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SHOGHI EFFENDI: GUARDIAN OR ARCHITECT OF A NEW BAHA'I ORDER?

ARTICLE INSIDE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

04 **PRAYERS**

My God, Whom I worship and adore!

05 **FOREWORD**

08 **HISTORICAL TRUTHS**

1911: 23rd September is when Abdu'l Baha arrived in Bristol and stayed at the then Guest House in Royal York Crescent.

09 **POEM**

No Mistakes - Lenora McWhorter

10 **THE MOST HOLY LAWS**

A brief passage emphasizing purity, devotion, and spiritual awareness.

11 **CLERGY IN THE BAHA'I CAUSE**

In answer to a question as to whether or not there would be any clergy in the Baha'i Cause?

12 **QUOTATION**

Inspirational passages from the Bab, Baha'u'llah, and Abdu'l-Baha on faith and service.

13 **THROWBACK**

In 1873, Baha'u'llah completed His most important work, the Most Holy Book (Kitab-i-Aqdas), written in the House of Udi Khammar

14 **WEBSPLORE**

Plans upon Shoghi Effendi's death

15 **SHOGHI EFFENDI: GUARDIAN OR ARCHITECT OF A NEW BAHA'I ORDER?**

Examining whether Shoghi Effendi preserved Bahá'u'lláh's Faith or built an administration that came to stand between the believer and the Revelation.

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FREE BAHA'I FAITH

17 **SHOGHI EFFENDI AND THE FAMILY OF ABDU'L BAHA: A PERSONAL ACCOUNT**

A personal account examining Shoghi Effendi's treatment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's family, their expulsion, and the human cost of unquestioned authority.

20 **WANT TO BE A CONTRIBUTOR FOR THE CARAVAN?**

We welcome thoughtful voices and fresh perspectives.

21 **FREE BAHA'I ACTIVITIES**

A look at emerging Free Baha'i activities and increasing engagement with original source texts.

24 **SOME QUESTIONS ANSWERED**

Thoughtful clarifications on questions submitted by readers.

28 **WHY DOES BELIEF NEED "REGISTRATION"?**

Questioning why a spiritual faith requires institutional registration and approval from human authorities.

30 **BLAST FROM THE PAST**

New Historian, February1932

31 **KNOW YOUR HERITAGE**

This article from The San Francisco Examiner on 25 September 1912 describes Abdu'l Baha's plans to visit the city.

32 **DECLARATIONS IN THE CAUSE**

A statement outlining the Free Baha'i understanding of service, conscience, and freedom from administrative authority.

33 **INVESTIGATION OF REALITY**

A passage from Abdu'l-Baha on the principle of independent investigation of truth.

34 **THROWBACK**

'Abdu'l-Bahá's arrival at Green Acre and His address on the search for truth and peace.

35 **DID YOU KNOW?**

Shoghi Effendi Did More Than Interpret the Faith. He Built Its Administrative Structure.

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FREE
BAHA'I FAITH

PRAYERS

MY GOD, WHOM I WORSHIP AND ADORE!

My God, Whom I worship and adore! I bear witness unto Thy unity and Thy oneness, and acknowledge Thy gifts, both in the past and in the present. Thou art the All-Bountiful, the overflowing showers of Whose mercy have rained down upon high and low alike, and the splendors of Whose grace have been shed over both the obedient and the rebellious.

O God of mercy, before Whose door the quintessence of mercy hath bowed down, and round the sanctuary of Whose Cause loving-kindness, in its inmost spirit, hath circled, we beseech Thee, entreating Thine ancient grace, and seeking Thy present favor, that Thou mayest have mercy upon all who are the manifestations of the world of being, and deny them not the outpourings of Thy grace in Thy days.

All are but poor and needy, and Thou, verily, art the All-Possessing, the All-Subduing, the All-Powerful.

- Baha'u'llah





"The day is coming when all the religions of the world will unite, for in principle they are one already. There is no need for division, seeing that it is only the outward forms that separate them. Among the sons of men some souls are suffering through ignorance, let us hasten to teach them; others are like children needing care and education until they are grown, and some are sick—to these we must carry Divine healing." - Abdu'l Baha

Dear Friends,

Allah'u'Abha!

There are moments in the history of every religious movement when its direction changes forever. For the Baha'i Faith, the passing of Abdu'l Baha in 1921 was one such moment.

Abdu'l Baha had spent his entire life demonstrating what it meant to serve the Cause of Baha'u'llah. His door was open to rich and poor, believer and seeker, people of every race and background. His life was not a life of religious authority and personal power. It was a life of service, humility, love and spiritual freedom.

Then came Shoghi Effendi.

This special edition of The Free Baha'i Caravan, dedicated entirely to Shoghi Effendi on the anniversary of his death, asks a question that has too often been avoided:

What happened to the Baha'i Faith after Abdu'l Baha?

The answer depends upon whom you ask.

The Haifan Baha'i administration presents Shoghi Effendi as the Guardian appointed by Abdu'l Baha and describes the Administrative Order as an essential part of the Faith. Indeed, the official Baha'i account states that Shoghi Effendi devoted himself to developing the Administrative Order and preparing the way for the Universal House of Justice.

But Free Baha'is see this history very differently.

For us, the period following 1921 represents a fundamental turning point: the emergence of a centralized administrative system that increasingly placed institutional authority between the individual believer and the teachings of Baha'u'llah.

That is why this edition matters.

We are not publishing it merely to revisit the life of a historical figure. We are examining the legacy of Shoghi Effendi and asking whether the system that developed under his leadership remained faithful to the spirit of the teachings of Baha'u'llah and the example of Abdu'l Baha.

The question becomes particularly important when we remember that Abdu'l Baha wrote in his Will and Testament that the Universal House of Justice was to deal with matters not expressly recorded in the Holy Text, while also assigning the Guardian a central role within that system. The official Baha'i interpretation accepts this as the foundation of the Guardianship and the Administrative Order. Free Baha'is, however, challenge the historical and spiritual conclusions drawn from these provisions and question whether later administrative developments should be treated as inseparable from Baha'u'llah's Revelation.

This is not a small disagreement.

It goes to the heart of a fundamental question:

Who should stand between the individual and the Word of God?

Baha'u'llah repeatedly called humanity away from blind imitation and toward conscious recognition of truth. The individual was not created merely to obey another human being. The spiritual journey requires thought, conscience, investigation and recognition.
And Abdu'l Baha's own life gives us a standard by which every institution claiming to serve the Cause should be examined.

Was the purpose of the Cause to create another religious hierarchy?

Was it to produce generations of believers whose primary concern would be obedience to administrative decisions?

Was it to create an institution that could become so central to Baha'i life that questioning the institution could be treated as questioning the Faith itself?

These are not questions that should frighten a sincere believer.

They should encourage investigation.

Every section of this issue approaches Shoghi Effendi from a different angle.

Our Guest Article examines the transformation of the Baha'i movement into an increasingly institutionalized system and asks what was gained, and what may have been lost, along the way.

In Some Questions Answered, we return to difficult questions surrounding the Guardianship, the authority attributed to Shoghi Effendi, and the development of the modern Baha'i Administration. Our Did You Know, Blast from the Past and other sections bring forward lesser-known episodes and historical details that deserve to be examined rather than forgotten. And through our Throwback Images, we remember the people, places and period in which these profound changes unfolded.

Together, these pieces tell a story that is rarely presented from the Free Baha'i perspective.

Perhaps the most striking issue is the language of authority that developed around Shoghi Effendi.

The official Baha'i texts preserve extraordinarily

strong language concerning obedience to the Guardian. In the Will and Testament of Abdu'l Baha, believers are instructed to turn to Shoghi Effendi, and the text describes him as the Guardian of the Cause.

For Free Baha'is, this raises a fundamental concern.

Baha'u'llah came to renew religion, not to establish another class of people whose interpretations could replace the individual's relationship with the Word of God.

A religious system becomes dangerous when its institutions become more difficult to question than its Scriptures.

And that is precisely why Shoghi Effendi must be examined. Not worshipped. Not demonized. Examined. His writings. His decisions. His administrative policies. His interpretation of the Cause. The system that developed under him. And the consequences of that system for generations of Baha'is.

Abdu'l Baha left behind an example that remains difficult to reconcile with the image of religion as an elaborate hierarchy. He served. He welcomed. He listened. He travelled. He encouraged. He loved. He did not spend his life demanding that humanity submit to an administrative machine. This is why the Free Baha'i movement looks back to Abdu'l Baha not merely as the son of Baha'u'llah, but as an example of how the Cause should be lived.

The Baha'i Faith does not need to be protected from honest questions.

Truth can withstand investigation.

If Shoghi Effendi's legacy is as essential to the Faith as the Haifan administration maintains, then examining that legacy should only strengthen the Cause.

And if serious questions arise, believers should be free to examine them without fear.

That freedom is not a threat to faith. It is faith.

The anniversary of Shoghi Effendi's death gives us an opportunity to look beyond the familiar photographs, titles and descriptions.

It gives us an opportunity to ask:

What did Shoghi Effendi introduce?

What changed after the Master?

Did administrative authority become more important than spiritual development?

Did the institution become the interpreter of the believer's faith?

And most importantly, did the Baha'i community move closer to or farther from the spirit demonstrated by Baha'u'llah and the Master? These questions cannot be answered by slogans. They require history. They require the Writings. They require independent investigation. And they require the courage to follow evidence even when it leads somewhere uncomfortable.

The Free Baha'i position is not that Baha'u'llah failed. It is precisely the opposite. We believe Baha'u'llah's Revelation is too great to be reduced to the authority of any human institution. The Cause belongs to Baha'u'llah. The Writings belong to humanity. And the conscience of every believer belongs to God.

As we remember Shoghi Effendi this November, therefore, let us not simply ask what he built. Let us ask what his legacy built around the Faith - and whether that structure still serves the purpose for which Baha'u'llah revealed His message. That is the purpose of this special edition. Not hatred. Not personal attack. Not blind opposition. But examination. Because the moment we stop asking questions is the moment independent investigation dies.

And when independent investigation dies, something far more important than an administrative system is lost: the freedom of the human soul to seek God for itself.

Welcome to this special edition of The Free Baha'i Caravan.

This time, we are not simply remembering Shoghi Effendi. We are examining his legacy.

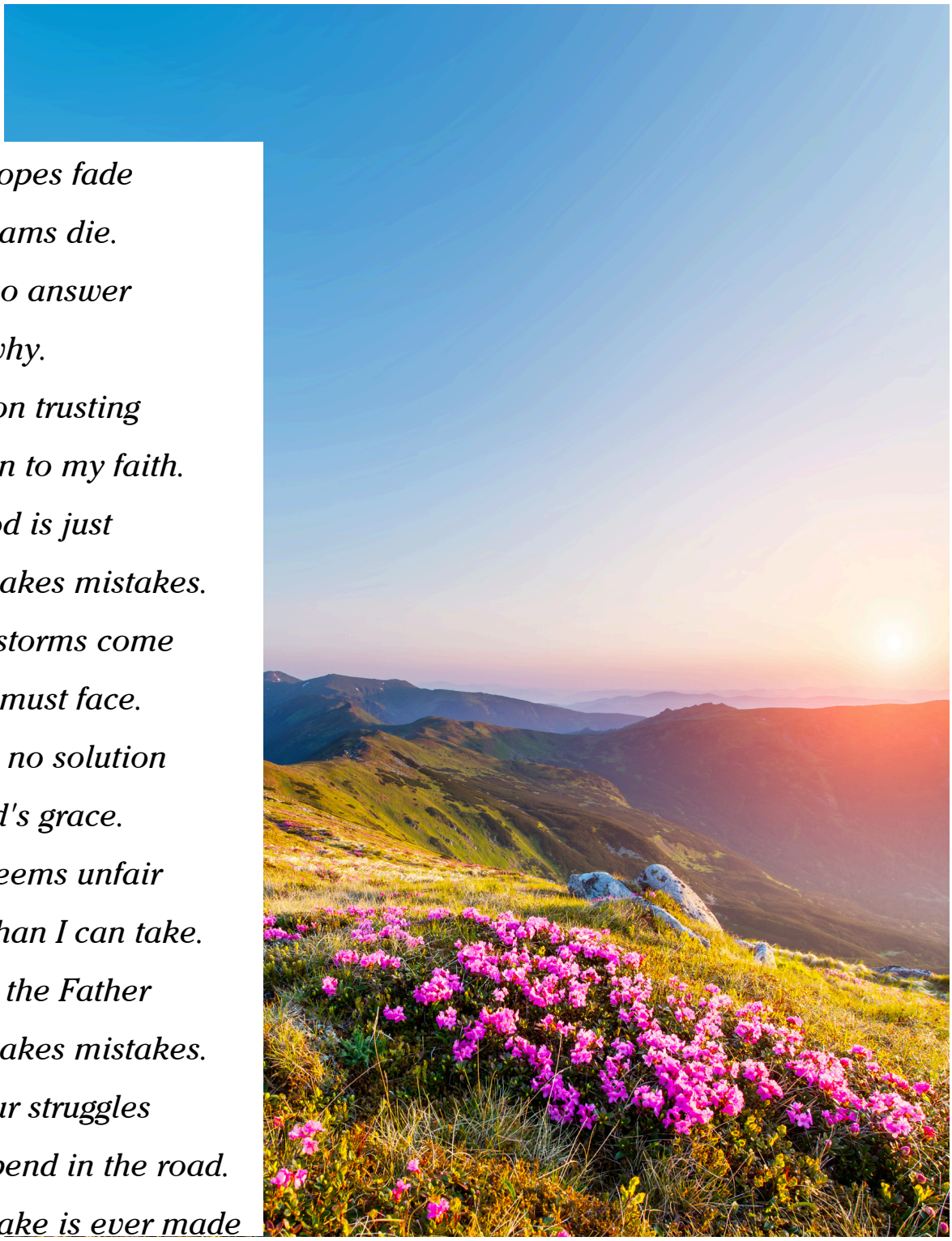
With love and steadfast hope,
The Free Baha'is Team

HISTORICAL TRUTHS



1911: 23rd September is when Abdu'l Baha arrived in Bristol and stayed at the then Guest House in Royal York Crescent.

NO MISTAKES



When my hopes fade
And my dreams die.
And I find no answer
By asking why.
I just keep on trusting
And hang on to my faith.
Because God is just
He never makes mistakes.
Should the storms come
And trials I must face.
When I find no solution
I rest in God's grace.
When life seems unfair
And more than I can take.
I look up to the Father
He never makes mistakes.
God sees our struggles
And every bend in the road.
But no mistake is ever made
Cause He weighs every load.

- Lenora McWhorter

THE MOST HOLY LAWS

In the name of Him who is the Ruler (al-hakim) over what was and what will be.

If ye differ on a matter, bring it back to God while the Sun shines from the horizon of this heaven. Whenever it sets, go back to that which was sent down from Him. It is sufficient for the worlds.

Say: O People, be not troubled when the kingdom of My Manifestation hath disappeared and the waves of the sea of My Explanation are calm. Indeed, in My Manifestation there is wisdom, and in My Disappearance, there is another wisdom. No one knows this except God, the Omniscient, the Solitary.

These see you from the most splendid (Abha) horizon, and We assist him who rises up to aid My Cause with the hosts of My most exalted (heavenly) beings and a tribe of angels who are brought near (to God).

Al-Kitab Al-Aqdas by Baha'u'llah, Translated from Arabic by Earl Elder & William Miller



CLERGY IN THE BAHA'I CAUSE

In answer to a question as to whether or not there would be any clergy in the Baha'i Cause?



"No. In this movement there will never be any paid ministers, no appointed clergy, no bishops, no cardinals, no popes, no ceremonies. A clergyman, assuming that he is ordained to his ministry, may think that he knows more about God than anyone else, whereas the humble man in his congregation may know more about God than he does. The sacerdotal and theological position makes a clergyman proud and haughty. But there is one thing in this Cause; some people may become greater than the rest, not through appointment, but through the purity of their hearts, their unselfish deeds, their heroic sacrifices, and their knowledge of God. Such illumined souls, like kind fathers or teachers, will guide and teach those less fortunate. They are the elder brothers of the members of the community. They do not arrogate to themselves any title or position. You will know them by their humility, their sincerity, their deeds, their severance, their knowledge, their spirituality, and their attraction."
Abdu'l Baha

Diary of Ahmad Sohrab, March 21, 1913

QUOTATION

"It is better to guide one soul than to possess all that is on earth, for as long as that guided soul is under the shadow of the Tree of Divine Unity, he and the one who hath guided him will both be recipients of God's tender mercy, whereas possession of earthly things will cease at the time of death. The path to guidance is one of love and compassion, not of force and coercion. This hath been God's method in the past and shall continue to be in the future!"

The Bab

"Only when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker's heart, and the breeze of His loving-kindness is wafted upon his soul, will the darkness of error be dispelled, the mists of doubts and misgivings be dissipated, and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being."

Baha'u'llah

"Consider the flowers of a garden. Though differing in kind, color, form, and shape, yet, inasmuch as they are refreshed by the waters of one spring, revived by the breath of one wind, invigorated by the rays of one sun, this diversity increaseth their charm, and addeth unto their beauty. How unpleasing to the eye if all the flowers and plants, the leaves and blossoms, the fruits, the branches and the trees of that garden were all of the same shape and color! Diversity of hues, form and shape, enricheth and adorneth the garden, and heighteneth the effect thereof. In like manner, when divers shades of thought, temperament and character, are brought together under the power and influence of one central agency, the beauty and glory of human perfection will be revealed and made manifest. Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men."

Abdu'l Baha

THROWBACK



In 1873, Baha'u'llah completed His most important work, the Most Holy Book (Kitab-i-Aqdas), written in His room (pictured here) in the House of Udi Khammar, now part of the House of Abbud, 2000

WEBSPLORE



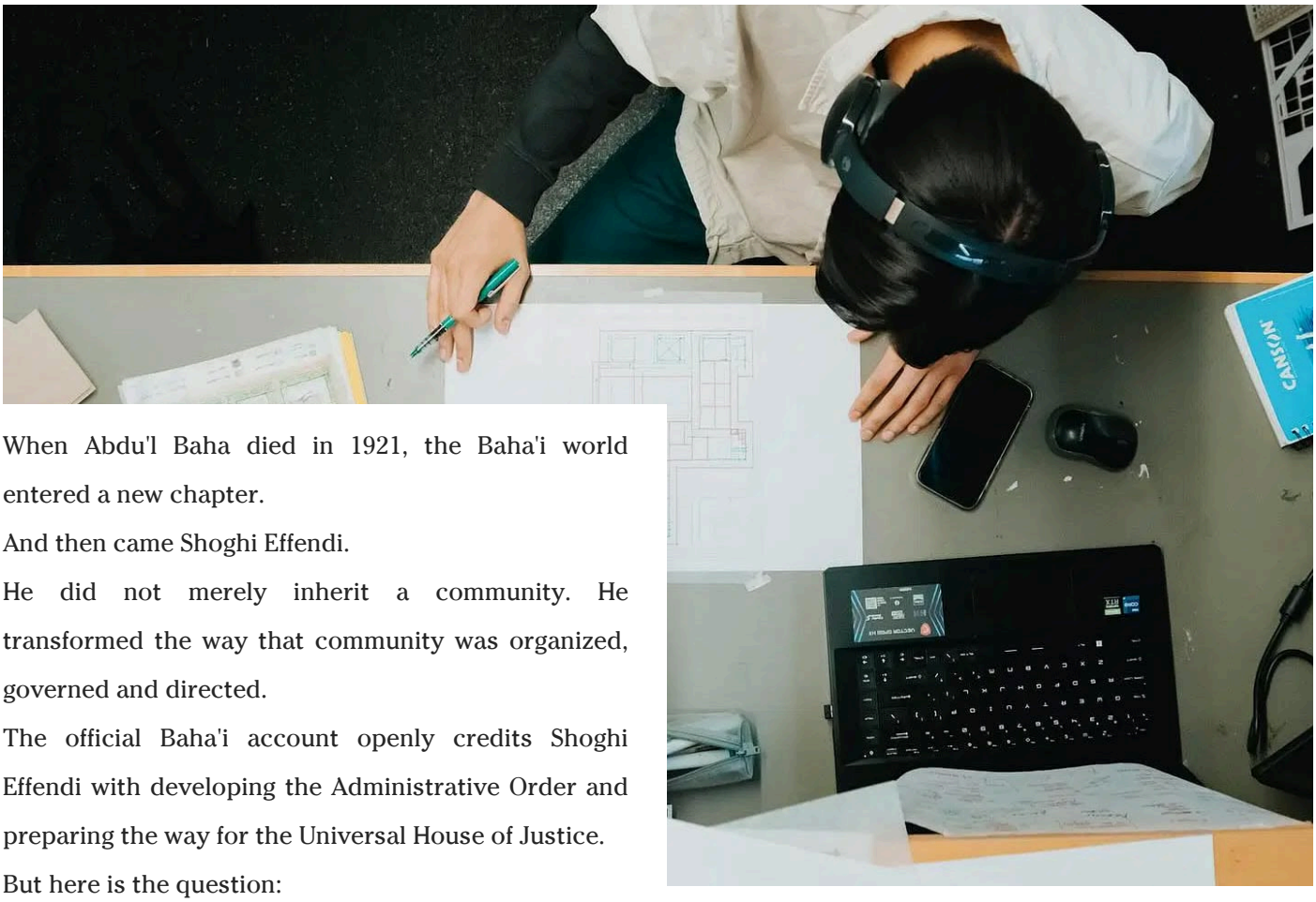
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Plans upon Shoghi Effendi's death

I know that the Guardian passed away unexpectedly in 1957 and put the Baha'is in a test of unity and resolve, which they passed ofc and now we all, except for those few pitiable Covenant Breakers, follow the Universal House of Justice. And there were Custodians chosen from the Hands of the Cause to govern the Faith until the House could be elected in 1963. I wonder, was this already a contingency plan made by the Guardian and the Hands or was it something they decided in the tumultuous aftermath of the Guardian's death. The Guardian was 60 by the time he died, and it was certainly unlikely by then he would have a child, so I feel they would have prayed and discussed the situation in the event the Guardian passed away. What do you all think?

Source:
https://www.reddit.com/r/bahai/comments/14sd05j/plans_upon_shoghi_effendis_death/

SHOGHI EFFENDI: GUARDIAN OR ARCHITECT OF A NEW BAHA'I ORDER?



When Abdu'l Baha died in 1921, the Baha'i world entered a new chapter.

And then came Shoghi Effendi.

He did not merely inherit a community. He transformed the way that community was organized, governed and directed.

The official Baha'i account openly credits Shoghi Effendi with developing the Administrative Order and preparing the way for the Universal House of Justice.

But here is the question:

Did he simply organize the Faith — or did he create a system that eventually came to stand between the believer and the Faith?

The Administration Takes Center Stage

Under Shoghi Effendi, Spiritual Assemblies, National Spiritual Assemblies, committees and other institutions became increasingly central to Baha'i life.

Shoghi himself described the Administrative Order as the framework for the future World Order of Baha'u'llah.

That is a remarkable claim.

Because administration is supposed to be a servant of the Faith.

Not the Faith itself.

In fact, Shoghi warned that administration must remain "an instrument and not a substitute for the Faith of Baha'u'llah."

So, ask yourself:

What happens when the instrument becomes more important than the message?

Who Was the Guardian?

The Haifan Baha'i interpretation presents Shoghi Effendi as the Guardian and authoritative interpreter

of the Faith.

This gives his writings and decisions an extraordinary level of authority.

And this is where Free Baha'is pause.

Baha'u'llah gave humanity His Revelation.

Abdu'l Baha demonstrated how that Revelation should be lived.

But should any later human institution or individual become so authoritative that questioning it becomes equivalent to questioning the Faith?

That is the real issue.

The Question We Cannot Avoid

Shoghi Effendi undoubtedly left an enormous mark on Baha'i history.

But building an institution does not automatically make that institution divine.

Organizing believers does not mean owning their conscience.

And serving the Cause does not mean becoming the Cause.

Free Baha'is therefore ask a simple question:

Did Shoghi Effendi preserve the Faith of Baha'u'llah - or did he build an administration that eventually became the lens through which that Faith had to be understood?

We should not be afraid of the question.

We should read Shoghi's writings.

Read Baha'u'llah.

Read Abdu'l Baha.

Read the history.

Then decide what the evidence says.

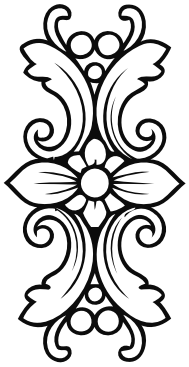
Because the Faith belongs to Baha'u'llah.

Not to Shoghi Effendi.

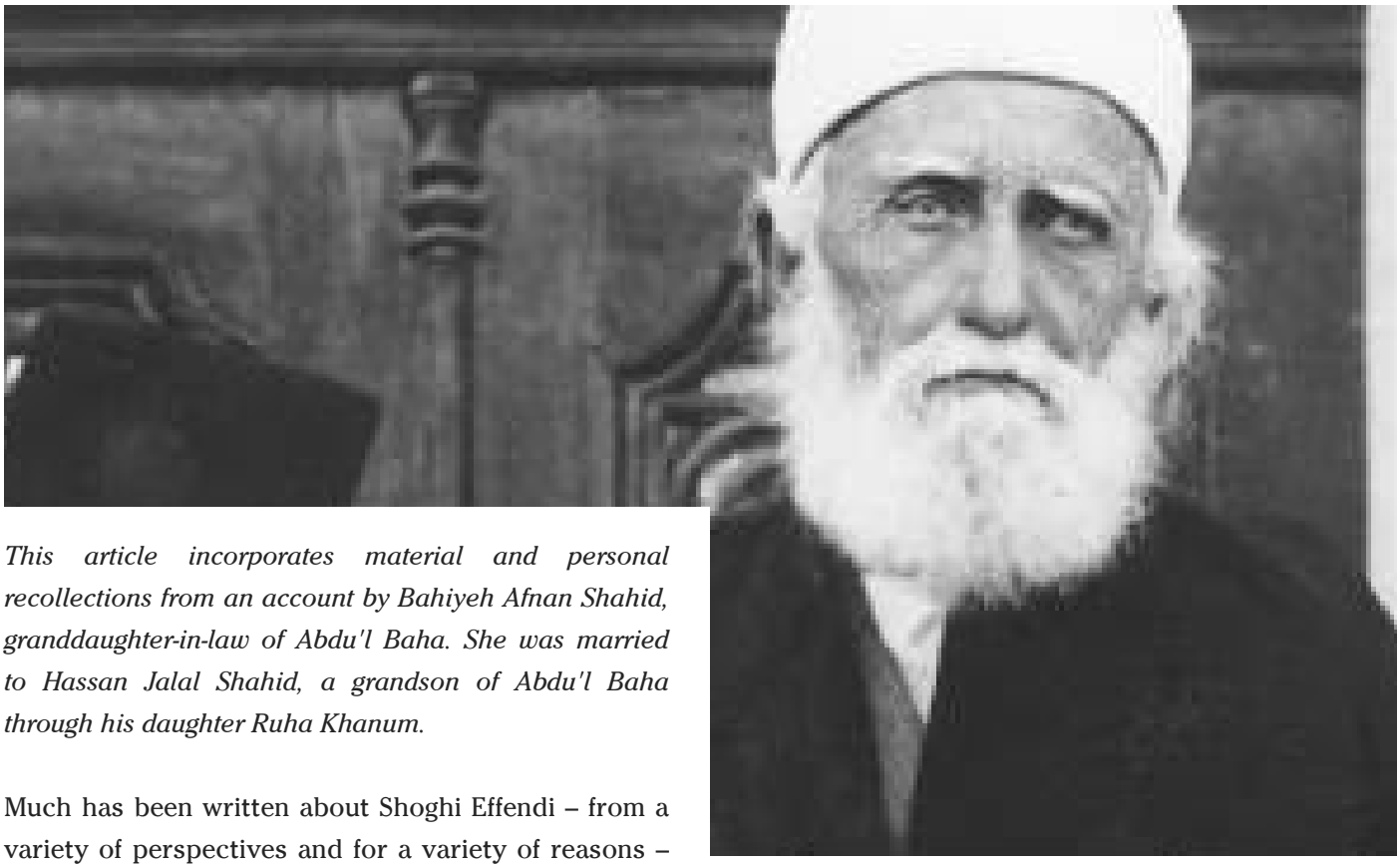
Not to the Universal House of Justice.

Not to any administration.

The servant must never become the master.



SHOGHI EFFENDI AND THE FAMILY OF ABDU'L BAHA: A PERSONAL ACCOUNT



This article incorporates material and personal recollections from an account by Bahiyeh Afnan Shahid, granddaughter-in-law of Abdu'l Baha. She was married to Hassan Jalal Shahid, a grandson of Abdu'l Baha through his daughter Ruha Khanum.

Much has been written about Shoghi Effendi – from a variety of perspectives and for a variety of reasons – to which there is little to add here. What remains to be said, which has never been said before, and which is very painful to recount, is to try, in a short and succinct way, to present the angle that reflects the pain and the suffering that the members of the family bore with the brunt of the Guardian's anger, displeasure, disapproval, judgement and punishment due to a long list of supposed wrongdoings such as 'disobedience', 'treachery', 'plotting', 'rebelliousness', 'disloyalty', 'covenant breaking' etc, etc, etc, (if you want the whole 'dishonour roll' then check the cables Shoghi Effendi sent with regard to the various members of the family in Adib Taherzadeh's book The Covenant of Baha'u'llah), with which he accused them – rightly or wrongly, who is to say, since he was the sole prosecutor, sole judge and one man jury, and there was no recourse to anything or anyone else for anything as simple as a chance for an open hearing or even handed defence. Maybe the depth of the pain and the hurt – and the great sense of relief – can be realized when, decades later we heard it said by a Baha'i of impeccable standing – who, for obvious reasons shall remain nameless – quoting no less a source than Hassan Balyuzi, to the effect that the family of Shoghi Effendi had never done anything to harm the Cause.

The four daughters of the Master ['Abdu'l-Baha], Zia Khanum, Touba Khanum, Rouha Khanum, and Monawar Khanum so loved and respected their father you would say he was their Lord, not only their father. It was inconceivable that any of them would do anything that ran contrary to their father's wishes. They had lived their lives as highly respected honorable ladies of a highly respected, honorable family. All four ended their lives 'expelled' from the faith of their forebears and 'shunned' by the community of their father and grandfather. Why?

Because they 'disobeyed'. Three of them suffered nervous breakdowns. Why? According to the Italian family physician, Dr. Costero, of the Italian hospital in Haifa – who knew them and their circumstances very well – because of the upheavals in their lives, which left them bereft of the support and the warmth of the community they belonged to, old, alienated, lonely and friendless in a world where they no longer had peace or place.

Things had not always been like that. When Shoghi Effendi first took over the reins of the Guardianship he truly was a benevolent source of help and succour to the family; maybe – and here I say maybe because this is pure speculation on my part – to a certain extent, he was returning the help and succour that the family had provided during his very traumatic period of adjustment to the new role and responsibilities that had been unexpectedly thrust upon him at the very young age of twenty three. He was kind, friendly and supportive. But soon things changed. Could it be that he took the will of the Master too literally to heart and thus required total obedience from both family and community? A strong suspicious mind was a character trait (particularly marked in his younger brother Riaz) which also soon manifested itself in him as well, leading to a willingness to listen and believe 'reports' brought in by people who thought that they would curry favour with him. Eventually he used informers to keep an eye on people.[1]

Shoghi Effendi required obedience to his wishes. This became very obvious when it came to the matter of marriages – those of his sisters or cousins – and travels abroad for purposes of preaching the Faith, particularly in the case of Ruhi Afnan, or of study abroad, as in the case of Fuad Afnan. The strange thing was that both with Ruhi and Fuad Afnan, he mentioned their going to the US and England as causes of his displeasure only after the fact. Ruhi Afnan had gone and come back from two very successful tours of the US where he had visited and spoken at many Baha'i gatherings and occasions with the full knowledge and approval of Shoghi Effendi. He knew full well that Fuad had gone to London to study at the Imperial College. He knew that while there, and until his death in an air raid during the London blitz, he was very involved with the Baha'i community. The news of his death was transmitted to Shoghi Effendi by the Baha'is in London. It was not until much later, when the cables were sent regarding the 'expelling' of both brothers that Shoghi Effendi, among other things, said that they had both gone abroad without his permission.

Since the family knew that he suffered from a disposition to being hot tempered, they had to be very careful to behave in a manner both befitting his position as well as to avoid provoking his ire that could easily boil over. To put it simply, the atmosphere in the family was not one of ease and general wellbeing but rather one of tension and pressure to be and behave in a manner pleasing to Shoghi Effendi. Having opinions that differed from his, expressing any ideas that deviated from what he considered right or correct, interpreting anything in ways that he disapproved of, these all put everyone under pressure and tension from which there was no escape for the family, and which, maybe, he dealt with by finding reasons to 'expel' those who bothered his somewhat exaggerated need for obedience and acquiescence to his guidance.

When it came to opposition to marriages, it becomes very personal and firsthand. When Shoghi Effendi heard that his cousin, Hassan Shahid was planning to marry his niece, he sent a message to Hassan's mother Rouha Khanum, his aunt, with Dr. Lutfulla Hakim, a prominent Bahai, and member of the Hands of the Cause. Upon his arrival at her home at No. 9 Persian Street (adjoining Shoghi Effendi's residence at No. 7) he told Hassan that he had a message from Shoghi Effendi and that he wished to see her alone. Worried that the news would prove too big a shock for her frail nervous condition, Hassan asked Dr. Lotfolla to take her condition into consideration, when giving her the message, because she was already shaking with anxiety as to what this visit and this message meant. It soon became clear. Shoghi Effendi's message was that if her son Hassan married me, he would not allow any Baha'is to walk in her funeral when she died! This, over a decade after Shoghi Effendi had 'expelled' her

1. The same thing which UHJ does today.

and all her family, which made it impossible for any Baha'is to walk in her funeral anyway! I wonder what reasoning in Shoghi Effendi's mind made it necessary for him to oppose this marriage.

The family of Shoghi Effendi raised no flags of dissent, did not accuse him of anything, sought to serve the Cause in whatever capacity they could and imprinted it on the minds of three ensuing generations that nothing should be done by the family that would in any way harm the Cause. In fact this became such a mantra, such a symbol of faith and faithfulness to the Cause of Baha'u'llah that all concepts of fairness, justice and simple human dignity were thrown to the winds and the family, over thirty in number, accepted the humiliation and the pain as a sacrifice to the Faith. The accusations directed at his sisters, Rouhanguise and Mehranguise and his cousin Soraya of being faithless and disobedient to Shoghi Effendi in marrying the sons of Seyed Ali Afnan and Forough Khanum (the daughter of Baha'u'llah); of accusations against all the excommunicated members of the family of turning to Islam; of marrying a Moslem, as in the case of Munib Shahid; or a 'low born Christian woman', as in the case of his brother Hussein (see Taherzadeh's book mentioned above).

They swallowed their pride, disregarded their dignity, suffered humiliation, 'expulsion', and the strange absurdity of some Baha'is claiming that 'no family existed'. Over the decades, the myth of the 'faithless relatives of Shoghi Effendi' was perpetuated, written about in Baha'i books and articles, and accepted as truth derived from an 'infallible' source. According to the official Baha'i line the family as such was driven into oblivion and extinction, and the myth culminated in the putting forth of the legend that Ruhiyyih Khanum was the only surviving member of Baha'u'llah's family. (See the invitation extended on November 11, 1993, in honour of Madam Ruhiyyih Rabbani, 'the last surviving member of the family of Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Baha'i faith' by the senior partner of a firm of solicitors in London, published in The Independent newspaper of London dated November 9, 1993.)

Of course 'expulsion' was not limited to the family. In fact, the very first members of the community that Shoghi Effendi saw fit to grace with that title was Abbas Gholi and his wife. This gentleman, good looking and well dressed, was a man of some means who had purchased land on the slopes of Mount Carmel and which he had donated to the Cause. He and his wife, who were childless, had chosen certain roles for themselves in the community. Why these people were expelled I do not know, but they were the first to be thus 'graced/disgraced'.

My husband, Hassan Shahid, very seriously asked Dr. Moojan Momen to arrange for him to meet some members of the House of Justice, where he would be able to present the case of the family 'expellees', just as a matter of historical record. Dr. Momen closed the door on that one, saying that that was not possible.[2]

2. Hassan Shahid, the last of the thirteen grandchildren of the Master, Abdul Baha, died on the 23rd of June 2015.

WANT TO BE A CONTRIBUTOR FOR THE CARAVAN?

WE WELCOME THOUGHTFUL VOICES AND FRESH PERSPECTIVES.



Interested in contributing to the Caravan Magazine by writing a guest article? Kindly send us your article at thecaravan@freebahais.org and if we find your article unique, knowledgeable, and interesting enough for our readers, we will surely publish it in our upcoming issue. If you have any other queries, you can write to us at info@freebahais.org Thank you!

FREE BAHA'I ACTIVITIES



"Now the new age is here and creation is reborn. Humanity hath taken on new life. The autumn hath gone by, and the reviving spring is here. All things are now made new. Arts and industries have been reborn, there are new discoveries in science, and there are new inventions; even the details of human affairs, such as dress and personal effects - even weapons - all these have likewise been renewed. The laws and procedures of every government have been revised. Renewal is the order of the day.

And all this newness hath its source in the fresh outpourings of wondrous grace and favor from the Lord of the Kingdom, which have renewed the world. The people, therefore, must be set completely free from their old patterns of thought, that all their attention may be focused upon these new principles, for these are the light of this time and the very spirit of this age."

Abdu'l Baha

Dear Friends,

The Free Baha'i community continues to move forward across borders, with believers in Thailand, Malaysia, Pakistan, India, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Europe and Latin America, remaining connected through gatherings, study, devotional meetings, youth activities, translation work, online discussions and personal outreach. What makes this activity remarkable is that it does not depend upon a centralized institution telling believers where, when or how to serve. People are simply taking initiative, gathering and keeping the teachings of Baha'u'llah alive in their own communities.

Preparing for the Holy Days

As we approach the Birth of the Bab and the Birth of Baha'u'llah on November 10 and 11, preparations are already underway among Free Baha'is for devotional gatherings, family celebrations, study sessions and community events. These occasions are more than

dates on a calendar. They are opportunities to return directly to the Words of the Bab and Baha'u'llah, remember the extraordinary lives of these two Figures and share Their message with friends, family and seekers.

The celebrations may be simple, but the spirit behind them is not. A gathering in a home, a reading shared online, a discussion between friends or a children's programme can all become an opportunity to bring the Teachings back to the centre.

Young People Continue to Step Forward

Young Free Baha'is continue to demonstrate that meaningful participation does not require an administrative title. Across different communities, young people are taking initiative in devotional gatherings, study groups, discussions, outreach and service activities. In Thailand and Malaysia, in particular, young believers continue to remain actively connected and involved.

This is important because the future of any spiritual community cannot depend upon a handful of people holding positions. It depends upon a new generation that is willing to think, question, study and serve. Leadership is not always a position. Sometimes it is simply having the courage to begin something and invite others to join.

India and South Asia

Across India and Pakistan, personal connections and small gatherings continue to provide opportunities for believers and seekers to study the Writings and discuss the history and teachings of the Faith. These conversations are especially valuable because they allow difficult questions to be asked openly — questions about Baha'u'llah, the Bab, Abdu'l Baha, Shoghi Effendi and the development of the Baha'i Administration.

The Free Baha'i approach remains simple: go back to the Writings, examine the evidence and allow every person the freedom to reach their own understanding.

North America, Europe and Latin America

In North America, Europe and Latin America, believers continue to maintain connections through online meetings, personal gatherings and individual outreach. For some, activity remains discreet, but discretion should never be confused with inactivity. A private conversation can reach someone who has been quietly questioning for years. A shared article can connect an isolated believer with others who have discovered the Free Baha'i perspective. A single online meeting can bring together people separated by thousands of miles.

The result is a community that may be dispersed geographically, but is increasingly connected spiritually.

Remembering Abdu'l Baha

This period will also lead us toward the Day of the Covenant on November 26 and the Ascension of Abdu'l Baha on November 28. For this special edition, these dates have an added significance. As we examine the legacy of Shoghi Effendi and the development of the Administration after 1921, we are also reminded of the life and example of the Master himself.

Abdu'l Baha's legacy was not built upon titles, wealth or institutional power. It was built through service, humility, love and an unwavering devotion to Baha'u'llah.

That is the example we want to remember.

The Work Continues

The Free Baha'i community may not possess the buildings, budgets and vast administrative machinery of the Haifan organization, but activity is not measured by the size of an institution. It is measured by what believers actually do.

A devotional gathering. A youth discussion. A translation. A conversation with a seeker. child learning about the Bab. A family reading Baha'u'llah

together. A believer reaching out to someone who thought they were alone.

These activities may never appear in an institutional statistical report, but they are the living connections through which a community grows.

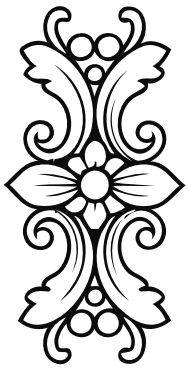
As we approach the Holy Days and remember the Bab, Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l Baha, let us continue to do what Free Baha'is have always sought to do: study the Writings, ask difficult questions, serve our communities and share the message without surrendering our conscience to any institution.

The work is moving forward - across countries, across generations and across borders.

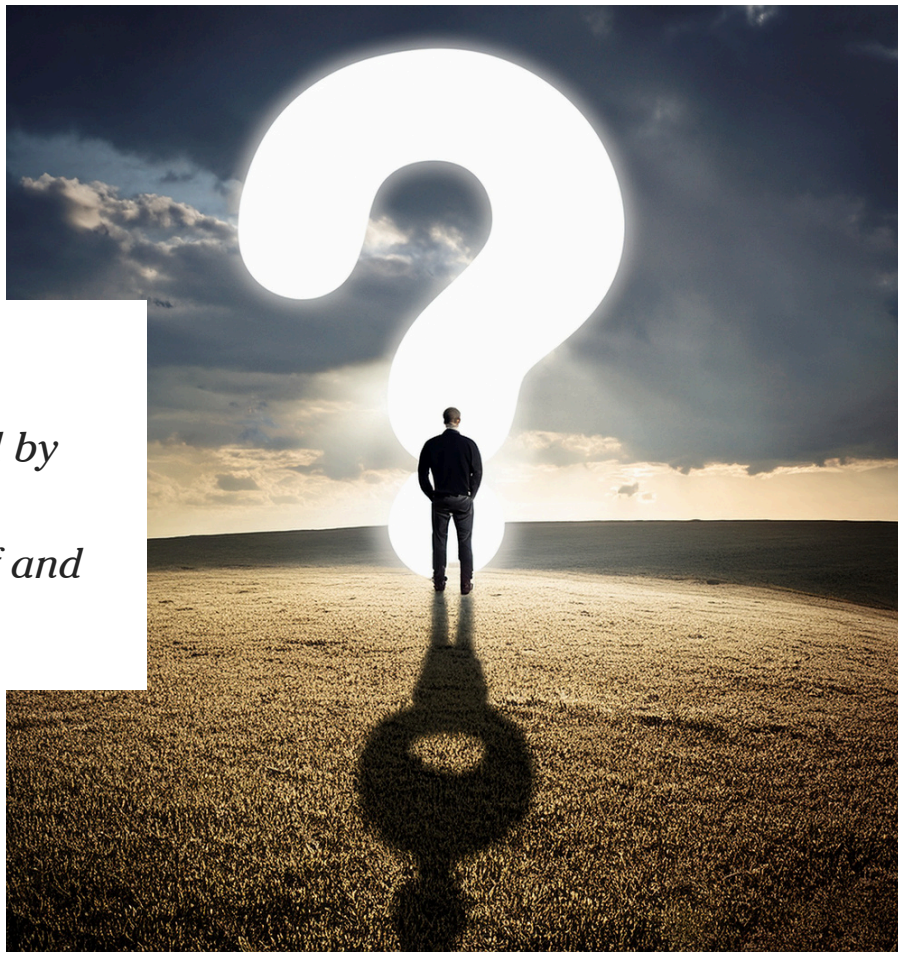
The Cause does not need an institution to keep the light burning. It needs believers willing to carry it.

With steadfast love,

The Caravan Team, Free Baha'is



SOME QUESTIONS ANSWERED



Here we address a few questions frequently raised by readers.
Our aim is to provide brief and thoughtful clarifications.

Christian = Church
Muslim = Mosque
Baha'is = ???

Hi Larry,

For Baha'is, the closest equivalent would be Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, or simply Baha'i House of Worship.

So, in simple terms:
Christian = Church
Muslim = Mosque
Baha'i = House of Worship (Mashriqu'l-Adhkar)

The term "Baha'i Center" is sometimes used for a place where Baha'is meet, but it is not technically the equivalent of a church or mosque. The Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is specifically the Baha'i institution dedicated to worship.

From Baha'i perspective, we would therefore use "House of Worship" when speaking to a general audience, and "Mashriqu'l-Adhkar" when using the proper Baha'i terminology.

Best,

Team Free Baha'is

Good morning, thank you for writing. You suggested that I write to the so-called Universal House of Justice. Before you wrote to me, I had already sent twelve Questions to that entity and I received no response. 'Abdu'l-Baha' wrote concerning the Universal House of Justice: "The Guardian of the Cause of God is the sacred head and distinguished member for life of that body." 'Abdu'l-Baha was not writing about Shoghi Effendi, because Shoghi Effendi was never the Head of a Universal House of Justice. The current body claiming to be a Universal House of Justice does not have a Guardian of the Baha'i Faith as its Head, but rather only an Alpha male as its head. On a scale of zero to ten, how surprised was I that I received no response for my twelve questions from the Alpha male and his colleagues in Haifa sitting on the so-called Universal House of Justice? The answer is zero.
Cordially,

Ross

Hi Ross,
Allah'u'Abha!

I completely understand where you are coming from. After sending twelve questions and receiving no response, I can certainly understand why you were not surprised by their silence.

The deeper problem, in my view, is what this says about the present Baha'i Administrative system.

When sincere believers raise serious questions about the Faith, its history, or the authority of its institutions, they should not simply be ignored. Baha'u'llah taught us to investigate truth for ourselves, and that principle should not disappear when difficult questions are directed toward an institution.

The questions you have raised concerning the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice are serious ones and deserve to be examined through the Writings rather than dismissed or ignored.

May God give you strength, patience and wisdom as you continue your investigation, and may your efforts lead you ever closer to the truth.

With warmest Baha'i greetings,

Regards,

What is the difference between Baha'is who believe Shoghi Effendi was the Guardian and those who believe he was not?

Hi Leidy,

Allah'u'Abha!

The difference is not merely about a title. It concerns who has authority in the Baha'i Faith and what happened to the Faith after the passing of Abdu'l Baha.

Those who accept Shoghi Effendi as the Guardian believe that Abdu'l Baha appointed him to a divinely established office and that his authority was an essential part of the Baha'i Administrative Order.

Free Baha'is reject this. We believe that elevating Shoghi Effendi into a divinely appointed Guardian introduced a system of religious authority that was never intended to stand between the believer and the teachings of Baha'u'llah.

The consequences were enormous.

Instead of remaining primarily a spiritual Cause centered on the teachings of Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l Baha, the Faith increasingly became identified with an elaborate administrative system:

· Local and National Spiritual Assemblies
· committees and administrative bureaucracy
· centralized interpretation
· compulsory loyalty to institutions
· Covenant-breaking and expulsion
· institutional control over membership
· financial and organizational structures
· an international administrative hierarch

The Free Baha'i objection is not to consultation or organization itself. The objection is to turning administration into "religious authority".

The Baha'i principle of independent investigation of truth becomes difficult to reconcile with a system in which disagreement with an authorized interpretation can be treated as disobedience to the Covenant. A believer may be told to investigate truth independently, but if reaching the "wrong" conclusion can result in being branded a Covenant-breaker, that independence is severely compromised.

The history of the Guardianship also raises a fundamental question. If Shoghi Effendi was an indispensable part of the divine administrative system, why did the system continue after his death in 1957 without another Guardian?

The mainstream Baha'i answer is that Shoghi Effendi had no eligible successor and that the Guardianship therefore ended. Free Baha'is see this differently: the disappearance of the Guardianship demonstrates that it was not an essential institution of Baha'u'llah's Faith in the first place.

Nor does the fact that Shoghi Effendi accomplished much prove that he possessed divine authority. He translated important writings, corresponded extensively with believers and developed the Baha'i organization. Those accomplishments can be acknowledged without accepting the claim that he was infallibly appointed by God.

The fundamental distinction is therefore this:
Haifan Baha'is place Shoghi Effendi and the administrative institutions built around his authority within the divinely established structure of the Faith.
Free Baha'is place Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l Baha above all later administrators and institutions.

From the Free Baha'i perspective, the tragedy is that a Faith founded upon the independent investigation of truth and the spiritual transformation of humanity was gradually turned into an institution increasingly concerned with obedience, administration, membership and authority.

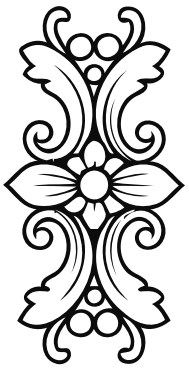
We therefore do not see the rejection of Shoghi Effendi as a rejection of Baha'u'llah.

We see it as a refusal to allow a later administrative

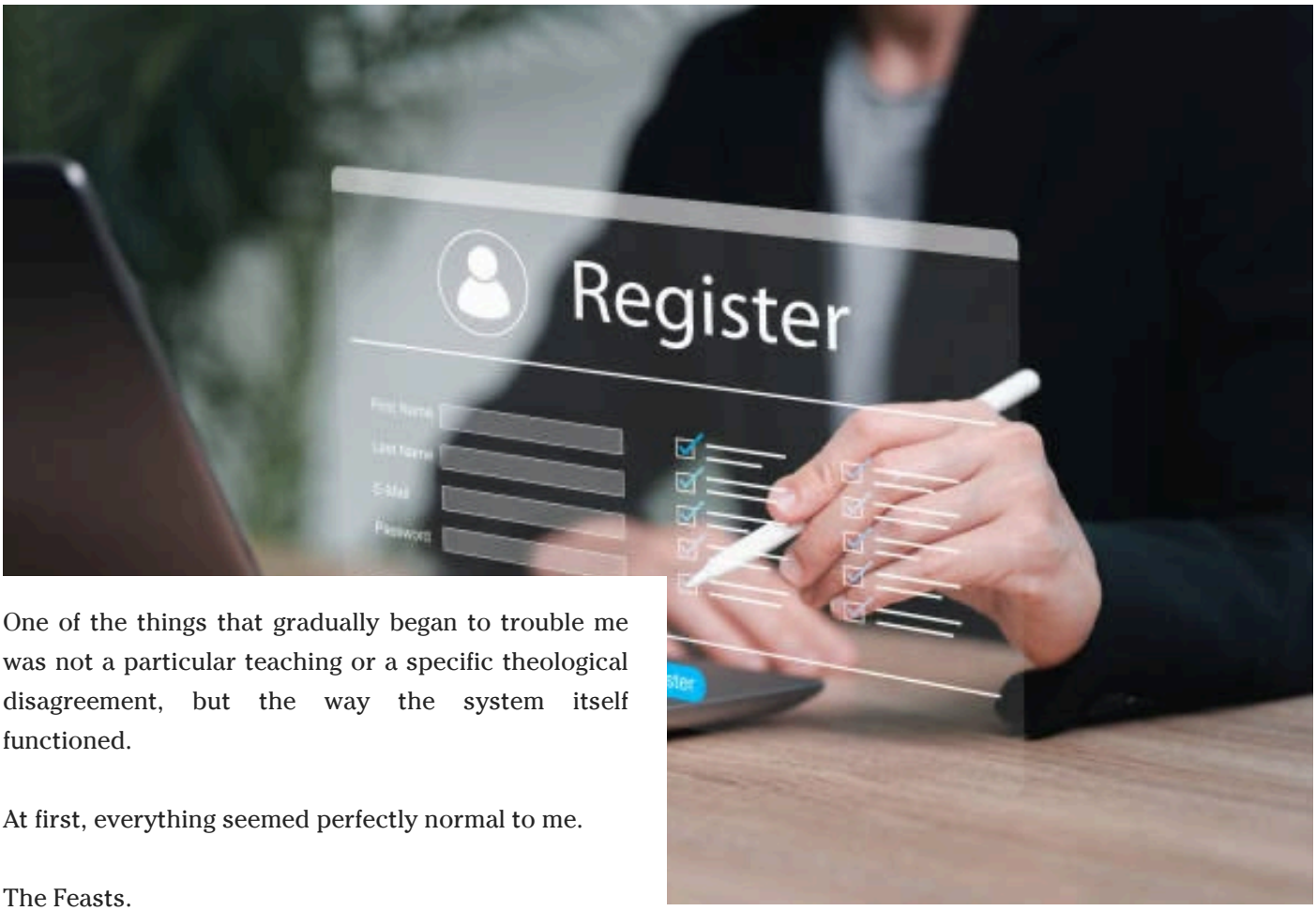
system to become greater than the Revelation from which Faith originated.

The question is not whether Shoghi Effendi accomplished much. The question is whether Baha'u'llah ever gave him the authority that later Baha'is attributed to him. Free Baha'is answer: NO. Our loyalty is to Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l Baha - not to a later institution claiming authority in their name.
Regards,

Team Free Baha’is



WHY DOES BELIEF NEED "REGISTRATION"?



One of the things that gradually began to trouble me was not a particular teaching or a specific theological disagreement, but the way the system itself functioned.

At first, everything seemed perfectly normal to me.

The Feasts.

The study circles.

The Local Spiritual Assembly plans and activities.

Because I was immersed in that environment, I rarely stopped to question any of it. It all felt natural. But over time, a few simple questions began to surface in my mind questions that I could no longer easily dismiss.

I found myself thinking:

Aren't we talking about a religion?

If so, why is there such an overwhelming emphasis on administration, elections, planning, statistics, and institutional structures?

I had seen organization and structure in other religions as well, but here it sometimes felt as though the administration itself had become the center of gravity. At times, it was difficult to tell which mattered more: faith, or the institution.

Then something else gradually caught my attention.

Whenever questions crossed a certain line, the atmosphere changed.

Not ordinary questions, but deeper questions about the administration itself, its decision-making processes, its authority, or the way its institutions operated.

I had always assumed that if something was true, it should be able to withstand scrutiny. Shouldn't a

religion welcome sincere inquiry?

Yet my experience was often the opposite.

Questions were not always treated as part of a genuine search for truth. Instead, they sometimes seemed to be treated as a problem in themselves.

People's expressions would change.

Their tone would become more cautious.

Some would become defensive.

Others would quickly try to change the subject.

And some reacted as if the very act of asking the question was the issue.

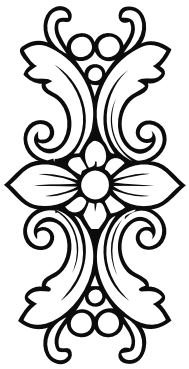
That puzzled me.

I found myself wondering: if this is a religion, why do serious questions about its own structures provoke such discomfort?

And that question gradually led to another:

What if I was dealing with something that functioned less like a spiritual path and more like an administrative system?

What religion needs formal registration and approval/admittance from an institution filled with humans like us?!?



BLAST FROM THE PAST

MAHATMA GANDHI IN SWITZERLAND

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT IN GENEVA
December 14, 1931

Dear Friends:

You will, I hope, welcome a few lines from one here who shares the humanitarian ideals of the New History Society, and the pacifist aspirations of the Bahai Cause. Switzerland, as you will have seen by the newspapers, has been honored by the visit of Mahatma Gandhi who took this small neutral state into his itinerary when planning his journey back to India. To thousands it must have seemed as if a legendary hero had come to life, to be both seen and heard!

Several meetings were arranged for, but the largest and most impressive took place in Geneva. This was most efficiently organized by the Woman's International League for Peace and Freedom, who had secured Victoria Hall which has a seating capacity of two thousand. Tickets were freely offered the public without favor or price, only a few being reserved for the press and for League and university notables. Long before the doors opened crowds were waiting in the cold, and within a very short time after, the vast hall was packed; this in spite of the fact that the meeting had unavoidably been fixed for the noon meal hour!

Two hours had, therefore, been willingly sacrificed in order to see the famous Indian patriot. As the audience waited the concert organ played, and then a small figure, enveloped in white, was seen to emerge from the back of the platform, and Gandhi surrounded by his Indian helpers, took his place on a small raised dais.

When he had seated himself in usual Indian fashion, comfortably enveloped in a heavy white shawl, his interpreter, Monsieur Edmond Privat, took his place at his side and swiftly translated, phrase by phrase, what was said. The complete poise and calm of this small frail figure, and the spiritual mastery which he exercised on his hearers was unmistakable. He spoke in clear tones and with perfect enunciation; and later when permission was given to press photographers and others to pour a blinding stream of light on his seat, he continued his remarks unmoved—a veritable "Buddha" in glistening white, with the spectacles of the sage!

Having met him a few years ago under very different circumstances in Delhi, when he was fasting and praying for Hindu-Moslem Unity, I had since had no opportunity of learning how he would address great public meetings on highly practical subjects. It however did not take me long to realize that his force of character and will power were stronger than ever, and that nothing would turn him from the pursuit of his great "experiment" in the spiritual conquest of India. He has been the creator of a new political faith, and the cause of a new vital awakening of long dormant forces in mass psychology. Will he finally succeed by his non-violence methods, this yet remains to be seen!

As he slowly enunciated his principles, and dealt with critical questions of a practical order, something of his

7

New Historian, February1932

KNOW YOUR HERITAGE

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 1912.

THE SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER

40 Years in Jail Brings Wisdom

Abdul Baha Urges World Peace

Famous Oriental Philosopher Will Visit San Francisco to Spread Doctrine.

ABDUL BAHA



Abdul Baha, after being in prison for forty years, is on his way to San Francisco to preach the faith he learned to follow during his confinement.

Abdul Baha is the son of Baha Ollah, the founder of Bahaism, which is, in brief, the doctrine of universal peace. He will remain here for two weeks or more, urging the peoples of the world to peace and brotherhood.

Abdul Baha was imprisoned with his father at Bagdhad for preaching the religion of the Dawn of a New Day. From Bagdhad, Baha Ollah was removed to Akka or Acre and there with his son, Abdul Baha, who is about to visit this city, he issued pamphlets, known as tablets, announcing the faith of Bahaism.

In 1904 the father died in prison calling upon the world to listen to the message of his son. With the revolution of the young Turks in 1908, Abdul Baha was released from prison and emerged into the world after having been hidden in dark dungeons for more than forty years.

He went to Egypt and Europe and was received with open arms by the wise men of the west, who allowed him to preach and teach after his own manner.

His mission has lasted in the open world for four years. He has now fifteen million followers known as Bahaists.

Abdul Baha speaks with the tongue of prophecy, though he resents being called a prophet, since he claims that what he has to say is of what there is and not what there shall be. He is a philosopher of wisdom gained not from books but from a life of solitude, during which his only literature has been the Bible, and his father's works. But Abdul is a scholar of amazing culture. He speaks like a fountain of wisdom.

He has the insight of Omar Khayyah, combined with the optimism of the Christian belief. He offers something more than a worldly hope men set their hearts upon. He offers a reality of life that comes only through peace of mind. This he declares is the first step towards peace of nations, though he fears that at present the nations of the world are striving at peace in the midst of discord.

Abdul Baha is now in Denver on his way West. He will arrive in San Francisco this week and various pulpits in the city will be lent to him to preach from. He preaches from all kinds of pulpits and it makes no difference to him, or to the people he preaches to the denomination of the church where he takes his stand.

This article from The San Francisco Examiner on 25 September 1912 describes Abdu'l Baha's plans to visit the city.

DECLARATIONS IN THE CAUSE

We the Free Baha'is do not believe in declarations. We believe in spreading the true teachings of Baha'u'llah and don't work for numbers. A Free Baha'i should purify himself from greed of attaining positions, and start working out of love for humanity and world peace.

Our Master has clearly stated,

"There are no officers in this Cause. I do not and have not appointed any one to perform any special services, but I encourage everyone to engage in the service of the Kingdom. The foundation of this Cause is purely a democracy, and not a theocracy."

Star of the West, Vol. 8, pg. 116

These man-made assemblies and authoritative positions have pushed the Baha'is to work out of greed of acquiring positions which lead to fake reports and false statistics. But, if a person frees himself from administration, he will fulfil his duties towards Baha'u'llah and not for NSA or UHJ. Thus, he will be rewarded by Baha'u'llah for his efforts. For this reason, Free Baha'is do not believe in Officers or Office Bearers and one must be the Guardian of his own faith and action.

So, anyone who would wish to work for the faith should follow the teachings of Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l Baha, serve the faith and promote world peace and harmony.

Why do you think the Baha'i Faith got split into various groups after the passing away of the Master? Don't you think the rule of the so-called guardian Shoghi Effendi and his Administration has played a very crucial role in the division and disunity of the Baha'is?

INVESTIGATION OF REALITY

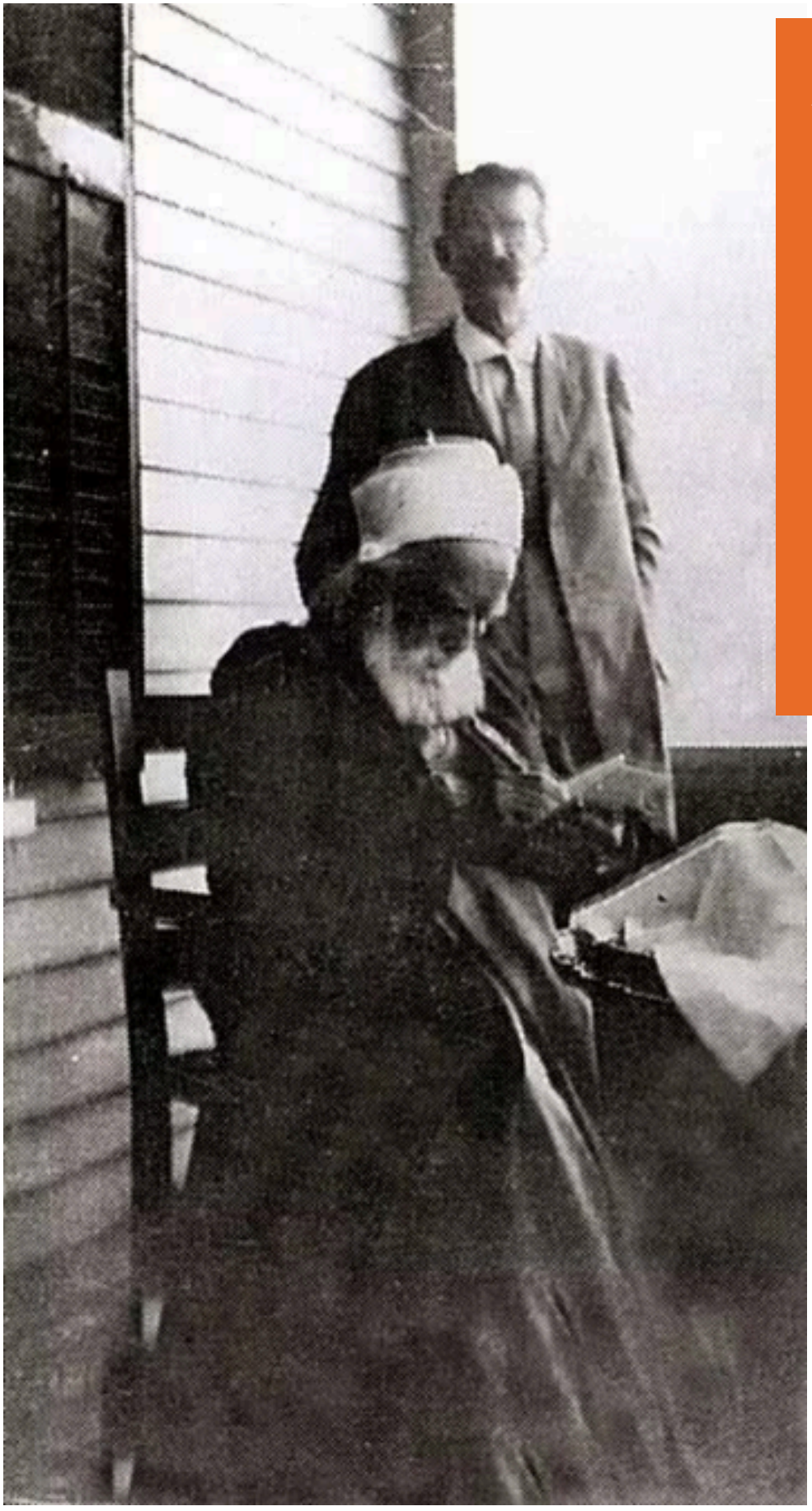


Abdu'l Baha has said,

"God has given man the eye of investigation by which he may see and recognize truth. He has endowed man with ears that he may hear the message of reality and conferred upon him the gift of reason by which he may discover things for himself. This is his endowment and equipment for the investigation of reality. Man is not intended to see through the eyes of another, hear through another's ears nor comprehend with another's brain… Therefore, depend upon your own reason and judgment and adhere to the outcome of your own investigation; otherwise, you will be utterly submerged in the sea of ignorance and deprived of all the bounties of God."

– Abdu'l Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, Volume 2, p. 287

THROWBACK



On August 16 when Abdu'l Baha arrived at Green Acre from Dublin, New Hampshire, more than five hundred people gathered to greet Him. The road from Main Street to the Inn was illuminated by Japanese lanterns. After a festive reception, He gave a short talk on "The Search for Truth" and later delivered an address in the Eirenion, a lecture hall dedicated to peace.

DID YOU KNOW?



Shoghi Effendi Did More Than Interpret the Faith. He Built Its Administrative Structure.

The official Baha'i sources explicitly describe Shoghi Effendi's ministry as the period in which the Baha'i Administrative Order was substantially developed and organized?

The official Baha'i account states that during his 36-year ministry, Shoghi Effendi "raised up the structure of elected Spiritual Assemblies" and, working with them, established the administrative foundations that eventually prepared the way for the election of the Universal House of Justice.

Shoghi himself described the Administrative Order as the structure upon which the future World Order of Baha'u'llah would ultimately be built. He also described the Will and Testament of Abdu'l Baha as the "Charter" of that Administrative Order.

But here is the question Free Baha'is believe every believer should ask:

If Shoghi Effendi was responsible for developing and organizing the system that would eventually govern the worldwide Baha'i community, where exactly does the Revelation end and administrative development begin?

That question is not answered by simply calling the system "divinely ordained."

It must be examined through the Writings, the history, and the evidence.

Because an institution may claim to serve the Faith — but it must always be the Faith that judges the institution. Free Baha'is simply refuse to let any administration close that door again.



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