

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

6 January 1998

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 28 November 1997 and has asked us to provide you with the following reply.

The House of Justice appreciates your turning to it with your concerns about the absence of a Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi, and it stands ready to provide the clarifications required to assist you in resolving the issues troubling you.

As a well-deepened believer with a distinguished record of service to the Cause over many decades, you have undoubtedly made a careful study of the letters of 6 October 1963, 9 March 1965, 27 May 1966, and 7 December 1969, published in the volume *Messages from the Universal House of Justice—1963–1986*, which pertain directly to several of the issues to which you have referred in your letter.

An issue not directly discussed in these messages is that of the members of the family of Shoghi Effendi who were expelled from the Faith as Covenant-breakers, and their offspring. A detailed description of the faithlessness of this family has been provided in the book *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh* by Adib Taherzadeh, a perusal of which provides a deeper insight into the events which prompted the following statement of Shoghi Effendi in a cable of 5 April 1952: "TIME ALONE REVEAL EXTENT HAVOC WREAKED THIS VIRUS VIOLATION INJECTED FOSTERED OVER TWO DECADES 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S FAMILY."

Unless they manifest evidence to the contrary, the children of the Covenant-breaking members of Shoghi Effendi's immediate family must necessarily be regarded as being infected with this spiritually contagious disease through their intimate association with their parents. Shoghi Effendi warned the believers about the propagation of Covenant-breaking attitudes through close family relationships in the following passage from a letter dated 18 August 1949 written on his behalf:

The friends are sometimes surprisingly naive and superficial in their approach to the subject of Covenant-breakers. They do not seem to understand that the descendants of Azal, with their mother's milk, drank hatred of Bahá'u'lláh, just as the descendants of Muḥammad-'Alí and his relatives have imbibed from babyhood a false concept of the Master. It takes practically a miracle to overcome this lifelong habit of wrong thought.

While this passage was written about the descendants of Mírzá Yaḥyá and Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí, the insight it conveys is applicable also to the descendants of the Covenant-breakers in the family of Shoghi Effendi.

In your letter, you have referred to the possibility of a member of Shoghi Effendi's family expressing contrition and being admitted into the community. In principle, membership in the Bahá'í community is open to all such individuals who make application to the House of Justice and who are found, following investigation carried out with the assistance of the Counselors or their deputies, to be free of the spirit of Covenant-breaking. Thus the only barrier to the entry into the Faith of the members of the family of Shoghi Effendi, or indeed any of the descendants of Bahá'u'lláh, is their own attitude to the provisions of the Covenant.

Since the central element of your concern is that of the exercise of the functions of Guardian of the Cause, you should note that a distinction must be made between the possible reinstatement of members of Shoghi Effendi's family and the designation of another Guardian of the Cause. You are well familiar with the provisions in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá for the Guardian's appointment of a successor. The House of Justice pointed out in its letter of 9 March 1965 that:

At the time of our beloved Shoghi Effendi's death it was evident, from the circumstances and from the explicit requirements of the Holy Texts, that it had been impossible for him to appoint a successor in accordance with the provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This situation, in which the Guardian died without being able to appoint a successor, presented an obscure question not covered by the explicit Holy Text, and had to be referred to the Universal House of Justice.

The House of Justice's decision, which was announced on 6 October 1963, was that "the Universal House of Justice finds that there is no way to appoint or to legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi." In addition, no believer, irrespective of his lineage or accomplishments, can now legitimately advance a claim to be the Guardian of the Cause, since 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated quite categorically:

... ere the expiration of a thousand years, no one has the right to utter a single word, even to claim the station of Guardianship. The Most Holy Book is the Book to which all peoples shall refer, and in it the Laws of God have been revealed. Laws not mentioned in the Book should be referred to the decision of the Universal House of Justice. There will be no grounds for difference ... Beware, beware lest anyone create a rift or stir up sedition. Should there be differences of opinion, the Supreme House of Justice would immediately resolve the problems.

The House of Justice understands your distress at the absence of a Guardian, and at the consequent adjustments which were necessitated in the Administrative structure of the Faith. However, there should be no doubt about the ability of the Cause of God to accomplish its world-redeeming and world-transforming mission, despite the loss it suffered with the passing of Shoghi Effendi. Your attention is directed to the statement of the House of Justice on 9 March 1965, that:

Although not invested with the function of interpretation, the House of Justice is in a position to do everything necessary to establish the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh on this earth. Unity of doctrine is maintained by the existence of the authentic texts of Scripture and the voluminous interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, together with the absolute prohibition against anyone propounding "authoritative" or "inspired" interpretations or usurping the function of Guardian. Unity of administration is assured by the authority of the Universal House of Justice.

You may also obtain a deeper understanding of the prospects for the development of the Administrative Order by contemplating the guidance provided in the following extract from a letter written on behalf of the Guardian in August 1936:

The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh constitutes, indeed, the stage of maturity in the development of mankind. His appearance has released such spiritual forces which will continue to animate, for many long years to come, the world in its development. Whatever progress may be achieved in later ages—after the unification of the whole human race is achieved—will be but improvements in the machinery of the world. For the machinery itself has been already created by Bahá'u'lláh. The task of continually improving and perfecting this machinery is one which later Prophets will be called upon to achieve. They will thus move and work within the orbit of the Bahá'í Cycle.

The House of Justice trusts that the clarifications set out in this letter will be of assistance to you. Should you find that aspects of this matter remain troubling, you should not hesitate to turn to it again. You are assured of the prayers of the House of Justice on your behalf in the Holy Shrines.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat