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Notes

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Between 1937 and 1938, there being no air travel, very few North American Bahá'ís could afford the time or cost to make the journey to Haifa. I had to sail to Europe on business in December 1937. Mrs. May Maxwell persuaded me to extend my trip, which I did, by train and bus, to visit the Guardian. I shall be eternally grateful to her for this privilege.

Throughout 1937, only two North Americans made the pilgrimage, Mrs. McCormick from Chicago and I from Montreal. In contrast, today about a hundred pilgrims arrive every fortnight, mostly from the Americas. This is one more measure of the growth and strength of the Bahá'í Faith.

The Guardian told me that the main purpose of my pilgrimage was to visit and pray at the shrines and holy places. In my own mind, my main purpose was to visit Shoghi Effendi. Actually, I never met Shoghi Effendi. However, having been the only Western pilgrim, I had the undivided attention of the Guardian for about three hours of each of the five nights. Gradually, I gained the feeling that Shoghi Effendi, the man, had sacrificed himself long ago for the Faith and

the Guardianship. I have never before or since met a human being who had given so much of himself for the Faith, obliterating all personal desires and aspirations.

One evening while discussing the subject of infallibility the Guardian explained that the derived infallibility of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was much inferior to that of Bahá’u’lláh, the prophet, while his own was infinitely inferior to that of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He admitted that his powers were limited to the interpretation of the Writings, having as its purpose the preservation of the unity of the Faith. When I asked him how do we know when he speaks to us as the Guardian and when as Shoghi Effendi, Rúhíyyih Khánum, his young bride, who was sitting next to him, asked: “I would like to know too; which is which?” The Guardian did not answer my question.

I asked the Guardian many questions, most of them prompted by my immaturity, having been a Bahá’í only ten years. One night Shoghi Effendi asked me a question, which I could not answer, nor did I understand its significance at that time. {{p189}} Shoghi Effendi asked me: “Since after the martyrdom of the Báb the authority of the Faith was passed on to Bahá’u’lláh, and after his passing to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, to whom was it transferred after the ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá?” I answered, of course, to Shoghi Effendi. He said no. I then said the Guardian. He again shook his head. I then ventured the Universal House of Justice. He again said no, and I could see from his expression that he was disappointed with my inability to answer his question. Then he asked, are the friends not reading my letters? The answer, he said, is clearly stated in The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh. It is divided into four parts: Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and the fourth part entitled the “World Order of Bahá’u’lláh,” which is the answer to his question.

The Guardian spoke a beautiful Oxford English. I spoke English with a terrible Hungarian-Canadian accent, which the Guardian found difficult to follow. Rúhíyyih Khánum, who had known me for nine years, had to interpret on several occasions.

After returning to Montreal, I wrote seven pages of the usual pilgrim’s notes, but I did not mention the above question, as I did not see any importance in it. As time passed, I could not forget his question, nor the sad expression on his face for my inability to answer. I was also puzzled as to why he had asked me that question.

As the years advanced, especially after his passing in 1957, I realized increasingly that the greatest lesson I learned was not during the many hours of exclusive conversations, most of which were based on my questions, but it was the question the Guardian asked me and which I could not answer. For the last forty years or so, I have asked the friends the same question on four continents, at untold firesides, summer and winter schools, and I received, with one single exception, the same wrong answers that I gave the Guardian as far back as January, 1938.

It is obvious that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in his Will and Testament stated very clearly

that all Bahá'ís should turn to Shoghi Effendi, that “whoso obeyeth him not ... hath not obeyed God” and again, “He that opposeth him hath opposed the True One...” It is also indisputable that Shoghi Effendi was the head of the Faith during his ministry of thirty-five years. Yet, he wanted to impress upon me at that time, that the authority of the Faith did not rest upon him but on the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, which was based on two pillars: The Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice. His vision of the future went far beyond the Guardianship, and our failure in all these years to visualize the significance of his question should indeed make him feel sad.

[^] ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Will and Testament of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1968) 11.

Our Faith was centered in the Guardian as a father figure, oblivious of the other pillar and its implications, which was a distortion if not a mutilation of our vision of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. {{p190}} Shoghi Effendi described this condition as follows:

To dissociate the administrative principles of the Cause from the purely spiritual and humanitarian teachings would be tantamount to a mutilation of the body of the Cause, a separation that can only result in the disintegration of its component parts, and the extinction of the Faith itself.[^]

[^] Shoghi Effendi, Guidance for Today and Tomorrow (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1953), 99.

These are strong words. Shoghi Effendi told me in Haifa that the Bahá'í Faith was founded by two prophets, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, and rests on two Orders, that of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and the Administrative Order, which has two pillars that are absolutely indispensable to each other.

[END]