

were limited to the interpretation of the Writings, having as its purpose the preservation of the unity of the Faith. When I asked him how do we know when he speaks to us as the Guardian and when as Shoghi Effendi, Rúhiyyih Khánum, his young bride, who was sitting next to him, asked: "I would like to know too; which is which?" The Guardian did not answer my question.

I asked the Guardian many questions, most of them prompted by my immaturity, having been a Bahá'í only ten years. One night Shoghi Effendi asked me a question, which I could not answer, nor did I understand its

189

significance at that time. Shoghi Effendi asked me: "Since after the martyrdom of the Báb the authority of the Faith was passed on to Bahá'u'lláh, and after his passing to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, to whom was it transferred after the ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá?" I answered, of course, to Shoghi Effendi. He said no. I then said the Guardian. He again shook his head. I then ventured the Universal House of Justice. He again said no, and I could see from his expression that he was disappointed with my inability to answer his question. Then he asked, are the friends not reading my letters? The answer, he said, is clearly stated in The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh. It is divided into four parts: Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the fourth part entitled the "World Order of Bahá'u'lláh,"* which is the answer to his question.

The Guardian spoke a beautiful Oxford English. I spoke English with a terrible Hungarian-Canadian accent, which the Guardian found difficult to follow. Rúhiyyih Khánum, who had known me for nine years, had to interpret on several occasions.

After returning to Montreal, I wrote seven pages of the usual pilgrim's notes, but I did not mention the above question, as I did not see any importance in it. As time passed, I could not forget his question, nor the sad expression on his face for my inability to answer. I was also puzzled as to why he had asked me that question.

As the years advanced, especially after his passing in 1957, I realized increasingly that the greatest lesson I learned was not during the many hours of exclusive conversations, most of which were based on my questions, but it was the question the Guardian asked me and which I could not answer. For the last forty years or so, I have asked the friends the same question on four continents, at untold firesides, summer and winter schools, and I received, with one single exception, the same wrong answers that I gave the Guardian as far back as January, 1938.

It is obvious that 'Abdu'l-Bahá in his Will and Testament stated very clearly that all Bahá'ís should turn to Shoghi Effendi, that "whoso obeyeth him not ... hath not obeyed God" and again, "He that opposeth him hath opposed the True One..."[1] It is also

indisputable that Shoghi Effendi was the head of the Faith during his ministry of thirty-five years. Yet, he wanted to impress upon me at that time, that the authority of the Faith did not rest upon him but on the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, which was based on two pillars: The Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice. His vision of the future went far beyond the Guardianship, and our failure in all these years to visualize the significance of his question should indeed make him feel sad.

Our Faith was centered in the Guardian as a father figure, oblivious of the other pillar and its implications, which was a distortion if not a mutilation of

190

our vision of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Shoghi Effendi described this condition as follows:

To dissociate the administrative principles of the Cause from the purely spiritual and humanitarian teachings would be tantamount to a mutilation of the body of the Cause, a separation that can only result in the disintegration of its component parts, and the extinction of the Faith itself.[2]

These are strong words. Shoghi Effendi told me in Haifa that the Bahá'í Faith was founded by two prophets, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, and rests on two Orders, that of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Administrative Order, which has two pillars that are absolutely indispensable to each other.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, who was also called the Mystery of God, was, as I understand it, the last father figure in the Adamic cycle, which carried humanity through its stage of immaturity. In all dispensations for thousands of years, religious communities centered around a pope, a calif, an archbishop, a rabbi, a priest, or a minister. In many congregations even today the leader is not only looked upon as wiser and more learned than anyone else but also called "the Father," whose authority is unquestionably followed.

Shoghi Effendi wanted neither to be treated nor followed as a father figure. He signed many thousand letters as "your true brother Shoghi." He did not want his photograph circulated or his birthday observed. One possible reason for his refusing to meet Bahá'í communities on any of his journeys, was probably to deemphasize the importance of his personality in relation to the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. He told us on various occasions that the main difference between the papacy and the Guardianship is that the Pope has exclusive authority to legislate and to interpret, while the Guardian's authority is limited to the interpretation of the sacred writings only.

Yet most Bahá'ís, conditioned by a cultural if not genetic inheritance of thousands of years, and the precedence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's imposing figure, were irresistibly moved to extend to the Guardian almost the same obeisance and reverence, to the detriment of the authority of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies. It almost seems like divine intervention that

the succession of the Guardianship was meant to cease, in order to strengthen the authority of the Administrative Order, culminating in the Universal House of Justice.

Guided by the vision of Shoghi Effendi and the events of history, the Bahá'í world community, having been personality centered, the characteristic of an immature society, has become assembly centered, which is a precondition for entering the age of maturity. Bahá'u'lláh wrote in his last major work:

191

Ere long will the state of affairs within thee be changed, and the reins of power fall into the hands of the people.[3]

Perhaps I can explain what I mean this way. As an individual Bahá'í, one is centered in Bahá'u'lláh, just as a Christian is centered in Jesus Christ. However, as a community, Bahá'ís are centered in Bahá'u'lláh only through our elected assemblies, which are an integral part of our Administrative Order that in the future will be called the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Herein lies the strength and greatness of our Faith, its organic and indivisible unity, and its distinction from all previous religions.

The Revelation associated with the Faith of Jesus Christ focused attention primarily on the redemption of the individual and the molding of his conduct ... as the fundamental unit in human society. Nowhere in the Gospels do we find any reference to the unity of nations or the unification of mankind as a whole. When Jesus spoke to those around Him, He addressed them primarily as individuals rather than as component parts of one universal, indivisible entity.[4]

In the secular world we can already discern, since the early half of this century, a new trend of leadership, from king to parliament, from prime minister to cabinet, and from judge to jury. Large industrial organizations are no longer built or run by one person. Great decisions are increasingly entrusted to the interaction of many minds, be it a board, a commission, a council, or an assembly. Even our great inventions today are the result of the working together of many scientists.

Bahá'ís believe that 1844 marks the beginning of a new spiritual renaissance, which is awakening in people the social awareness necessary for social justice, without which world peace cannot be attained. The liberation of slaves, serfs, and sharecroppers; the socialist and cooperative movements; progress toward political and economic democracy; and many other humanitarian movements, all had their origin at about the same time in the nineteenth century. The basic principle of the Bahá'í Faith is the oneness of humankind, and the Faith offers a unique pattern for the development of a world order. Just as Christ taught individual discipline, so Bahá'u'lláh offers a maturing humanity the means for imposing

social discipline on itself. The Bahá'í Faith is like the great religions of the past in that it upholds a belief in God and stresses ethical conduct in the individual, but it differs greatly in that its chief concern is the creation of a world government and a world civilization based on justice.

192

Adolescents cease fighting each other when they reach adulthood. Likewise nations will, as they outgrow their adolescence, gather around a table and dispose of their differences as mature people. In a mature age, which, according to Bahá'u'lláh, we are now approaching, a new world ethic is required. Conformity to law as stressed in the Old Testament, the significance of love as stressed in the New Testament, find their synthesis in social justice, as expressed in the collective conscience of an awakened humanity.

One who obeys one's conscience has overcome baser instincts. A community with a collective conscience overcomes the desire for national supremacy, for monopolistic privileges, or for racial priority. The Bahá'í administrative system not only incorporates individual good will into a social mechanism but also produces a quality of the soul that can be born only out of a collective experience.

Shoghi Effendi writes:

The principle of the Oneness of Mankind—the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve—is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope.... Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family.... It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced.. .. It calls for no less than the reconstruction and demilitarization of the whole civilized world.. ..[5]

With the passing of time as the Bahá'í Faith continues to gather momentum in all corners of this planet, the stature of Shoghi Effendi, our youthful Guardian, will increasingly stand out as the champion-builder of the Administrative Order, having led us with his unfailing vision through the transitional period from the Order of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the embryonic stage of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

193

Footnotes:

[1] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1968)

11.

[2] Shoghi Effendi, Guidance for Today and Tomorrow (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1953), 99.

[3] Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf trans. Shoghi Effendi, rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988) 149.

[4] Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day is Come, rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980) 119.

[5] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, 2d ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974) 42-43.

[*] Note that the fourth section of Shoghi Effendi's "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh" is actually called "The Administrative Order" [AB - 2024].

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