

Extracts From Letters Written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi

Original English



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— 42 —

In regard to the question as to whether people ought to kill animals for food or not, there is no explicit statement in the Bahá'í Sacred Scriptures (as far as I know) in favour or against it. It is certain, however, that if man can live on a purely vegetarian diet and thus avoid killing animals, it would be much preferable. This is, however, a very controversial question and the Bahá'ís are free to express their views on it.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 9 July 1931

— 43 —

'Abdu'l-Bahá does often state that the medical science will much improve. With the appearance of every Revelation a new insight is created in man and this in turn expresses itself in the growth of science. This has happened in past dispensations and we find its earliest fruits in our present day. What we see however is only the beginning. With the spiritual awakening of man this force will develop and marvelous results will become manifest.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 14 January 1932 to two believers

— 44 —

Bahá'u'lláh tells us that in case of disease we should pray but at the same time refer to competent physicians, and abide by their considered decision. Shoghi Effendi wishes you therefore to find whether your son has really become ill, and if he is, then follow the directions of the doctor. Being versed in the medical sciences they can treat better



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than even a loving mother can. You can render your assistance by praying for him and at the same time helping the physicians to treat him.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 9 April 1933

— 45 —

In the “Book of Aqdas” Bahá’u’lláh urges us that when we obtain any physical ailment we should refer to the doctor and abide by his decision. Physical and spiritual forces have both to be used to secure the speedy recovery of the patients; no partial treatment is sufficient...

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 1 June 1933

— 46 —

Healing through purely spiritual forces is undoubtedly as inadequate as that which materialist physicians and thinkers vainly seek to obtain by resorting entirely to mechanical devices and methods. The best result can be obtained by combining the two processes: spiritual and physical.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 12 March 1934

— 47 —

With regard to your question concerning spiritual healing: Such a healing constitutes, indeed, one of the most effective methods of relieving a person from either his mental or physical pains and sufferings. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has in His “Paris Talks” emphasized its importance by stating that it should be used as an essential means for effecting a complete physical cure. Spiritual healing, however, is not and cannot be a substitute for material healing, but it is a most valuable adjunct to it. Both are, indeed, essential and complementary.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 16 February 1935

— 48 —

With reference to your question concerning spiritual healing: Its importance, as you surely know, has been greatly emphasized by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who considered it, indeed, as an essential part of physical processes of healing. Physical healing cannot be complete and lasting unless it is reinforced by spiritual healing. And this last one can be best obtained through obedience to the laws and commandments of God as revealed to us through His Manifestations. Individual believers, however, can also help by

imparting healing to others. But the success of their efforts depends entirely on their strict adherence to the Teachings, and also on the manner in which they impart them to others. According to Bahá'u'lláh man cannot obtain full guidance directly from God. He must rather seek it through His Prophets. Provided this principle is clearly understood and explained, the Guardian sees no harm that the friends should try to effect spiritual healing in others. Any such cure effected, however, should be done in the name of Bahá'u'lláh and in accordance with His teachings. For God, and God alone, is the Supreme and Almighty Physician, and all else are but instruments in His hands.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 23 May 1935

— 49 —

As to your question concerning the meaning of physical suffering and its relation to mental and spiritual healing: Physical pain is a necessary accompaniment of all human existence, and as such is unavoidable. As long as there will be life on earth, there will be also suffering, in various forms and degrees. But suffering, although an inescapable reality, can nevertheless be utilized as a means for the attainment of happiness. This is the interpretation given to it by all the Prophets and saints, who, in the midst of severe tests and trials, felt happy and joyous and experienced what is best and holiest in life. Suffering is both a reminder and a guide. It stimulates us to better adapt ourselves to our environmental conditions, and thus leads the way to self-improvement. In every suffering one can find a meaning and a wisdom. But it is not always easy to find the secret of that wisdom. It is sometimes only when all our suffering has passed that we become aware of its usefulness. What man considers to be evil turns often to be a cause of infinite blessings. And this is due to his desire to know more than he can. God's wisdom is, indeed, inscrutable to us all, and it is no use pushing too far trying to discover that which shall always remain a mystery to our mind.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 29 May 1935

— 50 —

Regarding your questions concerning the condition of the soul during illness: The passages in the *"Gleanings"* make it quite clear that physical ailments, no matter how severe, cannot bring any change in the inherent condition of the soul. As Bahá'u'lláh says: "The spirit is permanent and steadfast in its station".¹ The veil or hindrance that interposes between soul and body during physical disease is sickness itself. Sickness

¹ The words quoted here are from a translation appearing in "Bahá'í Scriptures", p. 228. The passage as translated by Shoghi Effendi appears in "Gleanings" section LXXX, as follows: "...the soul itself remaineth unaffected by any bodily ailments."

reveals a lack of balance in the human organism, an absence of equilibrium in the forces essential for the normal functioning of the human body.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 8 March 1936

— 51 —

As to your question regarding the possibility of an artificial production of life by means of an incubator: this is essentially a matter that concerns science, and as such should be investigated and studied by scientists.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 31 December 1937

— 52 —

As to the possibility of conception without the presence of a male sperm in the future: this is a question which lies entirely within the province of science, and which future scientists will have to investigate.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 27 February 1938

— 53 —

The Teachings bear no reference to the question of telepathy. It is a matter that concerns psychology.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 28 February 1938

— 54 —

The eating of pork is not forbidden in the Bahá'í Teachings.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 27 March 1938

— 55 —

These investigations you have so painstakingly pursued in the field of medical science, and on a subject which is still puzzling the minds of all the leading scientists in the world, cannot but be of a captivating interest and of a great value to all medical research workers.

It is significant that you as a believer should have undertaken a work of this nature, as we all know that the powers released by the Manifestation of Bahá'u'lláh in this day are

destined in the course of time to reveal themselves through the instrumentality of His followers, and in every conceivable field of human endeavour.

That you should increasingly prove, through your continued researches in the domain of medicine, to be one of those instruments is the fervent hope of our beloved Guardian....

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 29 November 1938

— 56 —

Such hindrances, no matter how severe and insuperable they may at first seem, can and should be effectively overcome through the combined and sustained power of prayer and of determined and continued effort....

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 6 February 1939

— 57 —

The Bahá'í Teachings do not only encourage marital life, considering it the natural and normal way of existence for every sane, healthy and socially-conscious and responsible person, but raise marriage to the status of a divine institution, its chief and sacred purpose being the perpetuation of the human race — which is the very flower of the entire creation — and its elevation to the true station destined for it by God.

That there should be, however, certain individuals who by reason of some serious deficiency, physical or mental, would be incapacitated to contract marriage and enjoy the blessings of an enduring and successful marital life is only too evident, but these constitute only a very small section of humanity, and are therefore merely an exception, and their condition cannot possibly invalidate what an all-wise and loving Providence has decreed to be the normal way to a fruitful and constructive social existence.

The exact conditions and circumstances under which such incapacitated individuals should be advised or even prevented perhaps from entering into any sort of marital existence have not been specified in the Bahá'í Writings, but will have to be defined later on by the Universal House of Justice. In the mean time, those believers who consider themselves as falling into the above category would do well, before taking any final decision themselves, to consult medical experts, who are both conscientious and competent, and to abide by their recommendation.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 15 April 1939

— 58 —

Also with regard to the practice of circumcision; the Teachings bear no reference to this matter, and it is therefore not enjoined upon the believers.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 14 December 1940 to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma

— 59 —

Regarding your question about vaccination: these are technical matters which have not been specifically mentioned in the teachings, and consequently the Guardian cannot make any statement about them. No doubt medical science will progress tremendously as time goes by, and the treatment of disease become more perfect.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 22 January 1944

— 60 —

As to your question about healing: although there is no objection to your helping others to regain their health, he does not feel you should associate the name Bahá'í with your work, as it gives a wrong impression; we have no "Bahá'í healers" as Christian Science and various other sects have. You are a Bahá'í and a healer, and that is quite different.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 3 December 1945

— 61 —

The Tablet to a Physician was addressed to a man who was a student of the old type of healing prevalent in the East and familiar with the terminology used in those days, and He addresses him in terms used by the medical men of those days. These terms are quite different from those used by modern medicine, and one would have to have a deep knowledge of this former school of medicine to understand the questions Bahá'u'lláh was elucidating.

The Guardian never goes into technical matters, as this is not his work. Bahá'u'lláh has recommended that people seek the help and advice of experts and doctors; He does not say which school they should belong to.

Likewise there is nothing in the teachings about whether people should eat their food cooked or raw; exercise or not exercise; resort to specific therapies or not; nor is it forbidden to eat meat.

Bahá'u'lláh says teaching is the greatest of all services, but He does not mean one should give up medicine to teach.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 18 December 1945

— 62 —

The greatest form of healing which the Bahá'ís can practice is to heal the spiritually sick souls of men by giving this greatest of all Messages to them. We can also try to help them, both physically and spiritually, through prayer.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 25 March 1946

— 63 —

There is nothing in the teachings which would forbid a Bahá'í to bequeath his eyes to another person or for a Hospital; on the contrary it seems a noble thing to do.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 6 September 1946

— 64 —

He feels you should certainly think of your future and earning your living, and if chiropractic is the work you wish to go in for, you should continue your education; when you are finished it would be highly meritorious to enter the pioneer field, as for many years to come Bahá'í teachers will be needed in distant lands.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 31 March 1947

— 65 —

...you should not neglect your health, but consider it the means which enables you to serve. It — the body — is like a horse which carries the personality and spirit, and as such should be well cared for so it can do its work! You should certainly safeguard your nerves, and force yourself to take time, and not only for prayer and meditation, but for real rest and relaxation...

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 23 November 1947

— 66 —

Very little is as yet known about the mind and its workings. But one thing is certain: Bahá'ís can and do receive a very remarkable help and protection in this world, one which often surprises their doctors very much!

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 9 April 1948

— 67 —

The Guardian knows nothing about your kind of healing, nor would he care to go into the question in detail, as he has no time for such matters. But he can lay down for your guidance certain broad principles: there is no such thing as Bahá'í healers or a Bahá'í type of healing. In His Most Holy Book (the Aqdas) Bahá'u'lláh says to consult the best physicians, in other words doctors who have studied a scientific system of medicine; He never gave us to believe He Himself would heal us through 'healers', but rather through prayer and the assistance of medicine and approved treatments.

Now, as long as your healing is in no opposition to these principles, as long as you do not try and take the place of a regular doctor in trying to heal others, but only give them your kind of help through constructive suggestion — or whatever it may be — and do not associate this help with being a channel of the direct grace of Bahá'u'lláh, the Guardian sees no harm in your continuing your assistance to others. But you must conscientiously decide whether in view of the above you are really justified in continuing. He will pray for your guidance and happiness.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 8 June 1948

— 68 —

He does not feel that you should try to do anything special about the capacity you feel to help people when they are ill. This does not mean you should not use it, when the occasion arises, such as it did recently. But he means you should not become a "healer" such as the Christian Scientists have, and we Bahá'ís do not have.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 25 December 1949

— 69 —

We have no reason to believe that the healing of the Holy Spirit cannot be attracted by ordinary human beings. But this is rare, a mystery, and a gift of God.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 26 March 1950

There is nothing in our teachings about Freud and his method. Psychiatric treatment in general is no doubt an important contribution to medicine, but we must believe it is still a growing rather than a perfected science. As Bahá'u'lláh has urged us to avail ourselves of the help of good physicians Bahá'ís are certainly not only free to turn to psychiatry for assistance but should, when advisable, do so. This does not mean psychiatrists are always wise or always right, it means we are free to avail ourselves of the best medicine has to offer us.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 15 June 1950 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles

...as we are a religion and not qualified to pass on scientific matters we cannot sponsor different treatments. We are certainly free to pass on what we have found beneficial to others.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 30 September 1950

The Guardian sees no reason why you should not continue to help sick people. As he wrote some of the believers regarding this matter previously, as long as you do not say you are healing them as a Bahá'í, or because you are a Bahá'í (because we have no "healers" in the Cause as such) there can be certainly no objection to your doing it. On the contrary, to be able to help another soul who is in suffering is a great bounty from God.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 5 October 1950

There is nothing in the Teachings about chiropractic as a method of healing. People are free to turn to it if they please and find help through it.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 10 February 1951

Regarding your question: there are very few people who can get along without eight hours sleep. If you are not one of those, you should protect your health by sleeping

enough. The Guardian himself finds that it impairs his working capacity if he does not try and get a minimum of seven or eight hours.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 5 September 1951 to two believers

— 75 —

There is nothing in the teachings about Socialized Medicine. All these details are for the House of Justice to decide.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 18 February 1951

— 76 —

Every day medical science is progressing, and it is quite possible that some new form of treatment or some new doctor may be able to get you on your feet. He will certainly pray that this may be so.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 24 February 1952

— 77 —

So you see he cannot possibly pronounce on the merits of Dianetics. The believers are free to investigate new things, and use them if they prove of real value and no harm.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 30 August 1952

— 78 —

He was sorry to hear you have been ill, and urges you to cooperate fully with your doctors in order to regain your health as soon as possible and be free to serve the Cause.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 19 July 1953

— 79 —

The beloved Guardian says that the question of circumcision has nothing to do with the Bahá'í Teachings; and the believers are free to do as they please in the matter.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 27 March 1954

He is pleased to see that you are feeling better, and will certainly pray for your full recovery. Before having any serious operation, you should consult more than one qualified physician.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 8 April 1954

Regarding various matters raised in your letters: There is nothing in the Teachings to prevent a Bahá'í from willing his body for medical research after death. However, it should be made clear that the remains must be buried eventually and not cremated, as this is according to Bahá'í law.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 26 June 1956 to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada

There is nothing in the Teachings against leaving our bodies to medical science. The only thing we should stipulate is that we do not wish to be cremated, as it is against our Bahá'í Laws.

As many people make arrangements to leave their bodies to medical science for investigation, he suggests that you inquire, either through some lawyer friend or through some hospital, how you could do this, and then make the necessary provision in your will, stipulating that you wish your body be of service to mankind in death, and that, being a Bahá'í, you request that your remains not be cremated and not be taken more than an hour's journey from the place you die.

The spirit has no more connection with the body after it departs, but, as the body was once the temple of the spirit, we Bahá'ís are taught that it must be treated with respect.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 22 March 1957

