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Abbreviations

ADJ----The Advent of Divine Justice
BA-----Bahá'í Administration
CF-----Citadel of Faith
CN-----Call to the Nations
DND----Dawn of a New Day
GPB----God Passes By
GWB----Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh
KI-----Kitáb-i-Íqán (The Book of Certitude)
LGANZ--Letters of the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand
LODG---The Light of Divine Guidance
MTA----Messages to America
MBW----Messages to the Bahá'í World
PBA----Principles of Bahá'í Administration
PDIC---The Promised Day is Come
SAQ----Some Answered Questions
SWA----Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá
TB-----Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh
UD-----Unfolding Destiny
WOB----The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

Introduction

by Morten Bergsmo and Kishan Manocha

[p1]

[The authors acknowledge the contributions made by Dwight W. Allen, Seena Fazel, Shahriar Razavi and Hamid Samandari to the Introduction.]

If Shoghi Effendi had left us with no other evidence of his divinely-appointed station as Guardian of the Cause of God, his writings alone would convince us of the sublimity of his rank. His writings and translations have transformed all previous understanding of the station and purpose of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, shaped the evolving destiny of a world-wide community, and constitute the primary medium through which the teachings of the Revealer of God's Word in this day have become more fully recognised and understood, in familiar well-established terms of thought and concept, and charged with the necessary potency to effect a lasting change in the evolution of social and spiritual life on the planet.

The vast majority of Shoghi Effendi's writings fall under the general category of letters written to individual Assemblies (local and national) or believers: some 26,00 are in the current possession of the Bahá'í World Centre. With the exception of God Passes By, his monumental review of the significance of the events of the first century of the Bahá'í era and essentially the only 'book' he ever wrote, the other works by Shoghi Effendi are either collections of letters to various national communities, and include titles such as The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, The Advent of Divine Justice, The Promised Day is Come,

and Citadel of Faith (to the United States and Canada), Unfolding Destiny (the British Isles) and Dawn of a New Day (India). In addition, there are the compilations such as Selected Writings of Shoghi Effendi and Principles of Bahá'í Administration prepared during his lifetime, and others compiled posthumously such as Living the Life, Call to the Nations, and Guidance for Today and Tomorrow. [p2]

Although in scope of Shoghi Effendi's writings as Expounder of the Word of God deal with almost every aspect of human activity and thought, there are nevertheless major themes running through his mighty works; the development of the administrative institutions of the world-wide Bahá'í community; the cultivation of personal spiritual life; the promotion of the proclamation and teaching work of the Bahá'í Faith; the explanation of the Covenant, laws, teachings and principles; the history of the Bábí and Bahá'í Dispensations, including the stations and titles of the Central Figures of the Faith; and the history of world civilization and the forces animating its development, both in terms of its growth and decline, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

It is therefore clear that a prolonged and systematic study of these writings is an indispensable component of, and an adjunct to, the study of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh as a whole. Studying the writings of Shoghi Effendi raises the level of the discourse carried out by the followers of Bahá'u'lláh. It unfolds to every believer a true understanding of the nature of the remedy the Divine Physician has prescribed for the ills of mankind, for it lays bare the innumerable gems that lie in the ocean of the revealed Word of God. It is also concerned with capturing a unique vision, the vision of Shoghi Effendi, a vision that fuels within one's soul a fervour, an ardour and a passion which manifests itself in service to the Cause of God.

Using the power of Shoghi Effendi's historical analysis one is able to teach and serve with greater strength, with greater confidence, as one attempts to situate one's every initiative to serve the Cause of God in a special historical moment, to see one's endeavours as part of a series of past victories and future opportunities. To those who have accepted to embody the spiritual discipline called for in The Advent of Divine Justice there also comes the discipline of faith, of indomitable faith, which runs like a sublime thread throughout the faith in the validity of the principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, faith in the infinite potential of His Order as a channel for divine confirmation, as an instrument of change.

Bahá'ís have been ardently and consistently encouraged to make the writings of Shoghi Effendi a habitual and constant part of their general deepening in their Faith, until such a study becomes incorporated into the very core of their existence. Such an appeal has been especially directed towards Bahá'í Youth, whom Shoghi Effendi himself has declared can contribute decisively to the 'the virility, the purity and the driving force of the life of the Bahá'í community'. [p3]

This book has been prepared as an aid to the 'prolonged systematic study'[1] of Shoghi Effendi's writings. Our regular and continued study should be 'systematic' in at least three different ways: firstly, we should develop a systematic approach to the entire body of Shoghi Effendi's writings, first obtaining an overview of his published works, their background and main contents, and then studying the essential titles, steadily and conscientiously; secondly, we should cultivate a systematic method in studying and contemplating each work, so as not only to enter Shoghi Effendi's universe of exposition, but to integrate his life-giving vision through sound understanding sustained by reflection and thus equip ourselves with the ability to relate the teachings of the Faith to the contemporary realities of society and the individual; and finally, we should develop the ability to identify, explore and evaluate systematically the various themes and topics that Shoghi Effendi raises in each work.

[1. The Universal House of Justice, from a telex dated 4 August 1987 to the participants of the Youth Conference in Manchester, United Kingdom.]

Following this introduction the book opens with a unique compilation of extracts of letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi and by the Universal House of Justice on the importance of studying the writings of the Guardian. Then come two essays appraising the life and works of Shoghi Effendi. The rest of the book comprises a compendium of study guides to twenty-one titles by Shoghi Effendi. Although prepared by twelve Bahá'ís from six different countries, these study guides are based on the same method: they contain only questions to the text, and page references. No answers. The purpose is to open doors to the given text, to stimulate independent reflection and further investigation. Moreover, experience demonstrates that prepared questions can assist the study process as a basis for consultation.

However uniform the basic approach of the study guides, there is an element of individual judgement in the selection and formulation of questions. The reader will therefore notice a reflection of the diversity of those involved in the preparation of questions. But still, none of the guides are exhaustive, and the selection of questions is necessarily arbitrary, because of the scope and complexity of the writings. Some questions are repeated in different guides: the idea is that the guides can be used separately and that the compendium shall offer a guide to as many of the published works of the Guardian as possible.

There are many ways in which this outline can be used as a guide for study. They can be a personal guide for individual study or be used for group study. One person may be asked to lead the group, but it might be more effective if most or all members of the group [p4] assume active roles in the collective study. One format is to assign one question in rotation to all participants and then allow five or ten minutes at the beginning for everyone to prepare a discussion of his or her question. Some will simply read the question and then read the text which provides the answer. Others will choose to use the text as a springboard for further discussion. The group as a whole should be invited to

comment on each question as well.

It might be wise not to set a number of questions to 'cover' in one study session. The session could proceed naturally. Some of the more effective study sessions will result from the spirited discussion of only one question. Part of the excitement of studying is its unpredictable quality which results from the dynamics of the specific participants when everyone feels a responsibility for the process. It is useful to have a dictionary at hand, as well as other Bahá'í scriptures and commentaries for reference.

The idea of preparing this book was conceived in the Kalahari Desert, Botswana, in August 1987 when a group of Bahá'í youth were travelling teaching in the land of the Basarwa. We discussed various ways of studying Shoghi Effendi's writings. The example of the Bahá'í youth in Oslo, Norway, who conducted deepenings based on study guides, spurred us to embark on the project which led to the present book. Many Bahá'ís have participated in its preparation; efforts were made in a number of countries before the manuscript was finalised during the first Winter School of Czechoslovakia in the heart of Central Europe.

We would like to place on record gratitude to the Universal House of Justice for preparing the compilation on studying the writings of Shoghi Effendi and allowing its use in the book; to Mr. 'Ali Nakhjavání for his loving encouragement; to Dr. May Hofman Ballerio for her advice on substance and form; and to Mrs. Joan Dahl for her help with typing the manuscript.

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