

Dinner was served. He talked about Africa, asking questions about our goal of Bechuanaland, to which he had sent us. Present also were Amatu'l-Baha [p166] Ruhyyih Khanum and two other Hands, Leroy Ioas and Mason Remey, the dear Revell sisters, and we five pilgrims. Then, seeming happy and inspired, he spoke eloquently and prophetically about the future of the Cause. Now when I read *God Passes By* [1] and other letters and messages, I can almost hear his voice, emphasizing this, repeating that, saying those very things he was saying to us, a few people around the table, eating simple and delicious food.

[1. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, rev. ed. (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1974).]

Pilgrims used to ask questions of the Guardian on the part of others back home. Our companion asked such questions, to which he replied with patient exasperation, then said, "Why don't they read my book [*God Passes By*]?" In that moment my heart was touched to think how much he had done, how much he had suffered, writing, translating, planting magnificent gardens to beautify the holy places, at the same time carrying on a worldwide correspondence and keeping watch over the Baha'i Faith in the new State of Israel. Pilgrims came and went much of the time. How tireless was his deep devotion to Baha'u'llah, to 'Abdu'l-Baha, how great was his integrity, and how modern his style. Yet, he showed only the slightest wondering impatience with bothersome questions. We too had our own questions (some of which John mentions in his conference presentation) mostly to do with our pioneer work.

Shoghi Effendi seemed simultaneously aware of his immediate surroundings and of his distant vision of the Cause. He would tell us about the Golden Age, of the Commonwealth of Baha'u'llah and how the Baha'i Faith would never decline, then reaching to a bowlful of big juicy tangerines he would say, "These are delicious. They came from the Garden of Ridvan this morning," and then continue his fascinating discourse, so often with wit and humor.

After dinner, before he left one evening, he said to Nina and me, "You will go to the Shrines in the morning with John and Patrick and the Persian men." This was an unforgettable experience, hearing the melodious chanting of the Persians in that holy place.

Another time he said, "You will go to Bahji tomorrow. Be sure to see the new little cypresses just planted." Those must be the ones that today tower over the gardens.

While in Bahji I saw with my own eyes the ever-present danger from the enemies of the Baha'i Faith-members of Baha'u'llah's own family. One could see an old man peering out the window of a house close to the Shrine. He lived to a great age, this old enemy, still involved in his machinations, only to see the steady progress of the work of Shoghi Effendi in establishing the Administrative Order and bringing to fruition the divine plan of 'Abdu'l-Baha in his own monumental plans. When death overtook that arch Covenant-breaker and the house was demolished, a new and beautiful garden was designed. Years later we saw a bank of vivid red geraniums there [p167] and breathed a breath of thankfulness

that a branch fallen from a live tree must always wither away.

The second question was, "What was the most important thing you learned from Shoghi Effendi?"

When we received the cable from Shoghi Effendi that Bechuanaland was our goal, I felt confident and assured even though that land was the size of France with a population of one person in seventeen square miles and had no paved roads. I had reason to be assured. Shoghi Effendi always prayed for the pioneers.

The prayers of Shoghi Effendi had saved my life years before when I was seriously ill and faced leaving John with four motherless children, the youngest just over one year old. He had cabled asking for prayers when I had become worse. Again, when we set out for Africa to spend three weeks on a small freighter, and I was subject to motion sickness, I still felt reassured that all would be well, because he was sending us there.

When I was alone for some months and there were riots and other troubles in our area, I knew that I was not alone really, that the promised assistance to all who arise was there, and that Shoghi Effendi knew where I was. I had been spared from that illness for a purpose, and time would reveal it. It gave me an extraordinary feeling of security and a realization that we would all receive the promised assistance. This was especially true when I drove hundreds of miles, often alone, and in quite intimidating circumstances, to carry on pioneering for us both.

I learned that everything Shoghi Effendi predicted would occur. Twenty-odd years later, when John and I returned to Haifa, shivers went down my back to hear the constant ra-ta-tat, ra-ta-tat, where white dust rose from the digging into Mount Carmel for the foundations of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice. I vividly recalled the day when Shoghi Effendi came to the table and said, "I have laid out the arc on Mount Carmel today," and explained that the site for the Universal House of Justice would be at the top of the arc, opposite the tomb of the Greatest Holy Leaf in the beautiful Monument Gardens, already there. Other buildings were to be along the arc, the Archives building, plans for which were now ready, and, of course, the Shrine of the Bab was completed.

One evening Shoghi Effendi said we must look at the Shrine of the Bab when it would be illuminated for a limited time. We gathered at a window with him to see that delicately majestic building arrayed with light. Shoghi Effendi loved it and called it the "Queen of Carmel." The holy places of our Faith and the Administrative Centre would be together, not separated, as is the case in the Christian and Islamic religions.

One day, Patrick asked whether he should go back to university, having failed his year and then worked in an office, or go pioneering. Shoghi Effendi said that as he already had a brother serving in Nigeria, what did his [p168] father think? John gave a wise answer. Then Shoghi Effendi assured Patrick that he would pray for his success in whatever he chose to do.

On the way to Haifa our plane had stopped at Kano where our son Aldie was. We arranged that he meet us in the airport, his doctor willing. There he was after a serious accident, on crutches with his badly injured foot and leg hanging in a sling from his neck. Joy mingled with sorrow in that short but sweet reunion.

Haifa felt like home. In fact, it is the spiritual home on earth of all Baha'is. There were day-to-day things to be done. For instance, when we arrived dear Millie Collins was making bran muffins for lunch. Ruhiyyih Khanum had just been in planning delicious meals for all. Millie asked Nina if she could make dessert for Shoghi Effendi the following night. I was happily involved in sewing curtains for Shoghi Effendi's reception room in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house. Patrick was doing odd jobs and helping prune shrubs in the garden under Ruhiyyih Khanum's expert supervision. John was somewhere else. Each morning we went early to the Shrines on foot.

Nina made a chocolate cake and hoped Shoghi Effendi would like it. He did! He looked at it, and when he cut into the thick, dark chocolate with its thin layer of white icing only on the top, he smiled, and we knew he was thinking of Africa. Then he said, "It is delicious -- and very appropriate!"

One day, Shoghi Effendi said to John and me that we were not only husband and wife but also spiritual partners, and turning to me he said, "You must vie with him spiritually."

He spoke much about the work in Africa. He wanted "a mass of black African Baha'is" on that continent. He said we were there to teach the blacks, to associate with the whites only as much as was necessary. We would teach whites another time. He said to select one African, teach him or her thoroughly and encourage him or her to teach his or her own people. One good African teacher would be more effective than one-hundred pioneers. We should remain on the sidelines and encourage Africans; never let them lose confidence in us, as it would be very hard to regain lost confidence, if ever. He said that in the past whites had gone to take something from Africa, but we had something to give.

At the time we went there were only twelve national spiritual assemblies in the whole world, and several African countries were grouped as goals to become regional national spiritual assemblies. He foresaw the wave toward independence and reiterated the urgency of the teaching work. So often he said, "While there is yet time," and emphasized how important it was to love the Africans. We had already come to love our dear African friends and were grateful for the bounty of serving them.

We could not live within our goal territory but in Mafeking (now spelled Mafiking), its capital, which was fourteen miles inside South Africa. This restricted us greatly with many new laws that we had to obey. After [p169] three years, when it appeared too difficult to continue teaching, Shoghi Effendi approved our move to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) where at that time the attitude toward blacks was a bit more relaxed, and we could continue work in Bechuanaland from the north.

Years later we knew that Shoghi Effendi had travelled by rail 500 miles through that land and must have stood on the station platform in Bulawayo, the longest one in the world! Along the way he must have absorbed much and seen Africa closely. That was before the time of his Guardianship and when the Greatest Holy Leaf was holding in her hands the whole Baha'i world.

Since our plane left only weekly, we had to wait a few days. Shoghi Effendi said we must take a tour and visit the new country of Israel and some of the spots sacred to the Jews and Christians. Visitors were not allowed in some places such as the Mount of Olives or the Dome of the Rock. It was sad to see the vandalized graves of Crusaders, and many sites in Canaan, Capernaum, and Tiberias much affected by the passage of time. I picked a tiny wildflower in the crevice of a wall of a ruined synagogue and visualized an earlier day when Christ had trodden that very ground. How different, and how beautiful by contrast, were the holy places of this new age.

Soon we had to leave Haifa. Even now I close my eyes and recapture the delicate beauty of the Shrine of the Bab, so loved by Shoghi Effendi; the desolate cell of Baha'u'llah in the prison of 'Akka; and that simple room in the Mansion at Bahji. We had prayers there each night in the lamplight before sleeping in the rooms of the early great teachers, Haji Mirza Haydar!-'Ali perhaps, or Mirza Abu'l-Faql -- if only I could remember.

The spirit of Shoghi Effendi lives on in the world, giving a feeling of security in the quicksand of present conditions that he foresaw. I keep on learning that he was not only a courageous and far-sighted administrator, a brilliant and inspired writer, a true protector of our Faith who constantly encouraged us in the task of building a new order. He was at the same time a warm, concerned, and very dear human being. Let those who may not have yet found it read his very moving expression of love for Bahiyyih Khanum, his beloved great-aunt, sister of 'Abdu'l-Baha, written after her passing in 1932. It is a letter to the Baha'is of the United States and Canada, and can be found on page 187 of Baha'i Administration.[2] Ruhiyyih Khanum told us that when Bahiyyih Khanum was old and not well, Shoghi Effendi would have his dinner with her in her room. He described her as his chief sustainer, his most affectionate comforter, the joy and inspiration of his life. All his love for her and for 'Abdu'l-Baha and Baha'u'llah are poured out in deep affection in that most unexpected volume.

[2. Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932 (Wilmette: Bahi'i Publishing Trust, 1974) 187.] [p170]

To us, he gives endless encouragement and an ever greater vision of the potential within ourselves and in the world. I have learned that real happiness lies in constant awareness of that vision and, true to the Covenant, in continuing to love and serve the now firmly established Universal House of Justice in the same way as we served the Guardian. For the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice are two aspects of one thing, and they cannot be separated.

It was hard to leave Africa to which the beloved Guardian had sent us, but the wisdom of the House of Justice requested it, and here we are.

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Views1555 views since posted 2025-03-06; last edit 2025-03-06 18:42 UTC;

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