

Ruhiyyih Khanum's Two Cables Announcing the Death of Shoghi Effendi

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In my previous article “The Aghsan”, it was noted that Bahau'llah anticipated the Guardianship in His Most Holy Book and, in His Book of the Covenant restricted it to two Guardians: Abdu'l-Bahá and, after Him Muhammad-Ali. The latter was removed by the former Who appointed Shoghi Effendi in his stead. Had Shoghi Effendi appointed a Guardian; he would have been considered a Covenant Breaker. (See G. Gonzales, The Aghsan)

Shoghi Effendi was not an Aghsan; he was an Afnan, distantly related to Haji Mirza Abul Qassim. brother of the Bab's wife, he was not a believer. Muhammad Ali was an Aghsan who spent all his life close to Bahá'u'lláh; the second part of Nabil's Narrative raised him to the stars. It is remarkable how Abdu'l-Bahá took this step, at the very edge of the Covenant, something impossible without divine assistance.

Abdu'l-Bahá knew well that His grandson could not have children (1). Monireh Khanum, His wife, wanted to establish a series of imams after her blood; after the death of her son Husayn, Bahá'u'lláh Himself denounced her. Although rejected by Bahá'u'lláh, at the end Monireh was raised to the altar of sanctity by Shoghi Effendi, probably because she rendered good services to the Faith. She is the “Holy Mother”, and her tomb flanked by “the resting-place of the Greatest Holy Leaf with those of her brother and mother” occupies the most honorable place of the Arc, its fulcrum and axis. Anyhow, *magister dixit*.

This Lady was well-educated and clever. It seems that to please her, Abdu'l-Bahá, although knowing that His grandson could not have children, wrote in His Testament, her idea: “...*after him (Shoghi Effendi) will succeed the first-born of his lineal descendants...It is incumbent upon the Guardian of the Cause of God (Shoghi Effendi) to appoint in his own lifetime him that shall become his successor;...*”

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Shoghi Effendi passed away in London on November 4th, 1957. The same day his wife Ruhiyyih Khanum (born Mary Sutherland Maxwell, 1910-2000), wrote two cables informing the Bahais of his death. Each cable, even if reporting the same fact, carried a different meaning.

First Cable

Guardian desperately ill Asiatic flu **tell Leroy [Ioas]**
inform all National Assemblies inform believers supplicate
prayers divine protection Faith. Nov 4, 1957

Comment. - Shoghi Effendi was already dead at this time. He had appointed Leroy Ioas to the International Bahai Council in December 1951 as secretary-general; Mason Remey (1874-1974) was its President. With the death of Shoghi Effendi, Ruhiyyih Khanum was no more his liaison with the International Bahai Council and together with her fellow Hands became headless and inoperative. But still, she was Shoghi Effendi's widow and somehow the treasurer of the Bahai Faith (2)

The gist of this cable was her recognition of the International Bahai Council. The announcement of this Council came in as the only proclamation made by Shoghi Effendi and could be considered as **his Will and Testament**, fulfilling the law of Bahá'u'lláh.

Shoghi Effendi called it, **weighty epoch-making decision and this historic decision marking most significant milestone (in) evolution (of) Administrative Order and, its efflorescence into Universal House (of) Justice. Also... (the) constitution (of) International Council which history will acclaim (as the) greatest event ... (upon) second epoch (of) Formative Age, ...potentially unsurpassed (by) any enterprise undertaken since inception (of) Administrative Order..., ranking second only (to) glorious immortal events associated (with) Ministries (of the) Three Central Figures (of) Faith...** - Cablegram, February 9, 1951; Baha'i News (See **Appendix One**)

It is difficult to understand how this particularly important document remains almost unknown now, as it was three quarters of a century ago. This calls to mind the disappearance of The Will and Testament of Abdu'l-Bahá from all shelves, at least in Latin America, after the declaration of the end of the Guardianship.

All the above, beg the question of what Mason Remey was doing, since he was the President of the embryonic Universal House of Justice. This appointment fitted him like a ring on the finger. He was one of the great believers, although with slight *delirium des grandeur*. He was well beloved by Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, as well as hundreds of believers. He was astonished and overwhelmed with this appointment. His later appointment as a Hand of the Cause confused him even more since he must serve in two areas. Immediately after the death of Shoghi Effendi, he could; after checking it was impossible to have a Bahai Court, call for the election of the Universal House of Justice with a high probability of being elected there. But he became old and susceptible and following the promptings of Joel B. Marangella, committed spiritual suicide by claiming to be the Guardian. For this, his fellow Hands expelled him as a Covenant Breaker; Hand Hassan Balyuzi showed his opposition. Anyway, a great man, spiritual son of Abdu'l-Bahá and spiritual brother of Shoghi Effendi, passed to the Mercy of God, despised and forgotten.

Second Cable

- SHOGHI EFFENDI BELOVED OF ALL HEARTS SACRED TRUST GIVEN BELIEVERS BY MASTER PASSED AWAY SUDDEN HEART ATTACK IN SLEEP FOLLOWING ASIATIC FLU STOP **URGE BELIEVERS REMAIN STEADFAST CLING INSTITUTION HANDS** LOVINGLY REARED RECENTLY REINFORCED EMPHASIZED BY BELOVED GUARDIAN STOP ONLY ONENESS HEART ONENESS PURPOSE CAN BEFITTINGLY TESTIFY LOYALTY ALL NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES' BELIEVERS DEPARTED GUARDIAN WHO SACRIFICED SELF UTTERLY FOR SERVICE FAITH. RUHIYYIH

Comment. –In this second cable to the Bahais at large, Ruhiyyih Khanum sounds with the voice of authority “URGE BELIEVERS REMAIN STEADFAST CLING INSTITUTION HANDS,” From that moment, unwillingly or not, she assumed the role of quasi-Guardianship. This outstanding and charming lady had done for the Faith more than others; she was the ambassadress of the Faith everywhere and her leadership was evident; the doors of the Universal House of Justice were wide open to her until the end of her life.

After the death of Shoghi Effendi, Ruhiyyih Khanum was no more the liaison with the International Bahai Council and as a Hand became inoperative (3); however, she gathered the Hands of the Cause who choose nine of them that constituted The Custodians; curiously, the President of the Embryonic International House of Justice Mason Remey was one of them. Ruhiyyih Khanum was not very happy with the formation of the Custodians since honestly asks ***"How [was this body of the Hands] to assume the reins of authority with no document to support us"*** A clever lawyer advised that all National Assemblies must give their consent and pledge their allegiance to the Custodians, what all of them gave. However, in Venezuela, a group of important people protested and were easily expelled. The expulsion by the Hands occurs when someone opposes the Guardian (if there is one). The Custodians had the boldness to state that they will exercise *“such functions, rights and powers in succession to the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith”* and *“The Custodians shall be deemed to succeed the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith.* (Nov.25, 1957). In their favor the Hands of the Cause have the statement of Shoghi Efendi, that they are: **'The Chief Stewards of Baha’u’llah’s embryonic World Commonwealth.'** (October 1957)

In 1958 the International Bahai Council was the Head of the Faith and Mason Remey its President. A year later the Custodians were the Head.

The Universal House of Justice was elected in 1963. God is Great!

APPENDIX ONE

Proclamation of Shoghi Effendi

9 February 1951

Proclaim National Assemblies (of) East (and) West weighty epoch-making decision (of) formation (of) first International Bahá'í Council, forerunner (of) supreme administrative institution destined (to) emerge (in) fullness (of) time within precincts beneath shadow (of) World Spiritual Center (of) Faith already established (in) twin cities (of) 'Akká (and) Haifa. Fulfillment (of) prophecies uttered (by) Founder (of) Faith (and) Center (of) His Covenant culminating (in) establishment (of) Jewish State, signaling birth after lapse (of) two thousand years (of an) independent nation (in the) Holy Land, (the) swift unfoldment (of) historic undertaking associated (with) construction (of) superstructure (of the) Báb's Sepulchre (on) Mount Carmel, (the) present adequate maturity (of) nine vigorously functioning national administrative institutions throughout Bahá'í World, combine (to) induce me (to) arrive (at) this historic decision marking most significant milestone (in) evolution (of) Administrative Order (of the) Faith (of) Bahá'u'lláh (in) course (of) last thirty years. Nascent Institution now created (is) invested (with) threefold function: first, (to) forge link (with) authorities (of) newly emerged State; second, (to) assist me (to) discharge responsibilities involved (in) erection (of) mighty superstructure (of the) Báb's Holy Shrine; third, (to) conduct negotiations related (to) matters (of) personal status (with) civil authorities. To these will be added further functions (in) course (of) evolution (of) this first embryonic International Institution, marking its development into officially recognized Bahá'í Court, its transformation into duly elected body, its efflorescence into Universal House (of) Justice, (and) its final fruition through erection (of) manifold auxiliary institutions constituting (the) World Administrative Center destined (to) arise (and) function (and) remain permanently established (in) close neighborhood (of) Twin Holy Shrines. Hail (with) thankful, joyous heart (at) long last (the) constitution (of) International Council which history will acclaim (as the) greatest event shedding luster (upon) second epoch (of) Formative Age (of) Bahá'í Dispensation potentially unsurpassed (by) any enterprise undertaken since inception (of) Administrative Order (of) Faith (on) morrow (of) 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Ascension, ranking second only (to) glorious immortal events associated (with) Ministries (of the) Three Central Figures (of) Faith (in) course (of) First Age (of) most glorious Dispensation (of the) five thousand century Bahá'í Cycle. Advise publicize announcement through Public Relations Committee. —
Shoghi. Cablegram, February 9, 1951, Baha'i News.

On the members of the Council and the "offices" they held, were: Rúhíyyih Khánum, liaison to the Guardian; Mason Remey, president; Amelia Collins, vice-president; Jessie Revel, treasurer; Lutfullah Hakim, eastern secretary; Ethel Ravel, western secretary. March 2, 1951, by cablegram,

Shoghi Effendi, appointed Leroy Ioas to the International Baha'i Council in December 1951 as secretary-general.

NOTES

- 1) Mirza Hadi took his son to Baghdad for medical reasons; the report indicated a physiological delay that causes infertility. Abdu'l-Bahá saw in this a "Sign of God."
- 2) Ruhiyyih Khanum wrote, "A further large deposit, invested for safekeeping in Switzerland in both his and my name, I later turned over to the Universal House of Justice after its election" (Ministry of the Custodians, p. 11).
- 3) *O friends! The Hands of the Cause of God must be nominated and appointed by the Guardian of the Cause of God. All must be under his shadow and obey his command.*
- 4) The term **Custodians** appears to be referred to as the **Champions** in the Aqdas v.42.)

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