Letters to Individuals, April 21st, 1926 — April 21st, 1934.

Shoghi Effendi

Original English



Part II

Letters to Individuals, April 21st, 1926 — April 21st,

The first combined National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand was formed in

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August 12th, 1926

To Sarah Blundell

My very dear Spiritual Sister: Shoghi Effendi has been in receipt of your interesting letter dated June 7,20. It is a great pity that your health has more or less handicapped you in your service to the Cause. We, however, hope that this weakness will soon vanish and your health and strength be fully restored. The case of the teacher who has been in Palestine is one really to be lamented. All such persons instead of procuring their information from the very source, when they are so near to it, they go to the Missionaries who are undoubtedly biased. They are immediately told that the Cause is nothing more than a sect of Islám; a Movement that may do immense good to the Muḥammadan world, but far from ranking with Christianity or satisfying its needs. Then they refer this ignorant and innocent person to books such as Brown's. It is their fault for having gone to the wrong source for proper information, but once they have gone it is not their mistake to have been misled. We have heard of many such instances and there is absolutely no remedy except to leave them until they find the truth for themselves. We can only pray for their guidance. Shoghi Effendi always prays for you as well as the other Auckland friends, so that through your combined efforts the Cause may prosper there, and obtain a strong position in the





life of the people. I am not the least familiar with the social conditions there, but I am sure there is a ready field for active service. Yours in His Name, Rúḥí Afnán

My dear fellow-worker:

I rejoice to learn that your dear sons are realizing gradually the significance of this unique and mighty Cause, and my constant and fervent prayer is that you may witness erelong the fruition of their slow yet sure spiritual evolution. Persevere in your labours for I entertain and cherish the brightest hopes for the future awakening of promising New-Zealand. I shall ever remember the memorable visit of the first New-Zealand believers to the Holy Land. Please assure them of my undying

Your true brother,

Shoghi

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August 12th, 1926

To Margaret Stevenson

My dear Spiritual Sister: Shoghi Effendi wishes me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated June 7,20. It was most interesting to go over your circular letter and read the many points of interest. I was especially struck by the literature you have sent to Lord and Lady Allenby. If they have at all seen them I am sure they were much impressed, for they knew the Master so well. They were surely very astonished to see a group of Bahá'ís formed in such a distant land. I am very ashamed of myself not to have yet answered your letter of some months ago. It was mainly because Shoghi Effendi wrote you and acknowledged the receipt of your contribution for the pilgrim house that I have been so neglectful. I took Miss Baker's advice on the matter and together we went down-town and bought a set of straw chairs. We thought that would be most appreciated by the friends while sitting in the veranda of the new Pilgrim House. I remember a prayer, which you wrote, has been asked by a certain friend to be read daily. I believe sometimes the friends through their zeal and ardour do things that are not asked in the Cause. We have only one prayer that we have to say daily. No one in the world has the power, given to him by Bahá'u'lláh to add another to that daily prayer. If we should admit this the life of the friends will soon be spent in mere prayer, which is not the aim of the Cause. The healing prayer and such ones are only for occasional use when the need arises. Shoghi Effendi wishes me to extend to you his hearty greetings and assure you of his prayers. Yours in His Name, Rúhí Afnán

My dear fellow-worker:

Your letters are always a source of inspiring joy and stimulating encouragement to me. You are destined to achieve great things for our beloved Cause and my constant prayer is that your vision may be clear, your purpose unshaken, your zeal undiminished, your hopes undimmed. Let

not obstacles and disappointments, which are inevitable, dishearten you and whenever you are faced with trials recall our Beloved's innumerable sufferings. You certainly occupy a warm and abiding place in my heart. Your true brother,

Shoghi

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August 25th, 1926

To Evelyn Watkin

Dear Spiritual Sister: Shoghi Effendi wishes me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated June 14th 1926, and also thank, through you, the Auckland friends for their kind contribution. He wishes me to assure you and them of his earnest prayers. He hopes that through your constant endeavours the Cause will progress rapidly in that city and make the spirit of the movement permeate throughout the land. Though your number is still comparatively small yet through divine guidance and the Master's ever wakeful spirit you will soon add many to your group and make of it a power for goodness which will attract all attention. With best wishes and kindest greetings I remain, Yours ever sincerely, Rúḥí Afnán

My dear fellow-worker:

I am touched by this expression of the loyalty and devotion of the Auckland Bahá'ís whose welfare, and spiritual advancement are the object of my earnest and constant prayer. I shall devote it to further the interests of the Cause in ways that are dearest and nearest to my heart. I shall supplicate the Almighty that strength and wisdom may be given you to face and overcome the obstacles and trials that you will inevitably encounter in future. The end is glorious if we only persevere.

Your true brother, Shoghi

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September 18th, 1926

To Bertram Dewing

Dear Spiritual Brother: Shoghi Effendi wishes me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated July 18,

He was very glad to learn of the encouraging prospects you have for your "Herald of the South". He hopes that it will daily progress and add to its importance in drawing the attention of the people there. A good periodical fully representative of the spirit and teachings of the Cause is the greatest help the Movement can have in establishing itself in a country. So though difficulties may be found at the outset, we should bear them patiently and await that the future should give us our reward. Shoghi Effendi wishes me to extend to you his loving greetings and assure you, as well as your mother and Mr. Brewer, of his constant prayers. He hopes that through your combined efforts the Herald of the South will soon realise its aim and purpose. Yours in His Service, Rúhí Afnán

My dear and precious co-worker: Your welcome letter has cheered my heart and I look forward with confidence and joy to the harvest which you are destined to reap in the not distant future. I shall be so pleased and grateful if you would send me regularly a copy of your Bahá'í periodical which I trust and pray will grow from strength to strength and contribute its destined share to the progress and consolidation of the Cause of God. Be assured of my prayers for your happiness, welfare and spiritual

Your true brother, Shoghi

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October 23rd, 1926

To Sarah Blundell

Dear Spiritual Sister: Shoghi Effendi wishes me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated 11-9-26. He was most gratified to learn that the Cause is becoming more and more known and appreciated by the people in New Zealand. This is as important as the actual increase of the number of the friends, for it means that the principles are gradually permeating the thoughts of the people and making them more ready and receptive to the full identification of their beliefs with the precepts of the Cause. Shoghi Effendi wishes me to assure you of his prayers for you as well as for the other friends in New Zealand. He hopes that they will increase both in number as well as in spiritual understanding and insight. The reports that we occasionally receive from there are most encouraging and hopeful. It seems that the people there due to their breadth of mind and lack of traditional draw-backs show better prospect than many other places. With deepest loving greetings, Yours in His Name, Rúḥí Afnán

My dear co-worker: Your letter rejoiced my heart. I request you to persevere and renew your splendid efforts for the consolidation of the work already achieved. I have great hopes in the 'Herald of the South' and trust that the Editor will be guided and strengthened in his noble undertaking. I shall be obliged if you send me copies of any newspapers that may publish anything on the Cause as I am

preparing a collection of them in the Holy Land. Please assure the friends in New-Zealand of my continued prayers at the holy Shrines for the success of their pioneer work. Your true brother,

Shoghi

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November 3rd, 1926

To Amy Dewing

Dear Spiritual Sister: Shoghi Effendi wishes me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated September 13th19. He was most gratified to read the nice and encouraging news it contained. He hopes that the "Herald of the South" will daily increase in importance and now that it is coming out in printed form, obtain a great number of readers. You should try from the very start to maintain a high standard for its articles. They should be broad in view, clear in style and scholarly in their development of the different subjects. In short the 'public' should be taught to consider it as a paper fully worthwhile to read and meditate upon. Shoghi Effendi will remember in his prayers all those who are working in this noble field of service. Shoghi Effendi desires that you should extend his loving greetings to all the friends in Auckland. He hopes that through their endeavours and the Master's invisible guiding hand they will succeed to raise the standard of the Cause in that land to such heights that it will arouse the interest of all the seeking souls and in due time win their support. The members of the Master's family are well and send you their loving greetings. Yours in His Service, Rúhí Afnán

My dear co-worker: I shall pray from all my heart for the steady development and the growing influence of the "Herald of the South". May its voice grow in strength and power, and may its pages increasingly reflect the dynamic spirit of the Faith and mirror forth the ever-expanding activities of the

^{1.} Mrs Amy Dewing and her son Bertram were among New Zealand's earliest Bahá'ís; Mrs Dewing came from an orthodox Church of England background and viewed with disapproval her son's questioning attitude which led him to describe himself as a Rationalist. They heard of and accepted the Truth of the Bahá'í Cause after meeting with "Mother" and "Father" Dunn in Devonport, Auckland and, in 1926, both of them served as members of the first Local Spiritual Assembly in Auckland. Amy Dewing, as one of a small and persevering group of New Zealand believers, was active in spreading the Message as was her son through whose efforts a Bahá'í magazine was published in Australia and New Zealand to promote the teachings. Prior to her passing in 1957, Amy Dewing witnessed the emergence of the New Zealand community as an independent entity.

Having

travelled extensively overseas, Bertram Dewing eventually settled in Auckland. A tireless worker for the Faith, he was a member of the first Local Spiritual Assembly in Devonport in 1951 and in 1958 was elected to the second National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand. He pioneered to Hokianga in the same year and a decade later assisted in spreading the Faith to New Plymouth where he worked for the Cause with unabated zeal until he passed to the Abhá Kingdom in 1972 at the age of seventy.

friends in Australasia as well as in distant lands. Persevere in your efforts, let not obstacles damp your zeal and determination and rest assured that the Power of God which is reinforcing your efforts will in the end triumph and enable you to fulfil your cherished desire.

Shoghi

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January 11th, 1927

To Amy Dewing

Dear Bahá'í Sister, Our beloved Guardian has asked me to write to you for him. He is very pleased with your letter of Dec. 8th which reached him on Jan. 10th and he is very glad to hear of your activities in New Zealand. He will pray earnestly that your sincere efforts to make Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation widely known will bring forth much fruit and have a great result. In the newer countries minds are more open, and the people more ready and willing to receive this Great Message. With regard to the Queen of Rumania's 3 articles — he will see that you receive them correctly. He considers the last one in which she acknowledges Muḥammad as a true Prophet of God to have great importance for the East and especially in Persia. This evening, I personally have had a most interesting conversation with Dr. Habíb of Kirmánsháh² who is now on a visit to Shoghi Effendi with his wife and little girl. He was telling us of the continued fanaticism of the Moslems of Persia — and how during two periods of the year especially, the fanatical Mullás preach against the Bahá'ís from their pulpits — saying to the ignorant "No matter what evil things you have done during your life, or what sins you have committed, if you kill a Bahá'í who is an enemy of Islám, or even if you take his property or severely injure him, all your own sins will be wiped out and forgiven for the sake of this good deed of destroying an enemy of the Faith!!" — in this way they incite the people to deeds of violence and persecution. He said that the Bahá'í teachings are spreading rapidly amongst the more educated classes but it is difficult to teach the very poor and ignorant fanatical people — tho' when they do become Believers, they are very strong and faithful. The 2 periods of particular danger for the Bahá'ís in Persia are the fast month and the period of Moharram³ which lasts for 8 weeks.

Shoghi Effendi is very interested to hear of the engagement of your son to a Bahá'í young lady—and he prays that in future they may do a great work for the "Cause". He hopes so much that you will recover your full health and strength, and he will pray especially for that. It is good to

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3. The Moslem calendar dates from Muḥammad's emigration or Hijrah from Mecca to Medina in 622 A.D. The Moslem year begins with the month of Muharram of which the first ten days are observed by Shí'ah Moslems as part of their mourning period for the Imáms. The tenth day is called Ashura and commemorates the martyrdom of Ḥusayn, the grand-son of Muḥammad, who was cut down by thirty-three strokes of swords and lances and decapitated: his clothes were torn from him and his naked body trampled by horses hooves.

know that Esperanto is increasingly studied in New Zealand. He will certainly pray for Miss Palter⁴ and her Mother as you ask him to do — and also for your dear son and your two daughters.

Please accept all best wishes from myself and Believe me Yours in His Service,

Ethel J. Rosenberg

Μv dear and able co-worker: I have read the issues of the "Herald" with deep joy and thankfulness. I will continue to pray at the holy shrines that the invincible power of Bahá'u'lláh may add to your present opportunities, extend the sphere of the Journal, and enable you, individually and collectively, to mirror forth the beauty and the of this Divine Revelation. power Your brother, true Shoghi

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January 30th, 1927

To Evelyn Watkin

Dear Bahá'í Sister, Shoghi Effendi wishes me to thank you for the M.O. for £1 — which he has safely received, sent for the help of the sufferers in Persia. He is himself sending this money to the Nat. Assembly in Tihrán, and has requested them to send him the receipt for it — When he receives their receipt he will forward it to you, and urges you to give it to the friend who sent the money. The Persian friends will be very much pleased at receiving this kind remembrance and help from far distant New Zealand! With love and warm Bahá'í greetings from the holy household and the friends here, to the dear friends in Auckland. In the Master's Service, Sincerely Yours, Ethel J. Rosenberg

dear co-worker: My I am deeply touched by this further evidence of the love and devotion of the New-Zealand Bahá'ís and I will gladly forward their contribution of our friend to the Tihrán Assembly to be sent by them to the sufferers in Jahrum. I will ardently pray for every one of you that the Beloved may guide and lead your steps you to glorious victory. Your true brother, Shoghi

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^{4.} Miss Palter was the fiancee of Bertram Dewing. The name is possibly misspelled, and may be "Miss Patton". (Department of the Secretariat, Universal House of Justice. August 16th, 1979)

May 13th, 1927

To Margaret Stevenson

My dear Bahá'í Sister, I take pleasure in thanking you on behalf of my dear Guardian for your letter of April 5th. As a far away outpost of the Bahá'í Faith in New Zealand, he is always delighted to hear from Auckland and especially yourself and your promising Assembly there. You own a warm spot in his heart and he is looking forward to the day when through the efforts of the Auckland Assembly, centres will be established in every town in New Zealand. A firm faith and a golden heart is yours, there still remains to turn other hearts into gold. Miss Butler is well and often thinks of you. Assuring you of our Guardian's prayers and the love and best wishes of the family who always remember you. Ever yours in His Service, Soheil Afnán

My dear and precious co-worker: You should exercise your judgement and tact in delivering the message. You should make an effort to understand the character and mind of the seeker before you speak to him on the Cause. I will pray that you may be inspired and guided to follow the path of moderation and may become exemplary herald His of message that Your well-wisher. Shoghi

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June 4th, 1929

Dear Spiritual Sister: Shoghi Effendi wishes me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of Feb. 14th. He always feels great pleasure to obtain some news from the friends of that distant land and he hopes and prays that through God's blessings and your constant endeavours the Cause will develop in New Zealand and bring into its fold many sincere and devoted souls. The news that we daily obtain from the different parts of the world bring in wonderful news of the progress of the Movement. The world is gradually appreciating the significance of this Movement which has been for so long misunderstood and denounced. Yours ever sincerely, Rúḥí Afnán

My dear Spiritual Sister: I wish to assure you in person of my prayers for you as well as the dear and unforgettable friends in Auckland who assuredly occupy a warm and abiding place in my heart. I eagerly await the news of the progress of their work, and trust and pray that the Almighty may guide their steps, and help them to surmount every obstacle.

Shoghi



October 4th, 1930

To Bertram Dewing

Dear Bahá'í Brother: Shoghi Effendi wishes me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated April 6th 1930 written from London. He was very happy to learn that wherever you have been you have received wonderful reception from the friends. Surely, it is only through such acts of hospitality that the true spirit of the Cause is manifested. Shoghi Effendi wishes me to assure you of his prayers and extend to you his hope that wherever you go you will feel the divine help and guidance. He hopes that in America you will experience the true spirit of love that animates the friends there and that you will give them Shoghi Effendi's greetings. Yours ever sincerely, Rúhí Afnán

My dear and precious co-worker: I was much pleased to hear from you and to learn of your experiences. I trust that the same welcome and loving-kindness will be extended to you by the American friends. You are often in my thoughts, and I will continue to pray for your spiritual as well as material welfare and advancement. Convey, when you write to your Mother, my loving and affectionate greetings. Your true brother, Shoghi

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May 18th, 1931

To Amy Dewing

My dear Bahá'í Sister: I thank you on behalf of the Guardian for your letter of April 16th. He was very glad to know that you are now on your way to England by way of America and he hopes that you will find the occasion and the means of visiting the friends and making permanent connections with them. Bertram will of course be delighted to meet you and we hope he is successful in his work there. I suppose you have all the London addresses as the friends there would be delighted to meet you. Of course if you do decide to visit Haifa on your way back, Shoghi Effendi wishes me to assure you of a most hearty welcome. With his loving greetings to you all and to the young couple in England and with much love from all here. Sincerely yours, Soheil Afnán

My dear co-worker: I was so pleased to hear from you and of your plans. I do hope you will be able to visit the Holy Land where you would be most welcome in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's home. I will pray for the success of your efforts from the depths of my heart when I visit the holy shrines. May the Beloved enable you to render distinguished services to His Cause and remove every obstacle from your path.

Your Shoghi true

brother,

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December 17th, 1931

To Amy Dewing

Dear Bahá'í Sister: Shoghi Effendi wishes me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated Dec. 2nd 19. He is very sorry that you cannot on your way to New Zealand, break your journey and come over for a short visit to Haifa. But these are such difficult days that we should not be astonished and discouraged if our plans fail. He hopes however that on your way you will meet the friends, especially those in Port Sa'íd, for we have no centers in Haifa and Colombo. He was also very sorry to hear that Bertram has to give up his studies and return home. Shoghi Effendi hopes that this period he spent in America would be itself an education that would help him in his work in serving the Cause. His activities with the young people there should have made him very experienced and have deepened his understanding of the Faith. I believe Mrs. Dunn is planning to come this spring for a visit to Haifa. Perhaps you will meet her before she starts, Shoghi Effendi is eagerly waiting to see this noble soul who introduced the Cause into Australia and has been so self-sacrificing in her services. Shoghi Effendi hopes that on returning home you will start again to serve the Cause and attract new souls. The world is in great distress and its only salvation is in the spirit and teachings of the Blessed Beauty. Let us not, we who are the trustees of that divine message, fail in accomplishing our task and fulfilling our purpose. Assuring you of Shoghi Effendi's best wishes I remain Yours ever sincerely, Rúhí Afnán

Dear and valued co-worker: I am wiring the friends in Port-Sa'id to meet you on your arrival and I very much regret your inability to come to Haifa and visit the holy shrines. I will continue to pray for you, for your son-in-law and for your dear and promising son for whose future work in the Cause I cherish the brightest hopes. I will also remember in my prayers the friends in far-away Australia and New Zealand and will supplicate for them all the Master's richest blessings and unfailing guidance. Shoghi



April 29th, 1933

To Emily Axford

Dear Bahá'í Sister: Shoghi Effendi wishes me to thank you⁵ for your kind letter of March 16th 1933, as well as the enclosed article which has been translated by Mr. Paul into the Maori language. The Guardian has already written Mr. Paul and expressed to him his deep appreciation for the service he has rendered to the Faith, but especially to his own people who through the means of such literature will be acquainted with the teachings and will receive the light of guidance brought to the world by Bahá'u'lláh. I believe the Guardian has already intimated his approval of this pamphlet and the desire that the friends in Australia publish and circulate it among the Maoris.

As regards the passages in the sacred writings indicating the wrath of God; Shoghi Effendi says that the Divinity has many attributes: He is loving and merciful but also just. Just as reward and punishment, according to Bahá'u'lláh, are the pillars upon which society rests, so mercy and justice may be considered as their counterpart in the world to come. Should we disobey God and work against His commands He will view our acts in the light of justice and punish us for it. That punishment may not be in the form of fire, as some believe, but in the form of spiritual deprivation and degradation. This is why we read so often in the prayers statements such as "God do not deal with us with justice, but rather through thy infinite mercy." The wrath of God is in the administration of His justice, both in this world and in the world to come. A God that is only loving or only just is not a perfect God. The divinity has to possess both of these aspects as every father ought to express both in his attitude towards his children. If we ponder a while, we will see that our welfare can be insured only when both of these divine attributes are equally emphasised and practiced. In closing may I express the Guardian's loving greetings and best wishes the progress of your work in serving the Cause. Yours ever sincerely, Rúhí Afnán

May the Almighty bless your efforts, deepen your understanding of the essentials and distinguishing features of His Faith, guide your steps, and aid and assist you to extend the range of your activities and services.

Your true brother, Shoghi

^{5.} Three years later, Mrs Axford was elected Chairman of the first Local Spiritual Assembly in Auckland and for many years conducted classes in public speaking to help the friends overcome their shyness and reticence so that they might teach the Faith effectively. Emily was one of three New Zealand delegates who attended the National Convention held in Sydney during 1934 and the following year was elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand. She continued to work staunchly for the Faith, being appointed in 1946 to the Regional Teaching Committee responsible for formulating teaching plans throughout New Zealand. The following year, she assumed the delicate task of conducting negotiations with the immigration authorities so that Bahá'ís from Persia might be permitted to enter New Zealand as University students, and was actively engaged in this work up to the time of her passing on December 26th, 1949.



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September 1st, 1933

To Eleanor Leighton

Dear Bahá'í Friend, Shoghi Effendi has directed me to address you these few lines, acknowledging the receipt of your welcome letter of July 20th, 33, which he has read with deepest interest. He was gratified to learn that you have newly embraced the Cause and that you are earnestly endeavouring to spread it through every possible means. It is on young and active Bahá'ís, like you, that the Guardian centers all his hopes for the future progress and expansion of the Cause and it is on their shoulders that he lays all the responsibility for the upkeep of the spirit of selfless service among their fellow-believers. Without that spirit, no work can be successfully achieved. With it triumph, though hardly-won, is but inevitable. You should, therefore, try all your best to carry aflame within you the torch of faith, for through it you will surely find guidance, strength and eventual success. The Guardian is fully conscious of the difficulties that impede the progress of the Faith in your community. Chief among these, you mention the lack of courage and of initiative on the part of the believers, and a feeling of inferiority complex which prevents them from addressing the public. It is precisely these weaknesses that he wishes the friends to overcome, for these do not only paralyze their efforts but actually serve to quench the flame of faith in their hearts. Not until all the friends come to realize that every one of them is able, in his own measure, to deliver the Message, can they ever hope to reach the goal that has been set before them by a loving and wise Master. It is no use waiting for some able and eloquent teacher to take all the responsibility for the spread of the Cause. For such a thing is not only contrary to the spirit of the Teachings but to the explicit text of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, both of whom place the obligation of teaching not on any particular class, as in former ecclesiastical organizations, but on every faithful and loyal follower of the Cause. The teaching of the Word is thus made universal and compulsory. How long then shall we wait to carry out this command, the full wisdom of which only future generations will be able to appreciate? We have no special teachers in the Cause. Everyone is a potential teacher. He has only to use what God has given him and thus prove that he is faithful to his trust.

Visiting teachers, who are, at least in a general way, supposed to be more competent and able than the rest, are undoubtedly of a great help. But these can never replace the mass of individual believers and fulfil what must be inevitably accomplished through the collective effort and wisdom of the community at large. What visiting teachers are supposed to do is to give the final touch to the work that has been done, to consolidate rather than supplement individual efforts and thereby direct them in a constructive and suitable channel. Their task is to encourage and inspire individual believers, and to broaden and deepen their vision of the task that is to be done. And this, not by virtue of any inherent spiritual right, but in the spirit of simple and whole-hearted cooperation. It is in this light that Shoghi Effendi views the whole problem of teaching not only in New Zealand but in all the Bahá'í world. He would, therefore, encourage you to take a leading part in the carrying out of his wishes on this point, to take yourself an active

interest in teaching, not only private but also public, and in this way stimulate the friends to follow your example. It is then, and only then, that there can be a need for a qualified and competent visiting teacher in order to bring to full fruition individual teaching efforts. Assuring you of our Guardian's fervent prayers on your behalf, so that you may be increasingly blessed in your efforts for the spread of the Message. Yours in His Service, H. Rabbání

May the Beloved guide your steps, cheer your heart, deepen your understanding of the distinguishing features of His Faith and enable you to render the sacred Threshold unique and inestimable

Services,
Your

true

brother,
Shoghi

