

Chapter 13

Rúhíyyih Rabbani

Original English



Chapter 13

The Rise of the Administrative Order

During the years when the Guardian was building up not only the material, tangible assets of the Faith at its World Centre but winning for it the recognition of both the government of the country in which that Centre was situated and the municipal authorities in whose city its chief institutions were to have their permanent headquarters, he was performing at the same time a similar function abroad. Years later he defined what this had been: a triple, worldwide effort to demonstrate the independent character of the Faith, to enlarge its limits and to swell the number of its supporters. In order, however, to accomplish this he had to have instruments and those instruments, so clearly provided for in the teachings, were the local and National Assemblies, the building blocks of its Administrative Order. It is interesting to note that Shoghi Effendi, in a letter to a non-Bahá'í, in 1941, clearly defines his relationship to this all-important work: "...The Administrative Order which I, as the responsible interpreter appointed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, have laboured to expound and establish...in accordance with the explicit instructions written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will..."; evidently not satisfied that he had stated it sufficiently unambiguously he goes on in this letter to rephrase it, saying he had been "empowered and called upon" to establish it.

Although Shoghi Effendi very seldom mentioned himself — indeed very seldom in his general messages ever used the pronoun "I" — the powers conferred upon him in the *Will and Testament* were such that without them the Bahá'í Administrative Order could never have been built, the Bahá'í World Community as we know it today never brought into being, the foundations of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh never laid. As the institutions of the Cause locally and nationally multiplied and its fabric grew stronger, the Guardian's true position became more evident not only to those older Bahá'ís who had always recognized it, but to the many new and often inexperienced believers who had not yet grasped its true significance and implications. There is one letter in which he was forced, in order to protect the Cause, to set forth his own administrative powers; it was written in reply to a singularly imperceptive letter from the Secretary of a National Assembly, to which, most exceptionally, he did not append any postscript in his own hand but merely added: "Read and approved, Shoghi". This letter stated:

Just as the N.S.A. has full jurisdiction over all its Local Assemblies, the Guardian has full jurisdiction over all National Assemblies; he is not required to consul them, if he believes a certain decision is advisable in the interest of the Cause. He is the judge of the wisdom and advisability of the decision made by these bodies, and not they of the wisdom and advisability of



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his decisions. A perusal of the *Will and Testament* makes this principle quite clear. He is the Guardian of the Cause in the very fullness of that term, and the appointed interpreter of the Teachings, and is guided in his decisions to do that which protects it and fosters its good and highest interest.

He always has the right to step in and countermand the decisions of an N.S.A.; if he did not possess this right he would be absolutely impotent to protect the Faith, just as the N.S.A., if it were divested of the right to countermand the decisions of a Local Assembly, would be incapable of watching over and guiding the national welfare of the Bahá'í community.

It very seldom happens — but it nevertheless does happen — that he feels impelled to change a major (as you put it) decision of an N.S.A.; but he always unhesitatingly does so when necessary, and the N.S.A. in question should gladly and unhesitatingly accept this as a measure designed for the good of the Faith which its elected representatives are so devotedly seeking to serve.

It is not surprising to find that Shoghi Effendi characterized the period of the Faith that was ushered in after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ascension as the "Iron Age", "the Age of Transition", "the Formative Period". It was the Age in which the institutions of the Cause, whether national, local or international were being created, institutions which, the Guardian said, constitute the embryonic pattern that needs must evolve, during the Golden Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation, into a World Commonwealth. The "world vitalizing spirit" of the Faith, he wrote, had reached the point where it was ready to "incarnate itself in institutions designed to canalize its outspreading energies and stimulate its growth." the principles governing the Administrative Order established in the *Will and Testament* were defined by him during the first years of his ministry in a flood of letters to the believers all over the world in which he made clear the functions of Assemblies, their fields of jurisdiction and — what was still more essential — the spirit that must animate them if they were to fulfil their purpose in the immediate future.

The administrative institutions may be likened to the veins and arteries of the body that carry in their network the vital flow of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to all parts of the world; through their instrumentality a recreated society, "that Christ-promised Kingdom, that World Order whose generative impulse is none other than Bahá'u'lláh Himself, whose dominion is the entire planet, whose watchword is unity, whose animating power is the force of Justice, whose directive purpose is the reign of righteousness and truth, and whose supreme glory is the complete, the undisturbed and everlasting felicity of the whole of human kind", can be brought into being.

After defining the purely mechanical technique of how Assemblies should be elected and conduct their business, the Guardian's early admonitions to them often dealt with the subject of unity; if the "watchword" of future society was going to be "unity" it was obviously essential it should be assiduously cultivated amongst the Bahá'ís themselves. In 1923 he wrote to one of the local Assemblies: "Full harmony and understanding among the friends, outside and within the Spiritual Assembly; implicit confidence on the part of the non-members in every decision passed by their elected representatives; and the determination of these to disregard their likes and dislikes and seek naught but the general interests of the Movement — these constitute the only and sure foundation upon which any constructive work can be built in future and prove serviceable to the interests of the Cause." His letters to National Assemblies were no less emphatic, as witness these excerpts from two written during 1925: "The prime requisite,

however, of every undertaking in which the friends may engage is the maintenance of a spirit of unsullied fellowship and whole-hearted and loyal co-operation... the spirit of true Bahá'í fellowship — the only remover of our many perplexities in life, the one solvent of those inevitable problems that we shall encounter in the course of our labours for our beloved Cause." "An active, united, and harmonious National Spiritual Assembly, properly and conscientiously elected, vigorously functioning, alert and conscious of its many and pressing responsibilities, in close and continuous contact with the international centre in the Holy Land, and keenly watchful of every development throughout the length and breadth of its ever-expanding field of work — is surely in this day of urgent necessity and paramount importance, for it is the cornerstone on which the edifice of Divine Administration must ultimately rest."

Slowly, patiently, with infinite love and understanding, Shoghi Effendi educated the Assemblies, East and West, in how to conduct the affairs of the Cause of God on a proper basis, in accordance with the teachings. The members of these truly nascent institutions, like children, were prone to sometimes having rows amongst themselves; but these were not allowed by the Guardian to place the interests of the Faith itself in danger. On one such occasion, when a prominent national body, tired of one of its members, had voted him off it, Shoghi Effendi cabled them a strong warning that this could have "world-wide repercussions inflict irreparable injury Cause Bahá'u'lláh" and said the membership of the person in question should be retained and all criticism and discussion dropped and forgotten as it would "impair undivided authority institution National Assembly".

The handling of this case was not unusual; the Guardian well knew that the world, the believers and the Assemblies were still very immature; the administration of "justice" — in itself a highly involved subject — presupposes some degree of maturity, of experience, of deep knowledge of the teachings on the part of those concerned with it. It also takes a great deal of time. Over and over, during his entire ministry, the Guardian refused to arbitrate cases referred to him and urged those concerned to rise above the situation, to forget the past and forgive, to concentrate on the urgent, the paramount needs of the Faith, which were to fulfil the goals of its current Plans and spread its healing message to all mankind. Of course in cases of divorce or disputes on financial matters and other tangible issues the believers were advised to refer to their Assemblies and he urged those bodies to investigate and come to a decision; indeed, as the administrative bodies gradually matured over the years, he encouraged the Bahá'ís to refer to them their problems for solution, so that both the Bahá'ís and the Assemblies could gain in experience and learn to implement the marvellous Order of Bahá'u'lláh in their personal and community life; but nevertheless, in instances where plain inharmony, backbiting and mutual distrust had created the situation, he always called upon the friends to rise above it for the good of the Cause. His admonitions and appeals on such occasions were like a cool hand placed on a fevered brow, calming and comforting the angry and distressed contestants, soothing them until they were ready to let their essential love for their Faith flood back into their hearts and heal their wounds.

No sooner had Shoghi Effendi got national bodies properly elected and functioning — in those countries where such a step was possible — than he set about putting these bodies on an unequivocal, clear legal basis. Through his encouragement one of the great milestones in Bahá'í history was set up in 1927, five years after he had begun to function as Guardian of the Faith. That

milestone was no less than “the drafting and adoption of a Bahá’í National constitution, first framed and promulgated by the elected representatives of the American Bahá’í Community”. He has described this as the initial step in “the unification of the Bahá’í World Community and the consolidation of its Administrative Order” and said it was “a worthy and faithful exposition of the constitutional basis of Bahá’í Communities in every land, foreshadowing the final emergence of the World Bahá’í Commonwealth of the future.”

This document became the “charter” for all National Assemblies, was translated into such major languages in use throughout the Bahá’í world as Persian, Arabic, French, German and Spanish, and its provisions — based on those guiding lines Shoghi Effendi himself had been providing in his interpretive writings on the teachings of the Faith and the, as he described it, “complete system of world administration implicit in the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh” — were summarized by him in the following words: “The text of this national constitution comprises a Declaration of Trust, whose articles set forth the character and objects of the national Bahá’í community, establish the functions, designate the central office, and describe the official seal, of the body of its elected representatives, as well as a set of by-laws which define the status, the mode of election, the powers and duties of both local and national Assemblies, describe the relation of the National Assembly to the International House of Justice as well as to local Assemblies and individual believers, outline the rights and obligations of the National Convention and its relation to the National Assembly, disclose the character of Bahá’í elections, and lay down the requirements of voting membership in all Bahá’í communities.”

The drafting of the By-Laws of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the City of New York, in 1931, was likewise another great step forward in the evolution of the Administrative Order and was followed, a year later, by the legal incorporation of that Assembly in the State of New York. Of these by-laws Shoghi Effendi wrote that they would “serve as a pattern for every Bahá’í local Assembly in America and a model for every local community throughout the Bahá’í world.”

The formulation of this prototype for all national Bahá’í constitutions, as well as the framing of by-laws suitable for any local Spiritual Assembly, laid a firm basis on which both national and local Bahá’í Assemblies could obtain incorporation or registration, according to the law of the country in which they functioned, and thus hold legal title to such endowments of the Faith as land, national and local headquarters, historic sites and in some cases Bahá’í Houses of Worship — steps to which Shoghi Effendi attached the utmost importance. During 1928 the Guardian began to urge the oriental National Assemblies to form their national constitutions, patterned on the American one, and in addition to seek recognition as religious courts empowered to administer the Bahá’í laws on matters of personal status, such as marriage, divorce, inheritance and so on, which in many Islamic countries do not come within the jurisdiction of the usual civil courts.

All this primarily involved the battle of an independent Faith to obtain full recognition of its position in history and to be treated on an equal footing with other world religions. In the constant process of orienting the destinies of individual Bahá’í communities towards their common goal of becoming a completely unified international body, directed from a World Centre and labouring to achieve no less than the universal brotherhood of man, world peace and eventually a world commonwealth of nations, Shoghi Effendi seized upon the formation of the United Nations as a further means of hastening the attainment of this supreme objective.

As soon as it became apparent that the framework of this international body permitted non-governmental organizations to send their accredited representatives to various conferences convened under its auspices, Shoghi Effendi urged what was then the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada to apply for this status, which was obtained by that body in 1946. At the time it made its application it submitted a Bahá'í Declaration of Human Obligations and Rights as well as a Bahá'í Statement on the Rights of Women. A Bahá'í United Nations Committee was appointed and a Bahá'í observer attended United Nations sessions. As this status was very limited in scope ways and means were found by which it could be enlarged. This was achieved during the winter of 1947-8 through seven National Spiritual Assemblies' authorizing the American national body to act on their behalf as their representative under the title Bahá'í International Community, duly recognized as an international organization accredited to the United Nations, a status that both enhanced the prestige of the Faith and increased the privileges of the official Bahá'í representatives who regularly attended and took part in various United Nations conferences of a type open to those enjoying such status. As new National Spiritual Assemblies were formed these too joined in and reinforced the organization representing the Bahá'í world.

The importance Shoghi Effendi attached to this tie linking the Cause with the greatest international instrument ever forged in human history is reflected in his own words: "it marks an important step forward in the struggle of our beloved Faith to receive in the eyes of the world its just due, and be recognized as an independent World Religion. Indeed, this step should have a favourable reaction on the progress of the Cause everywhere, especially in those parts of the world where it is still persecuted, belittled, or scorned, particularly in the East." At the time of the intense wave of persecution that swept over the Bahá'í Community of Persia in 1955 the carefully established and fostered relationship with the United Nations bore fruit; in consequence of the detailed documentation of the injuries and atrocities the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in His native land had been made to suffer, which was submitted to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, a commission was appointed by him, headed by the High Commissioner for Refugees, and instructed to contact the Persian Government and obtain formal assurance from it that the rights of the Bahá'í minority would be safeguarded. So much importance did the Guardian attach to this relationship that one of the twenty-seven listed objectives of the Ten Year International Teaching and Consolidation Plan — the World Crusade — was the "Reinforcement of the ties binding the Bahá'í World Community to the United Nations."

The history of the Cause, Shoghi Effendi wrote, "if read aright, may be said to resolve itself into a series of pulsations, of alternating crises and triumphs, leading it ever nearer to its divinely appointed destiny." Although the passing of the Central Figure of the Faith — whether it was the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh or 'Abdu'l-Bahá — had inevitably precipitated a crisis, the majority of such shocks which impelled it forward were the result of the persecutions it suffered, usually, though not exclusively, at the hands of its inveterate enemies, the Muslim ecclesiastics. During the thirty-six years of Shoghi Effendi's ministry there were repeated and violent outbreaks, locally and on a national scale, of a most brutal and blood-thirsty nature, against the followers of the Faith in Persia; its adherents in Turkey were suppressed, persecuted and falsely accused; its followers in Egypt were subjected to attacks upon their persons, their properties, their

cemeteries and their legal rights; its adherents in Russia had their Assemblies dissolved, their Temple confiscated and were themselves, for the most part, either deported or exiled; the Bahá'í Community in Germany was officially dissolved and its activities forbidden in June 1937, its national archives were confiscated, some of its members interrogated and even placed under arrest.

Such events caused the Guardian keen distress, took up a great deal of his time and added to the burdens of an already over-burdened heart and mind. The major problem, however, was always Persia, where a "long-abused, down-trodden, sorely-tried community" perpetually struggled for its very existence in the face of continual persecution. This "dearly-beloved" Community — as he so lovingly and repeatedly referred to it — preoccupied him from the earliest to the latest days of his ministry. A steady flow of communications from him poured out to its members and its elected national body, and in his communications to the Bahá'ís of the West it was the frequent subject of his solicitude, his appeals for assistance in defending it and his explanations of why this Community — which he said had led the Heroic Age of the Faith — was so bitterly set upon by the people of its native land.

The fact that the Supreme Manifestation of God appeared in Persia and that it is therefore the much-loved "Cradle of our Faith and the object of our tenderest affections", as Shoghi Effendi said; the fact that, as he also wrote, the time will come "which is to witness the spiritual and material ascendancy of Persia among all the nations of the world", does not mean that at the present time the national character is so changed as to promise the speedy fulfilment of this prophecy. "Only a close and unbiased observer", he wrote, in one of his general letters, "of the manners and habits of the Persian people...can truly estimate the immensity of the task that faces every conscientious believer in that land" due to "the prevailing tendencies of different sections of the population" such as their apathy, indolence, absence of a sense of public duty and loyalty to principle, lack of concerted effort and constancy in action, and their habit of secrecy and blind surrender to an ignorant and fanatical clergy. As Bahá'u'lláh's Message must change the entire world it must likewise change His native land, which, when it comes under His shadow, has such a great destiny before it.

There was a time, as indicated in his letters, when Shoghi Effendi hoped the founder of the new Pahlavi dynasty — who was introducing many much-needed reforms — would speedily usher in a new phase in the development of Bahá'u'lláh's Faith in that country. In 1929 Shoghi Effendi had written that the believers there were "tasting the first-fruits of their long-dreamed emancipation". It was in view of this process of reform now taking place that he had advised the National Assembly to press for permission to print books and establish a Bahá'í Publishing Trust. This having been refused we find him cabling America in January 1932: "Urge transmit promptly through Teheran Assembly two written communications Persian Government and Shah expressing behalf American believers lively appreciation recent beneficial internal reforms, emphasizing spiritual ties binding two countries and earnestly pleading removal ban entry Bahá'í literature stressing their high moral value with particular reference to Nabils and Bahá'í World." Shoghi Effendi's hopes, however, were short-lived; the reforms were not big enough to include a bitterly hated community and this request too was refused. Determined not to give in without a real struggle, the Guardian cabled America five months later: "Urge address promptly written petition on behalf American believers to Shah introducing Ransom-Kehler as chosen

representative empowered appeal for entry Bahá'í literature Persia. Stress widespread appreciation internal reforms and spiritual ties binding both countries emphasize high tribute paid in Bahá'í writings to Islam and their moral value to Persia. Mail petition Persian National Assembly."

This case provides us with an excellent example of how the Guardian seized upon any tool that came to his hand and used it for the service of the interests of the Faith. Mrs Keith Ransom-Kehler, an American believer and a woman of outstanding ability and character, had arrived in Haifa as a pilgrim and Shoghi Effendi determined to send her to Persia. She had been, before becoming a Bahá'í, a minister of a Christian Church and was a fiery and able speaker. He kept her many weeks in Haifa, briefing her on Persia and what he hoped she could do there to assist in winning greater freedom for the Faith and at least a measure of recognition. Although the mission entrusted to her failed of its purpose, as the Shah refused to receive Mrs Ransom-Kehler, nevertheless the visit of this emissary of the Guardian had an historic effect on the Persian Bahá'í Community for she had been steeped in his instructions regarding the development of the Administrative Order there and was able to stir a frequently intimidated, always downtrodden and sometimes apathetic community into a new awareness of the mission awaiting it in the future, and the urgency of the immediate duties that lay before it. But, as in the case of Dr Esslemont, this newly taken-up instrument was wrenched from the Guardian's hand. On 28 October 1933 he cabled America: "Keith's precious life offered up sacrifice beloved Cause in Bahá'u'lláh's native land. On Persian soil for Persia's sake she encountered challenged and fought forces of darkness with high distinction indomitable will unswerving exemplary loyalty. Mass of her helpless Persian brethren mourn sudden loss their valiant emancipator American believers grateful and proud memory their first and distinguished martyr. Sorrow stricken lament earthly separation invaluable collaborator unfailing counsellor esteemed and faithful friend. Urge local Assemblies befittingly organize memorial gatherings in memory one whose international services entitle her eminent rank among Hands of Cause of Bahá'u'lláh". Persia's great loss in this death had become America's great gain.

The worthiness of Shoghi Effendi's emissary for the posthumous honours he so generously heaped upon her is amply reflected in her own words, written in Persia at a time when she felt keenly the failure of her primary mission: "I have fallen, though I never faltered. Months of effort with nothing accomplished is the record that confronts me. If anyone in future should be interested in this thwarted adventure of mine, he alone can say whether near or far from the seemingly impregnable heights of complaisance and indifference, my tired old body fell. The smoke and din of battle are to-day too dense for me to ascertain whether I moved forward or was slain in my tracks. Nothing in the world is meaningless suffering least of all. Sacrifice with its attendant agony is a germ, an organism. Man cannot blight its fruition as he can the seeds of earth. Once sown it blooms, I think forever, in the sweet fields of eternity. Mine will be a very modest flower, perhaps like the single tiny forget-me-not, watered by the blood of Quddus that I plucked in the Sabz-i-Maydan of Barfurush; should it ever catch the eye, may one who seems to be struggling in vain garner it in the name of Shoghi Effendi and cherish it for his dear remembrance."

In December 1934 Shoghi Effendi wired the Persian National Assembly: "Has Tarbiyat School been permanently closed enquire and wire". The background of this question is reflected in the answer of that Assembly to the Guardian: "Pursuant with your request on day Báb's Martyrdom both Tarbiyat Schools Teheran were closed therefore Ministry Education obliged close both schools and asked why we did not dissimulate..." This case might be cited as a classic example of the struggle of the Persian Bahá'ís — constantly spurred on and guided by Shoghi Effendi — to obtain at least a reasonable measure of liberty in following their own religion, which numerically was, after Islam, the largest in the country. The Tarbiyat boys' and girls' School, owned and managed entirely by the Bahá'ís, had been in existence for thirty-six years. Founded in 1898, in the days of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, it had been a project dear to His heart; it had always had an excellent reputation, and although its pupils were mainly Bahá'í, children of all denominations attended it. The School had always closed on the nine Bahá'í Holy Days but now, on the flimsy pretext that the Bahá'ís belonged to a denomination not officially recognized in Persia, the Ministry of Education had suddenly required the School to remain open on these days. This meant a retreat instead of an advance in the battle for emancipation the Cause was struggling so desperately to win and Shoghi Effendi flatly refused, ordering the Assembly to close the School on the anniversary of the Báb's Martyrdom. As he was neither willing to advise the believers to dissimulate their Faith, nor to keep the School open on Bahá'í Holy Days, and the Government refused to change its orders, the Tarbiyat School, one of the best in Persia, was closed and remains closed to present day.

In announcing this bad news, the day after he received his answer from Tehran, to the Bahá'ís in that land where they enjoyed the greatest degree of freedom throughout the entire world the anger of the Guardian is reflected in every word as he pours out the list of indignities and sufferings to which the Bahá'ís of Persia are being subjected: "Information just received indicates deliberate efforts undermine all Bahá'í institutions in Persia. Schools in Kashan, Qazvin, Sultanabad closed. In several leading centres including Qazvin Kirmanshah orders issued suspend teaching activities, prohibit gatherings, close Bahá'í Hall, deny right burial in Bahá'í cemeteries. Bahá'ís of Teheran compelled under penalty imprisonment register themselves Moslems in identity papers. Elated clergy inciting population. National Teheran Assembly's petitions to Shah undelivered rejected. Impress Persian Minister gravity intolerable situation".

In face of these wholly unwarranted blows received at a time when it could logically be expected that the more liberal policy affecting the entire country would be stretched to include the members of a Faith that since the days of Darius and his successors constituted that nation's only serious claim to fame — at such a time the Persian Bahá'ís were able to hold a Convention whose delegates were sufficiently representative of the Bahá'í Community within that country to elect a National Assembly that Shoghi Effendi officially lists in his statistical pamphlets as having been formed in 1934; already in 1927, what he had termed "their first historic representative conference of various delegates" had been held and plans made for the holding of future annual gatherings of this nature, and in 1928 he had begun to call the assemblies

elected at these gatherings the National Spiritual Assembly of Persia. One of the main reasons for this long-delayed proper election, “modelled”, as he wrote, “after the method pursued by their brethren in the United States and Canada”, was that the Assembly had been unable to carry out his instructions that a carefully compiled list of all believers in the country was a prerequisite to the proper administrative procedure involved in the formation of a national body.

During 1931 Shoghi Effendi had instructed Persia to buy a piece of land for her future Maṣḥriqu'l-Adhkár and to start building a Ḥazíratu'l-Quds in Tehran. It was no doubt partly due to these assertions of its right to exist as a recognized community that an irate government had, far from recognizing it, stiffened in its determination to deny its existence in spite of the great lengths to which the Guardian and the Community went in a reasonable effort not to provoke the authorities or the people unnecessarily. An example of this moderation is his instruction to the Bahá'í women not to take the lead in the new emancipation of women the Shah had set in motion — an emancipation which involved abandoning the veil and was entirely in keeping with the teachings of both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh — lest it precipitate new troubles.

The situation of the Bahá'ís in the East and particularly Persia is never really quiet, is always precariously balanced, ever ready to flare up into a violent and all-too-frequently bloody outbreak of persecution. Repeatedly there were isolated cases of Bahá'ís being killed — some of whom the Guardian mentioned as martyrs; constantly there was a temperature of persecution, sometimes hotter here and sometimes hotter there, but always present. To all the vicissitudes afflicting the Persian friends the Guardian responded with loving messages, with sums of money for relief, with instructions, usually to the American National Assembly, to intervene on their behalf and solicit justice in their cause. Such communications as the following were not infrequent and reflect the spirit of these messages: “advise...hold special devotional gathering Temple auditorium supplicate assistance invisible hosts Abha Kingdom emancipation long suffering brethren Bahá'u'lláh's native land. May America's incessant strivings redoubled exertions compensate enforced inactivity so large a section organized body of His followers”.

The worst crisis, however, which the Persian Bahá'í Community experienced in the thirty-six years of the Guardian's ministry, arose in 1955, when, as he cabled, a sudden deterioration took place in the affairs of this largest community in the Bahá'í world. In a long cable, dated 23 August, he reported to the Hands and National Assemblies what had been taking place: following the seizure by the authorities of the National Headquarters of the Persian believers in Tehran and the destruction of its large ornamental dome (a destruction during which one of the country's leading divines and a general of its army themselves took up pickaxes and went to work), local Bahá'í administrative headquarters all over Persia were seized and occupied, the Parliament of the country outlawed the Faith, a virulent press and radio campaign was started, distorting its history, calumniating its Founders, misrepresenting its teachings, and obscuring its aims and purposes — following all this a series of atrocities was perpetrated against the members of this sorely tried community throughout the entire country. In his summary of the terrible damage done and the “barbarous acts” committed, he cited such events as: the desecration of the House of the Báb in Shiraz, the foremost Shrine of the Faith in Persia, which had been severely damaged; the occupation of the ancestral home of Bahá'u'lláh; the pillaging of shops and farms owned by the believers and the looting of their homes, destruction of their livestock, burning of their crops and digging up and desecration of the Bahá'í dead in their

cemeteries; adults were beaten; young women abducted and forced into marriage with Muslims; children were mocked, reviled and expelled from schools as well as being beaten; tradesmen boycotted Bahá'ís and refused to sell them food; a girl of fifteen was raped; an eleven-month-old baby was trampled underfoot; pressure was brought on believers to recant their Faith. More recently, he went on to say, a mob two thousand strong had hacked to pieces with spades and axes a family of seven — the oldest eighty and the youngest nineteen — to the sound of music and drums.

The Bahá'ís, at the instruction of their Guardian, had already, through the intermediary of telegrams and letters to the authorities in Persia from over one thousand groups and Assemblies throughout the world, protested against such unjust and lawless acts committed against their law-abiding brethren. In addition all National Assemblies had addressed letters to the Shah, the Government and the Parliament protesting against this unwarranted persecution of a harmless community on purely religious grounds. As all this brought forth no acknowledgement whatsoever from official quarters the Guardian instructed the International Bahá'í Community, accredited as a Non-Governmental Organization to the United Nations, to take the question to that body in Geneva, he himself nominating those whom he wished to act as representatives of the Community on this important occasion. Copies of the Bahá'í appeal were delivered to representatives of the member nations of the Social and Economic Council and the Director of the Human Rights Division, as well as to certain specialized agencies of the Non-Governmental Organizations enjoying consultative status. The President of the United States was likewise appealed to by the American National Assembly and by all groups and local Assemblies in the country to intervene on behalf of their oppressed sister community in Persia.

This was the first time in its history that an attacked Faith was able to fight back with weapons that possessed some strength to defend it. The significance of this was clearly brought out by Shoghi Effendi. whatever the outcome of these “heart-rending” events might be, one fact had clearly emerged: God’s infant Faith, which had during the twenty-five years following the ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá provided itself with the machinery of its divinely appointed Administrative Order, and subsequently utilized its newly born administrative agencies to systematically propagate that Faith through a series of national plans that had culminated in the World Crusade, was now, in the wake of this ordeal convulsing the overwhelming majority of its followers, emerging from obscurity. the world-wide reverberations of these events would be hailed by posterity as the “mighty blast of God’s trumpet” which, through the instrumentality of the “oldest, most redoubtable, most vicious, most fanatical adversaries” of the Cause must awaken governments and heads of government, in both East and West, to the existence and the implications of this Faith. So stormy were the circumstances surrounding these events in Persia and so impressive their repercussions abroad that the Guardian stated they were bound to pave the way for the emancipation of the Faith from the fetters of orthodoxy in Islamic countries as well as for the ultimate recognition in His own homeland of the independent character of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh.

In view of the great sufferings and pitiful condition of the Persian believers Shoghi Effendi inaugurated an “Aid the Persecuted” fund and opened it by himself contributing the equivalent of eighteen thousand dollars for “this noble purpose”. Not content with this evidence of Bahá'í solidarity he called for the construction in Kampala, in the heart of Africa, of the “Mother Temple”

of that continent as a “supreme consolation” to the “oppressed masses” of our “valiant brethren” in the Cradle of the Faith. He struck back at the forces of darkness swarming over the oldest bastion of that Faith in the world, with the greatest weapons at his disposal — the forces of creative progress, enlightenment and faith.

It is hard to realize that one man, all alone in his solitude in Switzerland, with no advisers surrounding him to assist or comfort him at such a time, bore the shock of this violent wave of attacks that broke so suddenly on Persia in 1955; that all alone he devised his strategy, cabled his adjutants — the various National Assemblies — what action they should take, appointed those who were to represent the interests of the Faith to the highest international body ever devised by man — the United Nations — comforted the down-trodden, raised money for their succour, hurled his spears left and right in their defence.

Turning to the question of the liquidation of the Faith in Russia we must remember that one of the earliest Bahá'í communities in the world had existed there, in the Caucasus and Turkistan, from the end of the last century, where many Persians had found a welcome refuge from the persecutions to which they were so constantly subjected in their native land. They had established themselves in a number of towns, particularly in Ishqabad, where they had erected the first Temple of the entire Bahá'í world and opened schools for the Bahá'í children which remained in existence for over thirty years. Their affairs were well organized. They had, in 1928, a number of Spiritual Assemblies (including one in Moscow) and two central Assemblies had, pending the holding of proper, representative national elections, administered their affairs, appearing on lists published in the United States as the National Assemblies of Caucasus and of Turkistan. In a letter addressed in September 1927 to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Ishqabad Shoghi Effendi instructed them to gradually prepare for delegates from all Assemblies in Turkistan to meet in Ishqabad and hold the election of their National Assembly. On 22 June 1928 Shoghi Effendi received a cable from the Ishqabad Assembly as follows: “In accordance general agreement 1917 Soviet Government has nationalized all Temples but under special conditions has provided free rental to respective religious communities regarding Maṣḥriqu'l-Adhkár government has provided same conditions agreement to Assembly supplicate guidance by telegram”. The Guardian took immediate action, cabling the Moscow Assembly to “Intercede energetically authorities prevent expropriation Maṣḥriqu'l-Adhkár. Enquire particulars Ishqabad...” and to Ishqabad to “refer Moscow Assembly address petition authorities behalf all Bahá'ís Russia. Act firmly assure you prayers”.

In recalling the events which transpired in Russia a sharp distinction must be made — one which the Guardian himself recognized — between the hardships to which the Russian believers were subjected and the persecutions the Bahá'ís underwent in Persia. In Persia the believers were, and still are, singled out as victims of every form of injustice because they are followers of Bahá'u'lláh; in Russia the situation was entirely different. The Bahá'ís were not discriminated against because they were Bahá'ís but suffered from a policy which the government pursued against all religious communities.

In September 1928, in a letter to Martha Root, Shoghi Effendi indicates not only what had been going on in Russia but how it had affected him personally: “It has been a very depressing summer this year for me as the condition of the Cause in Russia is going from bad to worse. The Maṣḥriqu'l-Adhkár has been appropriated by the State, closed and sealed. A very large sum is

required from the friends if rented to them, otherwise they threaten to sell it to others in parts. The situation is very critical and many families have migrated to Persia. Meetings are suspended, Assemblies dissolved, heavy restrictions and penalties imposed...this and other happenings have made me feel very down-hearted and sad." The return to Persia of Bahá'ís from Russia was a move he did not approve of at all. He informed the Ishqabad Assembly that "departure friends Iran exceedingly harmful" and said they should change their Persian citizenship to Russian citizenship if necessary. He had already urged the Bahá'í immigrants in Russia to learn the language and translate Bahá'í literature into it. In 1929 he wrote to the Persian National Assembly that the Ishqabad believers should remain there and not disperse but wait for the evil clouds of injustice to pass and the sun of justice to come out.

In all persecutions how much is exacerbated by the unwisdom of the persecuted themselves, interacting on the unwisdom of subordinates carrying out the instructions of superiors — who may or may not be ill disposed — is a mystery we are not likely ever to solve in this world. It does not seem unreasonable to suppose, however, that at least some of our misfortunes we amplify by our own acts.

What had transpired in Russia, Shoghi Effendi wrote in a long letter to the Bahá'ís of the West on 1 January 1929, was that the Russian Bahá'ís had at last been brought under the "rigid application of the principles already enunciated by the state authorities and universally enforced with regard to all other religious communities"; the Bahá'ís "as befits their position as loyal and law-abiding citizens" had obeyed the "measures which the State, in the free exercise of its legitimate rights, has chosen to enforce". The measures which the authorities had taken "Faithful to their policy of expropriating in the interests of the State all edifices and monuments of a religious character" had led them to expropriate and assume the ownership and control over "that most cherished and universally prized Bahá'í possession, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of Ishqabad." In addition to this "state orders, orally and in writing," had "been officially communicated to the Bahá'í Assemblies and individual believers, suspending all meetings... suppressing the committees of all Bahá'í local and national Spiritual Assemblies, prohibiting the raising of funds...requiring the right of full and frequent inspection of the deliberations...of the Bahá'í Assemblies...imposing a strict censorship on all correspondence to and from Bahá'í Assemblies...suspending all Bahá'í periodicals... and requiring the deportation of leading personalities in the Cause whether as public teachers and speakers or officers of Bahá'í Assemblies. To all these", Shoghi Effendi stated, "the followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh have with feelings of burning agony and heroic fortitude unanimously and unreservedly submitted, ever mindful of the guiding principles of Bahá'í conduct that in connection with their administrative activities, no matter how grievously interference with them might affect the course of the extension of the Movement, and the suspension of which does not constitute in itself a departure from the principle of loyalty to their Faith, the considered judgment and authoritative decrees issued by their responsible rulers must, if they be faithful to Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's express injunctions, be thoroughly respected and loyally obeyed." He went on to say that after the Bahá'ís in Turkistan and the Caucasus had unsuccessfully exhausted every legitimate means for the alleviation of these restrictions imposed upon them, they had resolved to "conscientiously carry out the considered judgment of their recognized government" and "with a hope that no earthly power can dim...committed the interests of their Cause to the keeping of that vigilant, that all-powerful Divine Deliverer..."

Shoghi Effendi assured the Bahá'ís in this message that if he deemed it expedient to call upon the Bahá'í world to intervene at a later stage he would do so. In April 1930 he felt the time had come for this; the precious Temple, which the Bahá'ís had succeeded in renting from the authorities after its confiscation, was now placed in danger of passing once for all from their hands through a series of further and harsher measures imposed upon the friends. He therefore cabled the American National Assembly "...prompt action required. Stress international character Temple..." In his previous long letter he had already outlined the approach that should be made, when and if the time came for the believers abroad to raise their voices in protest and explanation: national as well as local Assemblies, East and West, in a gesture of Bahá'í solidarity, would call the attention of the Russian officials not only to their refutation of any implication of a political design or ulterior motive which might have been falsely imputed to their brethren in that land, but to the "humanitarian and spiritual nature of the work in which Bahá'ís in every land and of every race are unitedly engage" and to the international character of that Edifice which had the distinction of being Bahá'u'lláh's first Universal House of Worship, whose design 'Abdu'l-Bahá had Himself conceived and which had been constructed under His direction and supported by the collective contributions of believers throughout the world.

But when the die was finally cast Shoghi Effendi cabled the Ishqabad Assembly to "abide by decision State Authorities". A case such as this, involving the first of the two Bahá'í Temples erected under the aegis of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, cannot but constitute a guiding pattern for Bahá'í Assemblies to follow throughout all time and furnish a well of information to the individual believer on his duty towards his government, whatever the nature of that government may be.

Two other countries, Turkey and Egypt, formed with Russia, Persia and Germany the scene of serious repressive and restrictive measures imposed on the Faith during the lifetime of the Guardian. In Turkey, which ever since the downfall of the Caliphate had been the subject, as Shoghi Effendi wrote, of "an uncompromising policy aiming at the secularization of the State and the disestablishment of Islam", great civil reforms had taken place, reforms with which incidentally the Bahá'ís were wholly in sympathy. The troubles which arose there were therefore not based on religious prejudice but were rather brought about by the fact that the new regime had in the past discovered that so-called religious groups in Turkey had provided cover for political agitation and when its agents found the Bahá'í Community was organized and was pursuing its activities openly, teaching and spreading the Faith, they became suspicious and alarmed, searched many of the believers' homes, seized any literature they found, severely cross-examined some of them and put a good number in prison. The case brought a great deal of publicity to the Faith, to some extent abroad, but mostly in the Turkish press, which reacted in favour of the Bahá'ís and ensured for them, when it came before the Criminal Tribunal on 13 December 1928, a full and impartial hearing. It marked a new departure in the unfoldment of the Cause: "never before in Bahá'í history", Shoghi Effendi wrote, "have the followers of Bahá'u'lláh been called upon by the officials of a state...to unfold the history and principles of their Faith..."

It is interesting to note that in the papers seized by the authorities from the Assembly of Constantinople (the city now known as Istanbul), one of Queen Marie's tributes to the Faith was found and its implications were not lost upon the examining judges. The President of the Constantinople Bahá'í Spiritual Assembly, in giving his testimony before the court, exposed in a

most brilliant manner the tenets of the Faith and included this pointed quotation from Bahá'u'lláh's own words: "Before Justice, tell the Truth and fear nothing." The conclusion of this entire episode was that the Bahá'ís had to pay a fine for having infringed the law that all associations should be registered with the government and due authorization to hold public meetings be obtained, but its results were of great significance to the Faith, not only locally but abroad. The verdict of the Court was summarized by Shoghi Effendi in a general letter to the Bahá'ís of the West, written on 12 February 1929: "As to the verdict...it is stated clearly that although the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, in their innocent conception of the spiritual character of their Faith, found it unnecessary to apply for leave for the conduct of their administrative activities and have thus been made liable to the payment of a fine, yet they have, to the satisfaction of the legal representatives of the State, not only established the inculpability of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, but have also worthily acquitted themselves of the task of vindicating its independence, its Divine origin, and its suitability to the circumstances and requirements of the present age."

Although this was the first major episode involving the Bahá'ís with the new State that had evolved in Turkey after the downfall of the Caliphate, it was not to be the last. The secular powers were constantly on their guard against reactionary forces in the State and, as the official memory was short, in 1933 there was a recrudescence of the same suspicions and accusations that had brought about the case in 1904. On 27 January we find Shoghi Effendi cabling the American National Assembly: "Bahá'ís Constantinople and Adana numbering about forty imprisoned charged subversive motives. Urge induce Turkish Minister Washington make immediate representations his government release law abiding followers non-political Faith. Advise also National Assembly cable authorities Angora and approach State Department". At the same time he wired the Persian National Assembly: "Urge immediate representations Turkish Ambassador behalf imprisoned Bahá'ís Stamboul and Adana charged political motives". The next day he wired a prominent Turk:

His Excellency Ismat Pasha
Ankara

As Head of Bahá'í Faith learned with amazement and grief imprisonment followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Stamboul and Adana. Respectfully appeal your Excellency's intervention on behalf followers of a Faith pledged loyalty to your government for whose epochal reforms its adherents world over cherish abiding admiration.

The Bahá'ís, familiar with the whole situation through the detailed letters the Guardian had written at the time of the previous case, immediately took action and their representations to the Turkish authorities, as well, no doubt, as moves made in Turkey to cite the verdict the Criminal Court have given in the former case, secured, after many months of effort, the release and acquittal of the believers. On 5 March the Guardian informed the American Assembly: "Istanbul friends acquitted 53 still imprisoned Adana urge renew energetically representations immediate release" and on 2 April he cabled them: "Adana friends released. Advise convey appreciation Turkish Ambassador".

When we recall that this latest case in Turkey was taking place at the same time that Shoghi Effendi was struggling to obtain some rights for the Faith in Persia — during Mrs Keith Ransom-Kehler's sojourn in that country — we get a faint idea of the number and nature of the problems he was so constantly called upon to deal with. In spite of a regular recrudescence of suspicion on the part of the Turkish authorities the Guardian was able to lay, during his own lifetime, sufficiently strong foundations in the Bahá'í community of that country for it to elect after his passing, in fulfilment of one of his goals of the Ten Year Plan, its own independent National Spiritual Assembly.

In Egypt, one of the earliest countries to receive, during His own days, the Light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, events transpired, three years before the first court case of the believers in Turkey took place, to which the Guardian attached supreme significance. Beginning by a fierce attack on a small band of Bahá'ís in an obscure village of Upper Egypt it ended in being the "first step", Shoghi Effendi said, in "the eventual universal acceptance of the Bahá'í Faith, as one of the independent recognized religious systems of the world". The laws of personal status in almost all Islamic countries are administered by religious courts; when the Bahá'ís of that village formed their Spiritual Assembly, the headman, inflamed by religious fanaticism, began to stir up feeling against three married men who had become Bahá'ís; through legal channels a demand was made that their Muḥammadan wives divorce them on the grounds that they were now married to heretics. The case went to the Appellate religious court of Beba, which delivered its Judgment on 10 May 1925, in which it strongly condemned the heretics for violating the laws and ordinances of Islam and annulled the marriages. This in itself was a significant move but what the Guardian attached the most importance to was that "It even went so far as to make the positive, the startling and indeed the historic assertion that the Faith embraced by these heretics is to be regarded as a distinct religion, wholly independent of the religious systems that have preceded it". In his résumé of that verdict Shoghi Effendi quoted the actual words of the Judgment, of such immense historic importance to the Bahá'ís:

The Bahá'í Faith is a new religion, entirely independent, with beliefs, principles and laws of its own, which differ from, and are utterly in conflict with, the beliefs, principles and laws of Islam. No Bahá'í, therefore, can be regarded a Muslim or vice-versa, even as no Buddhist, Brahmin, or Christian can be regarded a Muslim or vice-versa.

Even if this verdict had remained an isolated phenomenon in an obscure local court of Egypt it would have been an invaluable weapon in the hands of the believers all over the world who were seeking to assert just that independence so clearly enunciated in this Judgment. But it did not rest there; it was subsequently sanctioned and upheld by the highest ecclesiastical authorities in Cairo, and printed and circulated by the Muslims themselves.

The Guardian, who was ever ready to seize upon the most insignificant and flimsy tools — from human beings to pieces of paper — and wield them as weapons in his battle to secure the recognition and emancipation of the Faith, grasped this sharp new sword placed in his hands by the enemies of the Faith themselves and went on striking with it until the end of his life. It was, he stated, the first Charter of the emancipation of the Cause from the fetters of Islam. In the East the Bahá'ís used it, under his astute guidance, as a lever to win for them a reluctant admission that the Faith was not a heresy inside Islam and in the West to assert its disavowal of that same accusation. It was even cited, at the time Shoghi Effendi made strong representations to the

Israeli Minister for Religious Affairs, as a reason for his insistence that the affairs of the Bahá'í Community should not be handled by the same departmental head who was responsible for the Muslim Community in Israel, pointing out that this created the impression we were a branch of Islam, and stating he preferred to have Bahá'í matters placed under the jurisdiction of the head of the Christian Department as in this way there could be no ambiguity as regards the independent status of the Bahá'í Faith. It was as a result of such arguments as these that the Ministry for Religious Affairs set up a Bahá'í Department with a head of its own.

With the powerful lever of the Beba Court's Judgment the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Egypt fought, over a period of years, to obtain for its Community at least a modicum of recognition of its independent religious status. To facilitate this the Assembly published a compilation of the Bahá'í laws related to matters of personal status and with the force of this document behind it, and using repeated incidents provoked by fanatical Muslims against the Bahá'ís, succeeded in obtaining from the Egyptian Government plots of land, officially granted to it in those cities where there was a relatively large group of believers, to be used as exclusively Bahá'í burial grounds.

This compilation of the laws regarding personal status was translated into Persian as well as English and used as a guide in the conduct of Bahá'í affairs in those countries which did not have civil laws covering such matters. Although certain concessions were won from the authorities in Muslim countries such as Egypt, Persia, Palestine and India as a result of this, the fact remained that the legal situation of the Bahá'ís, particularly in Egypt and Persia, was highly ambiguous and they often found themselves with no rights at all in certain respects, living in a kind of legal no-man's-land. This was particularly true of their marriages and divorces which were registered with their Assemblies, took place according to Bahá'í law, but were viewed as non-existent in the eyes of the government of their country. The fact that large communities of believers accepted this hardship proudly, refusing to be humiliated in the eyes of their derisive fellow-countrymen, and continue to this day the struggle for recognition in such fundamental matters, is the highest possible tribute to the spirit of faith the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh have engendered in their hearts, and to the loyalty with which they carried out the instructions of their beloved Guardian not to mind "any wave of unpopularity, of distrust or criticism, which a strict adherence to their standards might provoke."

In his recapitulation of those events which must ultimately lead to the recognition and emancipation of the Faith Shoghi Effendi, in *God Passes By*, wrote these memorable words: "To all administrative regulations which the civil authorities have issued from time to time...the Bahá'í community, faithful to its sacred obligations towards its government, and conscious of its civic duties, has yielded, and will continue to yield implicit obedience...To such orders, however, as are tantamount to a recantation of their faith by its members, or constitute an act of disloyalty to its spiritual, its basic and God-given principles and precepts, it will stubbornly refuse to bow, preferring imprisonment, deportation and all manner of persecution, including death — as already suffered by the twenty thousand martyrs that have laid down their lives in the path of its Founders — rather than follow the dictates of a temporal authority requiring it to renounce its allegiance to its cause."

In Shoghi Effendi's administration of the affairs of the Faith there was a quality of rigidity in essentials and fluidity in non-essentials that must always characterize a truly great leader.

Whereas in matters that are fundamental there can be no compromise, there can and should be, in administering the affairs of a world-wide community, recognition of the fact that people are in different stages of evolution. An example of the wisdom and skill of Shoghi Effendi is the way he treated different communities differently, never permitting any community — be it in one of the world's great and most sophisticated metropolises or in a village of illiterate peasant — to disregard the fundamental teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, but recognizing at the same time the fact that one does not require of a five-year-old child what one does of an adolescent or demand the same wisdom, obedience and experience in a young man of twenty-one that one expects from a person who has passed through three score years and ten in the school of life. It was because of this understanding of the different stages of inexperience or maturity, as the case might be, of the various Bahá'í communities that Shoghi Effendi treated the Persian Bahá'í Community — the oldest and most tried in the fire of tests of any community in the world — with the greatest degree of severity, expecting its privileged believers to be an example under all circumstances of fidelity and obedience to the laws of Bahá'u'lláh. Because of this policy he not only assiduously prepared the North American Bahá'ís, constituting the oldest western community in the world, to follow the laws — few in number but essential — which he ultimately gave them but forbore with them through the many long years it took to educate them to the point where they would and could accept and apply those laws. It was in accordance with this understanding that he instructed those National Assemblies engaged in teaching the Faith in so many countries opened during the World Crusade — countries whose inhabitants had mostly come from pagan backgrounds — to require of the new adherents of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh a minimum knowledge of its teachings and laws before accepting them into the Community of the Most Great Name.

No better example of this differentiation in the stages of development that characterize different Bahá'í communities at the present time could be found than in the last letter Shoghi Effendi addressed to one of the great African Regional Assemblies. Dated 8 August 1957 (less than three months before he died), and written at the instruction of the Guardian himself, his secretary pointed out the very essence of his thoughts on such a supremely important subject at this stage in Bahá'í history:

“During Mrs. ___’s visit, the Guardian discussed with her the teaching work in ___ where there is such a response to the Message, and where the people in outlying districts seem to be eager to enroll. He feels that those responsible for accepting new believers should consider that the most important and fundamental qualification for acceptance is the recognition of the station of Bahá'u'lláh in this day on the part of the applicant. We cannot expect people who are illiterate (which is no reflection on their mental abilities or capacities) to have studied the Teachings, especially when so little literature is available in their own language in the first place, and grasp all their ramifications, the way an African, say in London, is expected to. The spirit of the person is the important thing, the recognition of Bahá'u'lláh and His position in the world in this day. The friends therefore must not be too strict, or they will find that the great wave of loving enthusiasm with which the African people have turned to the Faith, many of them already accepting it, cools off; and being very sensitive, they will feel in some subtle way that they are rebuffed, and the work will suffer.

“The purpose of the new National Assemblies in Africa, and the purpose of any administrative body, is to carry the Message to the people and enlist the sincere under the banner of this Faith.

“Your Assembly must never lose sight of this for a moment, and must go on courageously expanding the membership of the communities under your jurisdiction, and gradually educating the friends in both the Teachings and the Administration. Nothing could be more tragic than if the establishment of these great administrative bodies should stifle or bog down the teaching work. The early believers in both the East and the West, we must always remember, knew practically nothing compared to what the average Bahá’í knows about his Faith nowadays; yet they were the ones who shed their blood, the ones who arose and said: ‘I believe’, requiring no proof, and often never having read a single word of the Teachings. Therefore, those responsible for accepting new enrollments must just be sure of one thing — that the heart of the applicant has been touched with the spirit of the Faith. Everything else can be built on this foundation gradually.

“He hopes that during the coming year it will be increasingly possible for the African Bahá’í teachers to circulate amongst the newly-enrolled Bahá’ís and deepen their knowledge and understanding of the Teachings.”

The balanced judgment that was such a paramount quality of Shoghi Effendi’s mind is nowhere better exemplified than in these instructions conveyed in that same letter:

“As regards the questions of tribal practice, the Guardian wishes you to be extremely forbearing and patient in weaning the Bahá’ís away from their old customs. This can only be done by taking each case individually as it comes up, using the greatest wisdom and kindness, and not trying rigorously to impose all Bahá’í laws in every detail at this time.

“Of course it is obvious that if a Bahá’í man already has one wife he cannot take another, no matter what the tribal law may be. Your Assembly should distinguish between this fundamental point and other phases of the tribal community life in which the new Bahá’í may still be deeply involved, and from which he cannot extract himself until the Bahá’í element in his community is strong enough to be a power in its own right.

“He agrees with the feeling of your Assembly that to start imposing the heavy sanction of depriving the friends of their voting rights is most unwise at the present time. The best policy is one of loving education.”

What Shoghi Effendi made us understand is that the great tree of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh when first planted is a tiny seed — belief in Him. Gradually it will grow, like any living thing, bigger and bigger and become more and more mature. Shoghi Effendi conceived it his major task, pursuant to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s instructions in His Will, to promulgate the Faith throughout the entire planet and enlist under its banner all the peoples of the world; he realized the raw material must first be assembled from which could be shaped the future society of that world; although so many things were required to shape that future society and were admittedly essential prerequisites to its creation, the supreme fact remained that the masses must be first brought under the shadow of Bahá’u’lláh before His World Order would emerge in all its glory.

In North America, the cradle of the Administrative Order of the Faith, the Guardian spent sixteen years in laying a firm foundation and creating a pattern for all Bahá'í administrative institutions. In our modern terminology he built a launching pad from which he could send off his rockets — the great teaching Plans that occupied so much of his time during the last two decades of his life. That “the administration of the Cause is to be conceived as an instrument and not a substitute for the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, that it should be regarded as a channel through which His promised blessings may flow, that it should guard against such rigidity as would clog and fetter the liberating forces released by His Revelation...” Shoghi Effendi made absolutely clear. “It is surely”, he went on to say, “for those to whose hands so priceless a heritage has been committed to prayerfully watch lest the tool should supersede the Faith itself, lest undue concern for the minute details arising from the administration of the Cause obscure the vision on its promoters, lest partiality, ambition, and worldliness tend in the course of time to becloud the radiance, stain the purity, and impair the effectiveness of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.” Four years after he began his first correspondence with the Bahá'ís of the East and the West in January 1922, Shoghi Effendi had begun to stress this point, which he evidently viewed as a danger from the beginning to the end of his ministry. In January 1926 he wrote to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada that “As the administrative work of the Cause steadily expands, as its various branches grow in importance and number, it is absolutely necessary that we bear in mind this fundamental fact that all these administrative activities, however harmoniously and efficiently conducted, are but means to an end, and should be regarded as direct instruments for the propagation of the Bahá'í Faith. Let us take heed lest in our great concern for the perfection of the administrative machinery of the Cause, we lose sight of the Divine Purpose for which it has been created.”

When the first Regional Assemblies were elected in Europe in 1957 as the intermediary bodies which would administer the affairs of some of the Ten Goal Countries of the second Seven Year Plan, pending the formation at a later date of independent National Assemblies, the Guardian wrote to each of these newly elected bodies a letter, stressing once again — as he had repeatedly done for years to all National Assemblies — this question of the administration being a means and not an end in itself. “The whole purpose of the Bahá'í administrative bodies at this time is to teach, to increase the membership, to increase the Assemblies and Groups” his secretary wrote on his behalf to one of these National Assemblies, and to another: “The fundamental purpose of the Bahá'í Administration at the present time is to teach the Faith. Administering it is only to coordinate its activities and to safeguard it. The friends must bear this clearly in mind; and he feels that he should point out to your Assembly, just embarking on its historic tasks, what he has many times pointed out to the old and tried national bodies, and that is that you should strenuously avoid introducing rules and regulations which will complicate the smooth working of the Faith in your region, handicap the Bahá'ís unnecessarily and confuse them. Short of the essentials, as already laid down in the teachings, and clearly available, the national bodies must try to do everything in their power to encourage the friends to teach individually, to serve actively, to open new centres, convert groups to Assemblies...”

After the first Seven Year Plan had been formulated and launched, the Guardian, always clear in his own mind as to what he was doing and how it must be done, in 1939 informed the North American Bahá'ís, who were the prosecutors of that Plan, that they were “promoting the growth

and the consolidation of that pioneer movement for which the entire machinery of their Administrative Order has been primarily designed and erected”.

Just as in the universe there are many galaxies in different stages of evolution, so in the global universe of God's Cause different parts of the Bahá'í world were in different states of development. The communities of the Middle East were much farther advanced in applying the Bahá'í laws and ordinances in the lives of the believers that composed them, but they were neither emancipated, recognized nor free. The communities in the West, in the Americas, Europe and Australasia were free, but, because of their cultural past, and the fact that in their countries laws of personal status were administered by civil and not religious courts, were far behind the East in applying many of the laws of their Faith as well as in observing its ordinances. The new Bahá'ís in many of the world's more backward countries were free in the sense of not being, like their brethren in the East, the victims of fanatical governments whose state religion was Islam, but were not always able to apply the Bahá'í laws because of the tribal societies in which many of them lived, and were also handicapped, at least temporarily, by the fact that the historical backgrounds from which they had sprung were so different in many respects from those of the peoples of Jewish, Christian and Muḥammadan antecedents, whose common background was that from which the Bahá'í Faith itself had come. Because of these factors Shoghi Effendi, like the conductor of a great orchestra, made sure that each community within the Bahá'í world was playing its own notes in the symphony of the whole. Though the parts were different each one had to follow the notes he had been given. Unless we grasp this picture of what our Bahá'í world is like at this present stage of its development, we will never be able to properly understand just what Shoghi Effendi did create, did accomplish, during his ministry and how thrilling his achievements are.

These different examples indicate that although mankind is one and the Faith is one, although its Administrative Order is one and its World Order will be one, the enforcement of the laws, ordinances and administrative procedures of the Cause must perforce progress at different rates of speed in different places. It took a long time for the Bahá'ís to reach the point, in the East and in the West, when they were sufficiently mature and had gained sufficient understanding of their Administrative Order for Shoghi Effendi to introduce, for example, the application of sanctions. He spent many years erecting, on the foundation already created by the Master, an organized system in which a Bahá'í was clearly differentiated from a non-Bahá'í — through his beliefs, his privileges and his responsibilities — before he could take the step of devising a way to ensure that inside the Bahá'í communities the believers made reasonable effort to follow the Bahá'í teachings and that if they too flagrantly disregarded them there was a means of punishment — a sanction — at hand to ensure they did not place in jeopardy the good name and independent character of the Faith and as a means of protecting the reputation of the community. This sanction was the removal of the administrative rights of a believer; it meant that he or she could no longer vote in Bahá'í elections, be elected to or appointed on Bahá'í Assemblies and committees, receive a Bahá'í marriage or divorce and attend those meetings where the Bahá'ís as a community were gathered. It is exceedingly interesting to note that when Shoghi Effendi inaugurated this sanction — which is the heaviest administrative punishment the Bahá'ís possess and should never be confused for a moment with Covenant-breaking and its attendant excommunication, which is isolation because of a spiritual disease — he made it abundantly clear to the National Assemblies that it must be used only as an extreme

measure, be applied (in the West) only with the approval of the National Assembly itself, and only be invoked in extreme cases. In the East, where many laws of personal status were administered by Assemblies, it involved a number of the provisions of the Aqdas; in the West, where a different situation existed, it involved obedience to those laws the Guardian considered the Bahá'ís must now follow, such as obtaining the consent of both parents to marriage, having a Bahá'í marriage ceremony, and following the Bahá'í divorce laws. This sanction was also invoked in cases where Bahá'ís, completely disregarding the teachings of their Faith, entered into political matters, or in cases of what he carefully termed “flagrant immorality” which brought the whole community into disrepute, or for other serious breaches of what he called those “directing and regulating principles of Bahá'í belief” which “the upholders of the Cause... feel bound, as their Administrative Order expands and consolidates itself, to assert and vigilantly apply.” Shoghi Effendi made it clear that the removal of voting rights must never be used lightly and its use at all should be avoided as much as possible, both to protect individuals from a hasty retaliation on the part of irate bodies and to make friends realize that in being Bahá'ís they were privileged and had responsibilities and that in losing their rights in the community they forfeited something very great and very precious.

A procedure as fundamental as this was one which Shoghi Effendi universally applied to Bahá'ís everywhere in the world, no matter what type of society they were living in, and was part of his gradual implementation of the laws and principles ordained by Bahá'u'lláh “which constituted”, he stated, “the warp and woof of the institutions upon which the structure of His World Order must ultimately rest”.

This direction of a Faith from its World Centre, which necessitated rigidity and universality in fundamental matters and permitted and even encouraged fluidity in secondary matters, forms a fascinating subject for observation. Shoghi Effendi's ministry was a constant breaking of the various shackles binding the Bahá'ís to the past, to the societies in which they lived, and a building up of their knowledge of the Faith and of its administrative institutions. Like a skilled physician he gave general health rules to all and specific remedies in specific cases. There are innumerable examples of this, only a few of which can be cited here.

In 1923 Shoghi Effendi wrote to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma that Bahá'í women should be included in all administrative activities on an equal footing with Bahá'í men — women in those parts of the world were already enjoying a greater freedom than was generally realized in the West. But in such countries of the Middle East as Persia, Egypt and Iraq, where women were entirely suppressed in civil life, the Guardian, not wishing to unnecessarily provoke the Muslim population by a highly provocative measure, did not permit Bahá'í women to take part in the administration of the faith until a quarter of a century later. In spite of the many glowing tributes he paid to Bahá'í women, and the testimony of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that “women have evinced a greater boldness than men when enlisted in the ranks of this Faith”, in spite of the fundamental principle enunciated in the Bahá'í Teachings that men and women are equal, its application to the machinery of the Administrative Order was deemed by Shoghi Effendi purely secondary and relatively unimportant compared to the paramount need to advance the general interests of the Faith in Islamic countries and protect its very existence.

Another excellent example of the manner in which the Guardian's explicit instructions, which he gave to various National Assemblies conducting Plans under his generalship, were modified by

him according to changing situations was the establishment during the World Crusade of local Bahá'í endowments and local headquarters: as the goals of the Ten Year Plan involved the acquisition of both national Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds and national endowments, he had instructed the Assemblies that there should be no further drain on the very limited resources of the Faith, already shouldering such a heavy programme, through expenditures on a local level. Had he not specified this the major goals would never have been reached; but by the summer of 1957 his secretary wrote in his letter to one of the Regional Assemblies of Africa: "Now that the work all over the Bahá'í world is progressing so remarkably and to all intents and purposes the Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds and national endowments have been purchased, he feels the friends should be left free to add additional Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds and endowments wherever they wish to."

It was by policies such as these that the Guardian had succeeded, long before he passed away, in building up the Administration of the Faith all over the world and making of it such a smoothly running international organization. He could never have achieved this during his lifetime if he had not had such a remarkable sense of proportion. He always knew where he could give way to the pressure of events without harming the Faith and when he should insist that, at any cost, some particular principle must be meticulously followed because not to do so would jeopardize a fundamental issue. Let us take the two extremes we find covered by his instructions on various occasions, both dealing with the same subject — National Conventions. At a time when there was a suggestion made to him by the American Assembly, in 1932, that because of the imperative need for economy the Convention should be given up that year and the election take place by mail, he cabled: "Spiritual advantages derived from deliberations of delegates in Convention assembled outweigh financial considerations. Urge eliminate unnecessary expenses." On another occasion, when he inaugurated the North American believers' first Seven Year Plan through a cable addressed to the 1937 Convention while it was in session, he called upon the delegates to prolong the Convention in order to have time to consider the details of this Plan they were to formulate and launch. But at the time he instructed Australia and New Zealand to form their joint national body, in 1934, he must have been perfectly aware of the fact that because the two countries were separated by a great distance, expensive to traverse, the National Assembly might have difficulty in holding its meetings. He evidently considered the advantages outweighed the disadvantages; the Australian and New Zealand Bahá'ís held a Convention in 1934, one in 1937 and one in 1944 — three in ten years; they conducted their work mostly through correspondence, a quorum operating in Australia in emergencies. This example, so completely different from the advice given to the American believers, reveals how Shoghi Effendi, through his wisdom and judgment, was able to advance the development of the Faith at such a rapid pace, never permitting minor considerations to hamper him or frustrate his purpose. Of primary importance — as soon as a reasonable basis for its election had been laid — was the formation of new National Assemblies; it was desirable that Conventions be held annually, desirable that as many as possible of the delegates take part in them, desirable that the Assembly meet as often as possible to consult, but it was not fundamental; the goal could be achieved by other means if necessary.

Another and typical example of this wonderful balance Shoghi Effendi expressed in all his views is that reflected in his attitude towards the subject of the funds of the Faith. Provisions for the support of the Cause of God had been made by Bahá'u'lláh Himself and mentioned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá on many occasions; but it was not until 1923 that Shoghi Effendi began to lay the

foundations of systematic financial support of the work. On 12 March of that year he wrote a general letter addressed "To the beloved of the Lord and the handmaids of the Merciful throughout America, Great Britain, Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy, Japan and Australasia" in which he said: "As the progress and extension of spiritual activities is dependent and conditioned upon material means, it is of absolute necessity that immediately after the establishment of local as well as National Spiritual Assemblies, a Bahá'í Fund be established...It is the sacred obligation of every conscientious and faithful servant of Bahá'u'lláh who desires to see His Cause advance, to contribute freely and generously for the increase of that Fund." On 6 May he wrote to the American Assembly amplifying this subject and stating that in order to reinforce the vitally needed teaching campaign it was undertaking and to conduct properly and efficiently the manifold affairs that were the responsibility of the National Assembly, it was "urgently necessary to establish that Central fund, which if generously supported and upheld by individual friends and local Assemblies, will soon enable you to execute your plans with promptness and vigour." In a letter in October of that same year his deep concern for the work the believers were required to so urgently undertake after the Master's passing is reflected in these words: "the Cause which stands today in sore need of material help and assistance".

On one hand it was apparent that under no circumstances could the world-redeeming Order of Bahá'u'lláh be established without great financial expenditures and on the other there were two principles that Shoghi Effendi felt compelled to call to the attention of the Bahá'ís which, if not correctly understood and exposed in their proper light, could militate against the much-needed flow of contributions into the various Funds of the Faith. The first was that as the Bahá'ís had received the bounty of knowing of and accepting Bahá'u'lláh in this great new day, and had therefore become His people and were privileged to build up His Divine Kingdom on earth, they were the ones to freely give back to their fellow men the benefits this had brought them; you could not very well first ask people to pay for a thing — in this case all the multiple institutions of the Bahá'í Faith — and then give it to them as a gift! Shoghi Effendi made this very clear as early as 1929: "we should, I feel, regard it as an axiom and guiding principle of Bahá'í administration that in the conduct of every specific Bahá'í activity...only those who have already identified themselves with the Faith and are regarded as its avowed and unreserved supporters should be invited to join and collaborate. For apart from the consideration of embarrassing complications which the association of non-believers in the financing of institutions of a strictly Bahá'í character may conceivably engender...it should be remembered that these specific Bahá'í institutions, which should be viewed in the light of Bahá'u'lláh's gifts bestowed upon the world, can best function and most powerfully exert their influence in the world only if reared and maintained solely by the support of those who are fully conscious of, and unreservedly submissive to, the claims inherent in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh." This was the great spiritual principle involved. The practical, material one, which might lead to "embarrassing complications" was that if you accept money from non-Bahá'ís for Bahá'í schools, Bahá'í Temples and other Bahá'í institutions, including the many activities undertaken by Assemblies, you risk that these well-wishers, by they governments or individuals, societies or philanthropists, will feel they have a right to follow where their money led and have a say in the conduct of purely Bahá'í affairs. As this was obviously impossible, the Guardian stated the Bahá'ís could only accept money from non-Bahá'ís for purely humanitarian purposes, such as charity to be expended for peoples of all racial and religious backgrounds and not just for Bahá'ís.

The second, and what he termed “the cardinal principle”, in a message to the American National Assembly in 1926, was “that all contributions to the fund are to be purely and strictly voluntary in character. It should be made clear and evident to everyone that any form of compulsion, however slight and indirect, strikes at the very root of the principle underlying the formation of the Fund ever since its inception.” This instruction was the logical concomitant of the attitude of the Bahá’í religion that the Message of the Manifestation of God in this day is His free gift to the peoples of the world; that all men have been called by Him to enter the Divine Fold and that in doing so not money but faith is required of them. Unlike so many churches there were no entrance fees, no obligatory dues to be paid, no seats in the Temples to be purchased, no forced contributions. The poor could find a refuge and the rich be welcomed on equal terms.

Apart from these two principles, what was the duty of the Bahá’ís towards the Fund? For a strong and unmistakable duty to support it existed, as Shoghi Effendi made abundantly clear: “The supply of funds,” he wrote to the American Assembly in 1935, “in support of the National Treasury, constitutes, at the present time, the lifeblood of those nascent institutions which you are labouring to erect. Its importance cannot, surely, be overestimated.” He said, in that same message, that the National Fund was the very “bedrock on which all other institutions must necessarily rest and be established”. He said that it “should be increasingly supported by the entire body of the believers, both in their individual capacities, and through their collective efforts, whether organized as groups or as local Assemblies.” By precept and example, over a period of more than a third of a century, the Guardian educated the Bahá’ís in a proper understanding of what it meant to have a Bahá’í Fund, to support it, and to spend it. It is a most fascinating subject; just as the heart pulses blood out through the arteries and capillaries of the body to give life to every individual cell, so the International, the National and the Local Funds pour back into the body of believers the benefits their contributions have made possible. International institutions proclaim the fame and create the heart of a World Community; national institutions, Bahá’í Temples, summer schools, endowments, teaching institutes, literature, news letters, perform the same function on a national scale; and local Funds enable the believers to have meeting places, carry on their teaching activities and generally forward the interests of the Faith in cities, villages and hamlets.

Shoghi Effendi made it clear that one of the duties and privileges of being a follower of Bahá’u’lláh was to support His work in this world. He also made it clear that the principle involved in giving is more important than the sum involved; the penny of a poor man, which may for him and his family represent a real sacrifice, is as precious, as much needed and just as respectable a contribution as the hundreds or thousands of dollars a more well-to-do Bahá’í may give. Over and over again he stressed these two things: universality in giving, the participation of all as a symbol of our common love for and solidarity in our Faith, and sacrifice in giving. At the time when the great Mother Temple of the West was in urgent need of contributions to raise its structure the Guardian wrote: “It cannot be denied that the emanations of spiritual power and inspiration destined to radiate from the central Edifice of the Maṣḥriqu’l-Adhkár will to a very large extent depend upon the range and variety of the contributing believers, as well as upon the nature and degree of self-abnegation which their unsolicited offerings will entail.” It is hard for a wealthy person to sacrifice because he has so much; but for a poor person to sacrifice is easier because he has so little. Money given to the Cause at a sacrifice on the part of any giver carries a particular blessing with it.

I am reminded of an example of this giving of the poor and meek in the Kingdom of God which the Guardian himself referred to in *God Passes By*: "...the touching scene when 'Abdu'l-Bahá, receiving from the hands of a Persian friend, recently arrived in London from 'Ishqábád, a cotton handkerchief containing a piece of dry black bread and a shrivelled apple — the offering of a poor Bahá'í workman in that city — opened it before His assembled guests, and, leaving His luncheon untouched, broke pieces off that bread, and partaking Himself of it shared it with those who were present." The first Bahá'í Temple erected in Russia, the Mother Temple of the West in America, and the three other great Bahá'í Houses of Worship in Europe, Africa and Australia have all been built by contributions from believers all over the world, many of them representing real sacrifice on the part of Bahá'í men, women and even children.

At the very outset of his instructions regarding the necessity to build up a national Fund and create local Funds Shoghi Effendi, in a cable in 1923, made another fundamental principle involved in giving quite clear: "Individuals at liberty specify purpose of their donations. But general principle contributions, free and frequent, by individuals and local Assemblies toward central fund for discretionary apportionment by National Assembly highly recommended." Briefly, and simply, as usual, he put everything in its proper place; the Assembly Funds — national or local — needed to be freely and frequently supported, but the principle of the freedom of individuals, so inherent in the Faith, was likewise pointed out.

Shoghi Effendi himself repeatedly supported various undertakings in different countries. Shortly after the Master's passing he began to contribute to the American Temple; in 1957 he announced he himself would defray one-third of the cost of erecting the three new Bahá'í Temples to be constructed during the World Crusade; he supported much of the translation and printing of Bahá'í books, contributed to Bahá'í cemeteries and the purchase of various Bahá'í headquarters, and innumerable other activities. In doing this he set an example to all believers and all Bahá'í institutions of giving, of participating with others in the joy of bringing to fruition plans of the Cause of God. His complete frankness in such matters, his avowal on some occasions that he did not have the money needed to do a certain thing he wanted to do for the Cause, the touching words with which he sent a small sum for the American Temple: "I beg to enclose my humble contribution of 19 pounds, as my share of the numerous donations that have reached the Temple Treasury in the past year", all provide not only an example but a very real encouragement to believers rich or poor to follow in his footsteps, happy they have such footsteps to tread in.

In his constant encouragement of the Bahá'ís to arise and spread their Faith among the spiritually hungry multitudes of their fellow men the Guardian frequently recalled to them the injunction of Bahá'u'lláh Himself: "*Centre your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God. Whoso is worthy of so high a calling, let him arise and promote it. Whoso is unable, it is his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation...*" and said that those who were not able to go forth and establish themselves in those places where Bahá'ís were so urgently needed, should, mindful of these words of Bahá'u'lláh, "determine...to appoint a deputy who, on that believer's behalf, will arise and carry out so noble an enterprise." On more than one occasion he himself, through a National Assembly, deputed a number of Bahá'ís to fulfil specific goals.

The Guardian gave to the Bahá'ís of the world what in my own mind I like to call guiding lines of thought, different themes in different fields. They were, to use a homely but graphic metaphor,

like the tracks of a railway on which certain trains run; it is the track that keeps the train on its path and enables it to reach its destination. Some of these major themes must be recalled if we are to gain any true appreciation of the life-work of Shoghi Effendi and to study how he succeeded in rearing the nascent institutions of a future world society.

