

Covenant Breaking

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COVENANT-BREAKING

28 November 1999

The International Teaching Centre

NON-ASSOCIATION WITH COVENANT-BREAKERS

WRITINGS OF BAHA'U'LLAH

"Protect yourselves with utmost vigilance, lest you be entrapped in the snare of deception and fraud."

This is the advice of the Pen of Destiny.

"Therefore, to avoid these people will be the nearest path by which to attain the divine good pleasure; because their breath is infectious, like unto poison."

"Endeavor to your utmost to protect yourselves, because Satan appears in different robes and appeals to everyone according to each person's own way, until he becomes like unto him—then he will leave him alone."

"...If you detect in any man the least perceptible breath of violation, shun him and keep away from him." Then He says: "Verily, they are manifestations of Satan."

(Baha'i World Faith, p. 431)

WRITINGS OF ABDU'L-BAHA

Baha'u'llah, in all the Tablets and Epistles, forbade the true and firm friends from associating and meeting the violators of the Covenant of His Holiness, the Bab, saying that no one should go near them because their breath is like the poison of the snake that kills instantly.

(Baha'i World Faith, p. 430)

And now, one of the greatest and most fundamental principles of the Cause of God is to shun and avoid entirely the Covenant-breakers, for they will utterly destroy the Cause of God, exterminate His Law and render of no account all efforts exerted in the past.

(Baha'i World Faith, p. 448)

My object is to show that the Hands of the Cause of God must be ever watchful and so soon as they find anyone beginning to oppose and protest against the guardian of the Cause of God, cast him out from the congregation of the people of Baha and in no wise accept any excuse from him. How often hath grievous error been disguised in the garb of truth, that it might sow the seeds of doubt in the hearts of men!

(Will and Testament of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 12)

EXTRACTS FROM THE WRITING OF SHOGHI EFFENDI AND LETTERS ON HIS BEHALF

With regard to avoiding association with declared Covenant-breakers, Shoghi Effendi says that this does not mean that if one or more of these attends a non-Baha'i meeting any Baha'is present should feel compelled to leave the meeting or to refuse to take part in the meeting, especially if that part has been pre-arranged. Also if in the course of some business transaction it should become necessary to negotiate with one of these people, in order to clear up the business, that is permissible, provided the association is confined to the matter of the business in hand. It is different if one of these people should come to a Baha'i meeting. Then it would become necessity to ask him in a most tactful and dignified way to leave the meeting as Baha'is are forbidden to associate with him.

(From a letter dated 16 May 1925 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

You must of course send Avarih (a Covenant-breaker) his title deed through the Qamsar Local Spiritual Assembly, as it is his right. The friends must have full regard for his rights inasmuch as civil rights have no relation whatsoever to the beliefs of individuals. The Baha'is must be free and sanctified from religious prejudice and from ignorant fanaticism.

(From a letter to a Local Spiritual Assembly dated 15 February 1929—Translated from the Persian)

Regarding Mr. ...'s question about the Covenant-breakers: Baha'u'llah and the Master in many places and very emphatically have told us to shun entirely all Covenant-breakers as they are afflicted with what we might try and define as a contagious spiritual disease; they have also told us, however, to pray for them. These souls are not lost forever. In the "Aqdas", Baha'u'llah says that God will forgive Mirza Yahya if he repents. It follows therefore that God will forgive any soul if he repents. Most of them don't want to repent, unfortunately. If the leaders can be forgiven it goes without saying that their followers can also be forgiven.... Also, it has nothing to do with unity in the Cause; if a man cuts a cancer out of his body to preserve his health and very life, no one would suggest that for the sake of "unity" it should be reintroduced into the otherwise healthy organism! On the contrary, what was once a part of him has so radically changed as to have become a poison.

(From a letter dated 30 November 1944 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

There is no excuse for believers continuing to associate with ... and those who, knowing everything, still insist on doing so, should be shunned by their fellow-Baha'is. The same applies to people who have left the Cause and associate with ... The point is that if the believers know and meet with people who are acquainted with Covenant-breakers there is no harm in this, for such individuals are not Baha'is and have nothing to do with the issues concerned. But those who have left the Cause, knowing all about such matters, and deliberately associate with Covenant-breakers, are well aware of what they do, and we must not associate with them at all. It is for the Local Assembly, guided by the National Spiritual Assembly, to enforce such decisions and the

Cause in its area of jurisdiction. The friends should, without too much dwelling on these negative things, be made to understand that some people are spiritually sick and that their disease is, alas, contagious. Some recover from it, as did ... whose heart could not rest till he returned to the fold; others do not. The Master and Baha'u'llah have taught us that associating with these souls is not likely to heal them at all, but on the contrary exposes one to grave danger of contagion. The history of the Faith has proved this over and over again. The only way we can prove to such people that they are wrong is to censure their conduct; if we sympathise with them we only fortify their perversity and waywardness.

(From a letter dated 23 January 1945 written on behalf of the Guardian to individual believer)

It is better not to read books by Covenant-breakers because they are haters of the Light, sufferers from a spiritual leprosy, so to speak. But books by well-meaning yet unenlightened enemies of the Cause can be read so as to refute their charges.

(From a letter dated 19 March 1946 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

He is very happy to know your dear sister is now happier, and more like her old self, and the dark thoughts she had have been dispelled. Covenant-breaking is truly a spiritual disease, and the whole viewpoint and attitude of a Covenant-breaker is so poisonous that the Master likened it to leprosy, and warned the friends to breathe the same air was dangerous. This should not be taken literally; He meant when you are close enough to breathe the same air you are close enough to contact their corrupting influence. Your sister should never imagine she, loyal and devoted, has become a "carrier".

(From a letter dated 29 July 1946 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

He noted the report of ... about her meeting with the grandchild of Subhi Azal. He feels that the friends should as much as possible avoid her, as it is very unlikely she has anything but prejudice against Baha'u'llah, in view of her background.

(From a letter dated 24 October 1947 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

No intelligent and loyal Baha'i would associate with a descendant of Azal, if he traced the slightest breath of criticism of our Faith, in any aspect, from that person. In fact these people should be strenuously avoided as having an inherited spiritual disease—the disease of Covenant-breaking! Certainly such matters should be brought to the attention of the Assembly or National Spiritual Assembly within whose jurisdiction they occur.

(From letter dated 9 December 1948 to an individual believer)

Whenever we find a person who opposes some fundamental of our Faith, such as Institution of the Guardianship, we must first be sure this is not due to ignorance or lack of proper training, before we take action. We must not suppose immediately that that person is necessarily tainted by the spirit of

Covenant-breakers. If, however, this should prove to be the case, then strong action must be taken by the Assembly.

(From a letter date 24 June 1948 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

The friends are sometimes surprisingly naive and superficial in their approach to the subject of Covenant-breakers. They do not seem to understand that the descendants of Azal, with their mother's milk, drank hatred of Baha'u'llah, just as the descendants of Muhammad-Ali and his relatives have imbibed from babyhood a false concept of the Master. It takes practically a miracle to overcome this lifelong habit of wrong thought. Now, however, he has told the German believers to shun her.

(From a letter dated 18 August 1949 written on behalf of the Guardian to a National Spiritual Assembly)

A Covenant-breaker, as you know, is one who disobeys and turns away from the Centre of the Covenant. Until such time as they repent of this sincerely, and express their willingness to work under the Centre of the Covenant, their status must be considered the same. However, such matter should be discussed and decided upon within the National Spiritual Assembly itself.

(From a letter dated 16 March 1953 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS AND MESSAGES OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

...children of Covenant-breakers, who have grown up with and still associate with their parents, are probably thoroughly infused with the Covenant-breaking spirit, and the friends must not associate with them until the Hands of the Cause have ascertained that these children have understood the sin of their parents and dissociated themselves from them.

(From letter dated 5 February 1969 to an individual believer)

It should be explained that descendants of Covenant-breakers who have not positively repudiated their forebears and sought readmittance to the Cause should be viewed with caution as they may well have received the poison of Covenant-breaking from their parents and would then have to be shunned by the friends.

(From memorandum to the Hands of the Cause in the Holy Land dated 2 December 1971)

The danger of meeting with children of Covenant-breakers is that even although they may never have been declared Baha'is there is always the likelihood that they have been strongly indoctrinated by their parents with the poison of Covenant-breaking.

(From a letter dated 9 June 1974 to an individual believer)

The Baha'i students who go to schools which children of Covenant-breakers attend should be made, lovingly and wisely, to understand that as Baha'is they cannot and must not choose children of Covenant-breakers as their personal friends, without making the matter into an open issue before the school. Thus, there should be no hard and fast rule to the effect that no Baha'i child should

be enrolled in a school where children of Covenant-breakers are also enrolled, or that they should leave a school as soon as a child of a Covenant-breaker enters it. The important thing is to impress upon Baha'i children that personal friendship and individual companionship with children of Covenant-breakers must be avoided. Should it be found that in a particular case the situation is such that the policy outlined above cannot be followed, then in such cases, which we hope can be kept to a minimum, it would be desirable for Baha'i children to change schools.

(From a memorandum dated 22 January 1976 to the International Teaching Centre)

YOUR REPORT FICICCHIA RECEIVED STOP IF COVENANT-BREAKER ATTENDS PUBLIC MEETINGS HE SHOULD BE TREATED BY SPEAKER IN WISE MANNER SUCH AS USED BY DR. ... STOP BAHAIS OTHER THAN CHAIRMAN AND SPEAKER SHOULD AVOID CONVERSATION WITH HIM ST SITUATION ILLUSTRATES VITAL IMPORTANCE DEEPENING COVENANT ALL BELIEVERS STOP
(Telegram dated 23 February 1976 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

In reply to your letter of April 19, 1977, enquiring whether ... may receive financial assistance from her Covenant-breaking father, we are instructed by the House of Justice to say that it feels, in the circumstances set forth in your letter, that it would be inadvisable for ... to accept such financial assistance.

(From a letter dated 4 May 1977 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

The Universal House of Justice has requested us to acknowledge your letter of 17 January 1978 and to say that ... need not feel guilty about selling items from her shop to Mr. ..., or engaging, as your Assembly states, in "distant business conversation" with him, should he call again at her shop.

(From a letter dated 14 February 1978 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

EXTRACTS REGARDING ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION WITH COVENANT-BREAKERS

Regarding your concerns about Covenant-breakers participating in and posting material to the "Baha'i Forum" on America Online (AOL), you should, of course, scrupulously and impartially uphold the rules of AOL's "Religion and Beliefs" area. You may warn the friends about interaction with Covenant-breakers if you feel it to be appropriate and if you can do so without violating the impartiality that you, as Forum manager, must demonstrate. With respect to your concerns about your own contact with Covenant-breakers, you should feel no trepidation at having to interact with them in this particular situation and, if necessary, to read their postings. It is suggested, however, that your contact with them be kept to a minimum, as strictly required by your obligations as Forum manager. You will want to resist any temptation to be drawn into discussions or consideration of the arguments which they may advance.

(From a letter dated 28 May 1998 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual)

More generally, while it is disconcerting that Covenant-breaker material is being disseminated on the Internet, there is little that can or should be done

to directly oppose such dissemination. Rather, the greatest protection to the Cause will be through ongoing deepening of the Baha'i community in the Covenant and the history and teachings of the Faith. An important role that the Internet can play in this regard is to make authentic Baha'i literature, on the Covenant and on Baha'i teachings generally, easily available.

(From a letter dated 19 December 1997 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual)

The House of Justice feels that, when Baha'is are teaching in an online "chat room" and Covenant-breakers intrude upon the discussion, the friends should not feel obliged to sign off simply because Covenant-breakers are present in this virtual space. They should, however, refrain from knowingly engaging the Covenant-breakers in discussions and, in any case, should avoid being drawn into contentious or disputatious situations.

(From a letter dated 27 October 1997 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual)

The Universal House of Justice has received your email message of 29 September 1997 regarding the Covenant-breaking material sent to your personal email account. The House of Justice is aware of such activities on the part of Covenant-breakers, and while it is closely following this issue, it sees no cause for undue concern. The friends should, of course, ignore any materials produced by Covenant-breakers which they may receive unsolicited by email or happen on while exploring the World Wide Web. With regard to your concerns over the content of the message, you are advised to turn to your Local Spiritual Assembly or an Auxiliary Board member for assistance in dealing with the spurious claims advanced in that message. The best countermeasure to Covenant-breaker initiatives and the greatest protection for the Cause is for the believers to acquire a deeper appreciation of the station and purpose of Baha'u'llah and to become well-grounded in His Covenant.

(From a letter dated 7 October 1997 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual)

In principle, no person can be considered a Covenant-breaker unless he has been so designated by the Head of the Faith. However, it is strongly advised not to associate with those who have fallen under the pernicious influence of groups such as the "Orthodox Baha'is". They are infected with the spirit of Covenant-breaking, even if they are not all designated as such. Accordingly, the friends should not answer queries from individuals who obviously seek to draw them into the consideration of the spurious claims and logic of the Covenant-breakers.

(From a letter dated 3 July 1997 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual)

Your faxed message dated 14 May 1997, requesting guidance concerning the attention given by the friends to postings by Covenant-breakers on the Internet, was received by the Universal House of Justice and referred to our Department for reply. The House of Justice is aware of the electronic postings on the Internet by Covenant-breakers. While it is closely following this issue,

it sees no cause for undue concern. "The Baha'i World", a Web site developed by the Baha'i International Community's Office of Public Information, was launched in July 1996. It, together with a range of specialized Baha'i Internet presentations such as the new "One Country" site, now provides individuals interested in learning about the Baha'i Faith with a large and ever-expanding body of authentic material on the Faith, attractively presented and illustrated. Sites maintained by Covenant-breaker groups will have a diminishing impact in the context of the information deluge on the Internet and against the background of the authorized Baha'i source now accessible. The greatest protection to the Cause will, of course, be through ongoing deepening of the Baha'i community in the Covenant and the history and teachings of the Faith. To facilitate this, you may wish to bring attention to the availability of the Sacred Text on the Web site "The Baha'i World" and on the Baha'i World Centre FTP server.

(From a letter dated 4 June 1997 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

Your email of 11 April 1997 regarding contact through the Internet between the friends and Covenant-breaker groups has been received by the Universal House of Justice. It is not possible to provide you with a list of Internet addresses of Covenant-breaker groups as you have requested, as no such listing is being maintained at the Baha'i World Centre at this time. Any plans that you have to alert the friends to Covenant-breaker activity on the Internet should, of course, be undertaken with wisdom and discretion so as to avoid giving Covenant-breakers more attention or prominence than they would otherwise receive.

(From a letter dated 4 May 1997 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

Thus, if any participant in an email discussion feels that a view put forward appears to contradict or undermine the provisions of the Covenant, he should be free to say so, explaining candidly and courteously why he feels as he does. The person who made the initial statement will then be able to re-evaluate his opinion and, if he still believes it to be valid, he should be able to explain why it is not contrary to either the letter or the spirit of the Covenant. The participants in such a discussion should avoid disputation and, if they are unable to resolve an issue, they should refer the point to the Universal House of Justice since, in accordance with the Will and Testament of `Abdu'l-Baha, "By this body all the difficult problems are to be resolved..." and it has the authority to decide upon "all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure, and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book." In this way the Covenant can illuminate and temper the discourse and make it fruitful.

(From a letter dated 16 February 1996 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual)

There is an ever increasing use by believers of the Internet and other available computer based means of communication. These open unlimited

possibilities for continuous proclamation and teaching, bringing the Creative Word and the Sacred Writings as well as the ideas of individual believers to hearts and minds everywhere. It also offers easy access to these same believers by those whose purpose is to undermine their faith. By being constantly alert we are able to encourage the use of this medium by the friends while ensuring their protection from those who would prey on them.

(From a letter dated 11 May 1995 written by the International Teaching Centre to a Continental Counsellor)

Participation by enemies of the Faith or members of Covenant-breaker groups may, indeed, occur in the dialogue on electronic forums. It is not advisable for the institutions of the Faith or its individual members to become directly involved in such discussion. It is neither wise nor possible to interfere with postings on public forums, but if it is observed that such activity is taking place on Baha'i-only forums National Assemblies should be alerted so that they may provide appropriate advice to the administrator of the forum. The greatest protection to the Faith will not be through intervention on either open or closed electronic forums, but through ongoing deepening of the Baha'i community in the Covenant and the history and Teachings of the Faith.

(From a letter dated 24 February 1995 written by the International Teaching Centre to a Continental Board of Counsellors)