God since they assumed their duties after their election in 1961. Collectively and severally they have greatly contributed to strengthening the World Center of the Faith and to carrying out those duties specified for that body by our dearly-beloved Guardian.

"The Hands in the Holy Land wish, on their own behalf, to assure the Council members of their appreciation of the valuable assistance they have given them locally in so many ways, and to assure them our association has been not only a fruitful and pleasant one, but a source of comfort and strength to us." [27]

And sent to the entire Bahá'í world on 21 April 1963: "OCCASION WORLDWIDE CELEBRATIONS MOST GREAT JUBILEE COMMEMORATING CENTENARY ASCENSION BAHÁ'U'LLÁH THRONED HIS SOVEREIGNTY WITH HEARTS OVERFLOWING GRATITUDE HIS UNFAILING PROTECTION OVERFLOWING BOUNTIES JOYOUSLY ANNOUNCE FRIENDS EAST WEST ELECTION SUPREME LEGISLATIVE BODY ORDAINED BY HIM IN HIS MOST HOLY BOOK PROMISED BY HIM RECEIVE HIS UNFALLIBLE GUIDANCE..."[28]

One hundred years after Bahá'ú'lláh publicly proclaimed the advent of His mission, on the first day of Ridván 120 B.E., ballots were cast to elect the first Universal House of Justice. The purpose and life of the International Bahá'í Council had come to a successful conclusion and a chapter of Bahá'í history came to a close. The intention of the Guardian, the hopes of `Abdu'l-Bahá and the plan of Bahá'u'lláh had been fulfilled. The supreme institution of the Cause of God, the Baytu'l-i-Azam, the "source of all good, freed from all error," had become a physical reality.

The life of the International Bahá'í Council had come to a successful consummation and a chapter of Bahá'í history brilliantly closed.

Notes:

1. Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Haifa: Bahá'í World Center, 1978) p. 26.
2. Tablets, p. 93.
3. newly translated tablet, The Universal House of Justice, a compilation, (Oakham: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984) p. 11.
4. Will & Testament of `Abdul-Bahá.
5. newly translated tablet, The Universal House of Justice, a compilation, p. 10-11.
6. No single source has been found which surveys the existing administrative structure in place before Shoghi Effendi became Guardian, but various historical accounts mention local councils in various places. A list of these accounts can be found in Making the Crooked Straight (Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 2000), p. 758, as well as the original: Desinformation als Methode (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1995) p. 609. To that list can be added: Bahá'ís in the West (Los Angeles, Kalimat Press, 2004).
7. Letter dated 12 March 1923, Bahá'í Administration, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974) p. 41.
8. Bahá'í News, February 1951, p. 1.
9. Rúhíyyih Rabbani, The Priceless Pearl, (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969), pp 251-52.
10. Bahá'í News, February 1951, p. 2.
11. Bahá'í News, June 1951, p. 1.

12. The Priceless Pearl, p. 253.
13. ibid, p. 391.
14. ibid, p. 253.
15. The Bahá'í World, XIII (1954-63), p. 395.
16. Will & Testament of `Abdu'l-Bahá
17. Even as far away from Haifa as Topeka, Kansas, where the author lives, the lives of the believers were disrupted. Being wealthy, Mason Remey had traveled extensively around the Bahá'í community in his younger years, even several times to Topeka. The Bahá'ís there in the 1970's and 80's, who knew him, were still upset by his actions.
18. The Ministry of the Custodians: 1957-1963, An Account of the Stewardship of the Hands of the Cause, (Haifa, Bahá'í World Centre, 1992) p. 33.
19. Ministry, p. 37.
20. Ministry, p. 168.
21. Ministry, p. 168.
22. Ministry, p. 282.
23. cablegram dated 24 Dec 1951, Ministry, p. 290.
24. Ministry, p. 291.
25. Ministry, p. 295.
26. The Bahá'í World, XIV (1963-1968), p. 427.
27. Ministry, p. 421.
28. Ministry, p. 425/6.

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