

An **Introduction** and quick **translation** of a letter written by RUHI Mohsen AFNAN to the Baha'i Spiritual Assembly of Iran in 1349 (1970) in Tehran, after reading *The Priceless Pearl* by Ruhyyih Rabbani. The letter was not actually sent at the time.

Introduction

Ruhi Afnan was the son of Abdul Baha's daughter, Toubah Khanum and Mohsen Afnan, a member of the Bab's family.

In 1969 Ruhyyih Rabbani, née Mary Maxwell, widow of the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, Shoghi Effendi, published her book *The Priceless Pearl*, regarding her late husband. Ruhi Afnan, a first cousin of the Guardian, a long-time and close friend of Shoghi Effendi, had many things in common with him. They shared Abdul Baha as a grandfather. They both had Afnans for fathers, their mothers were sisters and they had both been born into, grew up in and were nurtured by the legacy of Baha'u'llah and the Baha'i Faith in the family and household of Abdul Baha. When Shoghi Effendi found out that Abdul Baha had appointed him as the Guardian of the Cause, the shock and unexpected weight of the responsibility placed on his young shoulders caused him eventually to leave Haifa and spend almost a year in Europe. Ruhi was his companion, fellow traveller and secretarial aid. Close in age, (Shoghi Effendi was two years older) both were dedicated to the service of the Cause and furthering its spread and its message. Ruhi twice went to the US and Canada to preach the Cause and for years served Shoghi Effendi as secretary and in a variety of other capacities.

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Cause, saw fit to 'cast out' Ruhi Afnan from the Cause about 1937. For years, like other 'cast out' members of the family, he had not uttered a word regarding the whole tragic history that had ensued.

In 1970, living in Tehran, he read *The Priceless Pearl*. In his opinion, the ideas, conceptions, interpretations and judgements passed by Ruhyyih Khanum in that book – relating to the Faith and its underlying essential principles and beliefs, or to the various members of the family – were not in accordance with the basic tenets of the Cause that the Bab, Baha'u'llah and Abdul Baha had lived, taught, suffered and died for. That was when he decided to break his decades of silence and wrote the ensuing letter to the Spiritual Assembly in Tehran. For some reason, he refrained from sending it.

Now, over four decades later, it seems appropriate to publish it, for the simple reason that there are so many events, decisions and judgements that have been made in the past, and stated in that book, which, in the opinion of Ruhi Afnan, who was very close to the Cause, well versed in its ideas, principles and history and who sincerely loved and cared for its fate, deemed it necessary to clarify many things expressed in that book and to steer matters back to their original course.

Doubtless there will be those who disagree. After all, the book was written by a lady who shared Shoghi Effendi's life for 20 years; to whom he had given the title of Amatul Baha (bondmaid/handmaid of Baha); appointed her as a Hand of the Cause and whom he considered his 'shield' at difficult times of his life, (see back cover of *The Priceless Pearl*, 2nd edition, 2000). After him, and for over 40 years, she brooked no opposition and unopposed by any family 'out cast', drew her own conclusions regarding the Cause, its

principles and the priceless pearl, its Guardian. It remains for readers to draw their own conclusions. History is best served when all facts, events, interpretations, decisions and conclusions are aired and placed in the public domain. None of the thirteen grandchildren of Abdul Baha, of whom only one remains alive today, (2013) were ever approached by Baha'i historians, researchers, fact finders or just curious human beings, to ask, question, find out why, after the Master, matters moved the way they did. Ruhi Afnan throws some light on that area of one-sided darkness.

Bahiyeh Afnan Shahid

He starts his letter with reference to the case of Ne'matullah Falah – who had left Iran at the time of Baha'u'llah's exile and had finally settled in Iskenderun, Turkey, where he had become a successful businessman. He had been appointed Honorary Iranian Consul in that city, a post he had taken upon the explicit encouragement of the Master, Abdul Baha.

Upon his accession to the Guardianship Shoghi Effendi had considered that it would serve the Cause better if Baha'is refrained from all political activities. He therefore asked Falah to resign his post. This Falah refused to do, especially as he had a letter from the Master urging him to take the post. This resulted in the expulsion of Falah and his family from the Cause.

Passing through Iskenderun at a much later date, Ruhi Afnan met the members of the family and impressed by their lasting faith and commitment to the Cause, encouraged them to write to the House of Justice to seek a return to the community. Since the letter had to be written in English, Ruhi actually wrote it for them. Soon their request was granted and now the members of the Falah family are back in the Cause. One daughter, married to a Turkish diplomat, had remained out, fearing that difficult conditions would be placed in her way. Ruhi says that this had made him both angry and upset. However, he had been greatly relieved to hear that that she had been subsequently also accepted back in the community,

Ruhi Afnan adds that during the last thirty years, though he himself was deprived of serving the Cause, he had encouraged others who had been expelled to seek to return to the Cause and to fully participate in the membership of the community.

He ends this first section by [in his own words] 'making so bold' as to remind the members of the Spiritual Assembly that the placing of such conditions upon membership in the community are completely contrary to the revealed words of Baha'u'llah and the Bab and should not be permitted. The measure of Reality and Truth are only the prophets – unchanging and unchangeable. Everyone and everything in the phenomenal world, where things are capable of change, have the words of the divinely inspired prophets as their yardstick, not the words of persons and institutions of this world.

Ruhi Afnan quotes Baha'u'llah's comparison of divine manifestations (prophets) to the Sun of Reality or Truth, and the guardians to moons that obtain their light from that Sun and reflect it on humankind. In this revelation Baha'u'llah placed the Guardianship, together with the House of Justice in one twin institution, with the Guardian, who cannot be removed from office, as head of that institution. But Baha'u'llah adds that 'omooreh siyasiyeh' [usually understood as political matters, but here referring to civil and administrative affairs] are the domain of the Guardian and the members of the House

of Justice, and matters of ‘ibadat’, worship and faith, to that which was revealed in the Book. This meant that the the legislative powers of these institutions were limited to ‘omooreh siyasiyeh’ and could not exceed that. Faith and belief, part of ‘ibadat’, are outside their domain.

Faith in the Sun of Truth

Religion, says Ruhi Afnan, is the manifestation (tajalli) of divine light or mercy that shines upon the reality of all things, including humanity’s intelligence. Faith is divine radiance. Human intelligence is the mirror in which that reflection occurs. Awareness of that divine radiance and dedication to that light are the proofs of faith. This is an internal and deeply personal feeling. Only those who have that awareness and are dedicated to that light can vouch for it. Confession and admitting to that are the only proofs of that faith. Abdul Baha, in his will, declared faith in the Bab and Baha’u’llah as the only requirements of being a Baha’i. No other requirements were mentioned. Ruhi Afnan quotes the Quran to that effect as well, where it is said that faith is an inner feeling and condition and is sufficient proof of belief. There is no mention of any ‘meezan’, or means of measurement, other than the intelligence of each individual believer to judge their own belief and faith. (Al Anfal 2).

Special mercies (rahmateh makhsooseh) of God’s Divine Being upon the Suns of Reality (the prophets)

In the Persian Bayan the direct relationship between human beings and the Sun of Reality has been clearly explained. Also, that God is Truth and what is other than God are his creatures who worship Him. The prophet is the complete manifestation of divinity. In essence, God and the Sun of Truth or the prophet are one and the same. The radiance of one is the radiance of the other. It is through them that God’s creation is nourished. For these divine names there is no first and no last, nor has there ever been, or in future shall ever be, any numbers. Meaning that these manifestations have always appeared and will go on doing so.

Widespread Mercy of the Sun of Reality upon Humankind

In the same section of the Bayan the Bab says that in the being of every created thing something of God exists – and has always existed, with which oneness with divine qualities can be achieved. Something that is perceived by God alone.

In a long paragraph (with extensive quotes from the Bab’s Bayan, the translation of which has not been here attempted) Ruhi Afnan explains that according to the Bayan, two realities exist in this world. One is the manifestation of the divine qualities and the other the ability to be a mirror that reflects these qualities. The first is superior to the second for if it did not exist, worship, which is the rising awareness of the reality that is above and beyond one’s self, would not occur. But understanding the existence of these two does not mean that there is a place for a third reality. For any third reality would be a creature of the creator, for there is nothing more than the realities of creator and created. Based on this Ruhi Afnan ascertains that guardians and houses of justice cannot

constitute a third reality. Thus the primary duty of all created realities, no matter of what kind, be it guardian or religious organisation, is, each to the best of their abilities, to make that divine light that the creator shines on his creation their own, and reflect it back on their surroundings. For in the world of creation everything is headed towards wellbeing, improvement and an onward, upward march, leaving no place for a third ‘reality’ in the equation, for anything other than the first two is a creature. It therefore follows that neither guardianship nor houses of justice can form a third category. In fact, it is the primary duty of everything in creation, no matter who they may be, including guardians or religious organisations, having first absorbed that divine light which shines forth from the creator, to reflect that divine light, each to the best of their capacity, upon their surroundings. This does not permit for a third reality to appear between creator and created, as has happened in Christianity.

What is meant by Baha’ism

As such it means the radiance that shines from the manifestation or God’s will on everything in creation, whether they are aware of it or not. As such it causes the nurturing, development, improvement and elevation of everything in creation. As such, Baha’ism is unlimited and has no borders. Faith is the acceptance of that divine radiance.

In this sense Baha’ism is the radiance of the divine qualities, not the appearance of the being of God. It is not a piece or a part of the being of God. Man’s intellect and mind are not part of God’s intellect and mind, to be the source of wisdom. They are creatures, not creators. Man’s mind is not independent in essence, for it derives its radiance from a better and higher source. To shine brightly Baha’ism must ever seek light directly from the Manifestation. In his will, Baha’u’llah names the heads of the Baha’i Faith as ‘guardians’ whose duty it is to be caretakers and servers of the Cause, to further spread the aims of the religion. It should be kept in mind though that the guardians and safe keepers of the Cause are not representatives and spokesmen (wakeel), ministers (wazir), or equals (nazeer), or the divine manifestation (prophet), for the latter have divine power within them which they make manifest. Guardians and safe keepers only mirror the sun of reality (the prophet) and they must seek light from this source, since they themselves are not the source of that light and that radiance.

The Mirrors That Speak of the Sun of Reality (Marayayeh Mostahkieh az Shamseh Haquiqat)

Ruhi Afnan quotes Baha’u’llah’s Tablet to Salman to answer the question regarding the position of the Sun of Reality and the mirroring of that divine radiance. He equivocally differentiates the station of the Sun of Reality that is the prophet, from the station of all other people who do no more than reflect the divinity existing in the prophet, adding that without the Sun of Reality there would be no mirrors to reflect anything. Ruhi Afnan goes on to quote Baha’u’llah to the effect that divine grace, as seen in the prophets, is something which like spring breezes, wafts over and encompasses everything in creation. He insists that Baha’u’llah was most emphatic that the Baha’i Faith was meant for **all** peoples and was absolute divine grace and mercy granted to everyone. It knew no boundaries and was the manifestation of divine light and radiance to everyone in the realm of creation. It has been freely granted without questions or requests, mysticism or certainty. Some would

recognise and realise its value; and some would remain in ignorance. The idea is not to differentiate Baha'is from others – this Baha'u'llah forbids. It encompasses all the people of the world. Baha'ism is not a religion among other religions, as some people conceive it. It is world encompassing divine mercy, a will and desire based on sure foundations, unlimited and unconditional. Anyone who makes the membership conditional removes himself from the world of creation and will be committing an error. As such it cannot remain absolute (motlaq) to be the measure (meezan) of Reality and the test of human conduct. Faith and certainty are the realisation and belief in that outpouring of divine mercy. It is an inner, psychological state. No one save the Manifestation can measure and test that faith and belief. If one day a person or an institution creates any conditions regarding adherence to the Faith it will change the course of God's mercy so freely given to one and all by turning Baha'ism into a party or a community or a mystic path. Divine Reality, which is absolute and eternal, will become the prisoner of a world of change and alteration, confined by human understanding and error. God's infallibility is lost and made subject to human judgement.

A believer's faith and belief will become dependent upon another's acceptance, someone who is another member of the human community and is not a fitting judge. The presence of conditions turns the general, unrestricted character of the religion upside down. It will make love something to be forced, certainty subject to fear, knowledge dependent on personal interest and freedom subject to outward conformity. A divine faith thus becomes an institution devoid of spirit.

Baha'u'llah goes on to explain that at the time of the Bab the same situation pertained. The ulamas of the time considered themselves the judges of people's faith, condemning and killing innocent believers.

Guardians (owliya) of the Faith and members of the House of Justice

Judging by a prayer in which Baha'u'llah mentions the 'owliya' (guardians) who have not allowed worldly thing to detract them from turning to God, Ruhi Afnan concludes that 'owliya' were ordinary people – the same status that the Bab gave to Ali ibn Abi Taleb, the Prince of Believers, 'Ameer al Mo'meneen', for he believed that the latter had been created by the 'word' of the prophet and therefore did not participate in the divine being of the prophet. He was born a 'normal' creature like other men.

This is a purely speculative discussion, since neither Abdul Baha nor Shoghi Effendi saw themselves as sharing in the essentially divine manifestation that the Bab and Baha'u'llah enjoyed. They were mirrors reflecting the Sun of Reality. They both saw their duty as availing themselves of the divine light provided by the Bab and Baha'u'llah and spreading it among the people of the world. Ruhi Afnan uses the example of one of the prayers (munajats) of Abdul Baha where he says:

'... we are all sinners and You the teacher and guide. We are full of shortcomings and You who see and expose them. Do not record the sins of these sinners in Your tablet . . . forgive these wrongdoings . . . for forgiveness is a noble quality . . . and You are the merciful and the forgiving, . . .'

This type of munajat, of which there are many, and the poetry that Abdul Baha wrote after the passing away of Baha'u'llah; the very name of Abdul Baha (the servant of

Baha'u'llah) that he chose for himself; all the letters that he signed with his initials of 'ein ein' (A A) that stood for Abdul Baha Abbas; and the tone and format of his correspondence, all of which showed that he was ever searching for inspiration, guidance, light and mercy from God and the Sun of Reality to spread among the people of the world. This made Abdul Baha the highest and most accomplished of 'mirrors' in the world.

Above and beyond that, there was his insistence and attachment to meetings where prayers were chanted and the efforts he made to instil this custom in all the members of the community. Every day, early in the morning, the members of the family and particularly the children were awakened, and in the parlour where tea was served, he would ask one of the ladies of the household to chant some prayers or tablets. Just as every evening, with those friends who were present, he would spend one or two hours asking those who were good at chanting the prayers to do so. Or he himself would talk about the Cause, explaining and clarifying its principles and talking about its history. I remember being awakened in the middle of the night by the voice of the Master, Abdul Baha, pacing, alone and in the dark, in the central hall of the house, chanting prayers and making supplications. Just one more sign of the heavy burden that Abdul Baha had to bear and his need for help from the Sun of Reality without whose help and sustenance things would not have moved forward. And since Abdul Baha was the well polished mirror of the Sun of Reality, Bahau'llah cast his radiance in his heart, seeing that he saw nothing but his own light in that heart. However, it cannot be said that Abdul Baha was a third 'reality' between the Sun of Reality and the world. The Bab had declared that between God and his creation there cannot be a third, for that third is part of the created world.

There is no doubt that at the time when Shoghi Effendi was in the service of the Master and recorded the prayers of Abdul Baha or translated them and at times, committed them to memory, he was fully aware of this principle. He knew that Abdul Baha never considered himself a participator or partner in the divinity of the Sun of Reality. This he applied to himself as well, never making any claims to infallibility as he knew full well that any phenomenal reality is subject to error. In the many years that I had the honour of being Shoghi Effendi's secretary, I neither heard him say or write anything to that effect. In his own words, quoted in *The Priceless Pearl* (p. 298) he says that Abdul Baha made him 'the responsible interpreter' of the holy writings and responsible for the laws of God, activities to which he diligently applied himself, as well as having 'laboured to expound' and to 'establish . . . in accordance with the explicit instructions written by Abdul Baha in His Will' the Assemblies, all in strict accordance with the clear teachings of Abdul Baha, his source of true sustenance and help, for it was he who had wanted him to undertake the building of these august structures of the Faith. These are the words of Shoghi Effendi himself, and are the frank and clear statement of his position in the shade and shadow of the great infallibility, just as Abdul Baha was in the shade and shadow of that same infallibility, the Sun of Reality, Baha'u'llah. This is compatible with the principle of 'mirroring' just as it is with the world of phenomenon. Undoubtedly the guardianship of the Faith reverted to him. However, guardianship and responsibility are twins and the person who is responsible is capable of error. Otherwise he would be free of any cares. A guardian is ever afraid that he might make a mistake that causes harm to another party. It was the realisation of these dangers that made Abdul Baha write the munajats (prayers or supplications) that he did. It is these sentiments and feelings that must be looked for in Shoghi Effendi as the Guardian of the Faith and not the bestowal of infallibility, as is claimed in *The Priceless Pearl*, chapter xvi A Unique Ministry, (p 436),

where it is stated that:

The Master's grandson had been sublimed¹ by the forces released in His Testament into the Guardian of the Faith; belonging to the sovereign caste of his divine Forefathers, he was himself a sovereign. To the primacy conferred by ties of consanguinity had been added the powers of infallible guidance with which the operation of God's Covenant had invested him. Shoghi Effendi's divine and indefeasible² right to assume the helm of the Cause of God had been fully vindicated through thirty six years of unremitting, heart-breaking toil.

Bestowed infallibility means becoming a complete representation of the original, someone who epitomises him who is considered infallible in the first instance – that is Baha'u'llah, the Sun of Reality. And if any mistakes are made by him then that mistake reverts to the original person bestowing that representation. That is a concept rejected by Baha'u'llah. A guardian is not infallible. Infallibility must be required from a legal representative (wakeel), a minister (vazir), or a manifestation (mazhar), as they are in essence one with the original reality.

Secondly, infallibility is a quality of the Creator as that is the source of the being and the reality of the creature, having given him whatever shape or form He wishes. The Creator is also the measure of all the righteousness and truth of that being. You should not ask for whys and wherefores from the Creator, nor is He open to interpretations and explanations. Infallibility is a characteristic of the Sun of Reality and divine Will, not a characteristic of the mirrors that speak of them, as Baha'u'llah has clearly stated.

We said that the Master, Abdul Baha can be considered a model of human religiosity and morality. Religiosity and morality depend on two foundations: knowledge and freedom to choose that which is best. Without these two bases it is not possible to have a religious and moral life. Freedom gives value to choice. Anyone who lacks this freedom is forced to become an instrument whose actions have no moral value. The possibility of making mistakes made a model of Abdul Baha. If there was no possibility of error in what he said or did he would not have been a model to the world. Nor would his existence have produced anything good. Thus the term infallibility, in all its meanings mentioned in *The Priceless Pearl* (page 436) with reference to Shoghi Effendi, is out of place, unless we say that he was the Sun of Reality and a manifestation of God's will. This was something he never claimed.

Secondly, Shoghi Effendi says that Abdul Baha designated him as the 'interpreter of God's tablets'. We have seen that Baha'u'llah considered this as one of the complete prerogatives of the Sun of Reality and the manifestation of the Primal Will, the creator of all things. Adding that none but that manifestation can arrive at the pearls hidden at the bottom of that great sea and understand them as they deserve to be understood, for he is the real interpreter of the secrets and the destiny therein concealed. The meaning of these words is that the interpretation of the mirrors cannot be superior to that of the manifestation. Yes, the mirrors interpret, each according to his ability and station, but essentially they are of this created world as is their knowledge and understanding. To

¹[The Oxford Dictionary says that 'sublimed' used as a verb is used in chemistry (with reference to a solid substance) which changes directly into vapour when heated, typically forming a solid deposit again on cooling]. Maybe 'was made sublime' was what was meant.

²Indefeasible refers to a state or right that cannot be defeated, revoked or made void.

the extent that the heart of the mirrors are purified and clarified, to that extent will the divine light be reflected therein. This is what Shoghi Effendi meant when he said that the Master, Abdul Baha, appointed him as the interpreter of the writings and made him responsible for the laws of God. Abdul Baha himself had been given those prerogatives by Baha'u'llah, the manifestation of the Primal Will and the repository of divine inspiration.

The Meaning of ‘Being in the Shade of the Great Infallibility’.

Infallibility is not a quality that can be attributed to ordinary people since they cannot be equals or similar to, or representatives of the Sun of Reality, as is done in the Catholic Church. Infallibility, like all other divine qualities, is a ray that shines from the Sun of Reality, which like the rays of the sun, shine upon the mirror of the human heart – on condition that the mirror of the heart is burnished and cleansed from impurities – and always open. As Baha'u'llah says in a prayer, ‘worldly matters did not deter them from giving all they had in the hopes of attaining to what You have’. Infallibility, as the Bab also says, belongs to the Sun of Reality and not to any mirrors that speak of that Sun. And if it is not in the mirrors, the slightest deviation from that radiance, deprives them of its light. This is a principle that Baha'u'llah clearly stated in the tablet of the Sun of Reality. He knew that the sun of divine grace and bounty shines equally upon all the mirrors in creation. Some though, grasp it in such a way that the Sun of Reality sees his own face reflected back at him, and he therefore describes these mirrors in his own unlimited manner, which in actual fact are descriptions of himself.

In his will Abdul Baha says that the Guardian is in the ‘shade of the great infallibility’. What do these words mean? It does not mean that that person or institution has complete authority to lay plans that are carried out without any questions asked. Such an interpretation would place that person or institution in the position of being the official deputy (wakeel), or a representative (mandoob), or an equal (nazeer) of the Sun of Reality. As has been seen, there is no such thing as the official deputy or equal of that Sun in the created world. That person or organisation is a guardian (wali) or a faithful and trustworthy (ameen) person and group in whose hands a very valuable trust has been placed for him and for them to safeguard and nurture. Being in the ‘shade of the great infallibility’ means that that person or institution should, indeed like a mirror, derive rays and radiance from the Sun of Reality, meaning that they should consider that the source of radiance and intellectual impetus that is named divine wisdom is that celestial inspiration that descends upon prophets and is expressed in holy writ. Being in the shade of the great infallibility means that that person or institution seriously, like a mirror, should seek to find and reflect the radiance of the Sun of Reality. Their intellectual efforts should be aimed at setting up a system of rules and regulations that bring about the advancement of those principles. The source of this radiance and the intellectual activity which they call divine wisdom is the same as the celestial inspiration that descends upon prophets and messengers of God and is expressed in holy writ. They are both the creators and the measure (meezan) of reality. The sources of human thought and culture derives from them. For example, if the Sun of Reality has said ‘associate with all religions in spirit and in joy’, the Guardian or the House of Justice cannot enforce laws that forbid that or disrupt it. Or, as has been shown, the Sun of Reality states that membership in the Faith must not be conditional, the House of Justice or the Guardian cannot lay down conditions and thus reduce the universality of the Baha’i Faith. Any rules and regulations should

serve to complete and make more accessible and widespread these basic principles. For one is divine wisdom and the other the product of human thought. One is absolute reality and the other human deduction. One the inspiration of the Sun of Reality and the other the conclusions of mirrors that are capable of error. One the Creator of all, and the other a limited creature. One the creative source of all truth, and the other dependent upon it. The word of the Creator supersedes, is superior and governs the word of the creature. The guardian and the members of the House of Justice are special people who in speech and action find nothing better than the religion of the Sun of Reality. Maybe they are of constant assistance to him.

The Necessity of Belief in the Sun of Reality

At the start of the Kitabeh Aqdas Baha'u'llah states that:

‘The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the dayspring of His revelation and the fountain of His laws, Who represents the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoever achieves this duty has attained unto all good; and whoever is deprived of that has gone astray though he be the author of every righteous deed.’

The person who is ‘the dayspring of His revelation’ is that Sun of Reality who is the creator of the world and source of the spiritual, intellectual and cultural condition of humanity. This is the source of creative inspiration and everything else is but His creation. It is the source of the revelation and radiance upon which all others depend. One is the appearance of utter Truth and the measure (meezan) of the existence and perfection of things, and the other dependent upon it.

The Guardian of the Faith of God, like Ali Ibn Abu Taleb and Abdul Baha, are clear mirrors that reflect the rays of that revelation upon humanity. However, no matter how clear and shining they may be, they themselves are not the Sun of Reality. They are not self subsistent (qua'em beh nafsih). Baha'u'llah states that like the moon that appears after the setting of the sun, it depends on the latter for its light, which it then casts upon the world. That moon, however, never becomes the sun. Since the Sun of Reality is the manifestation of the divine in the world, knowing Him and believing in his religion becomes the source of human spirituality, thought and culture. That is why knowledge of, acceptance of that source of inspiration and belief in His mission is the first step in the salvation of humanity.

The Eternal Youth

In this section Ruhi Afnan enumerates the various promises made by Isaiah regarding the return of the Jews to the Holy Land led by and governed by a young man who will establish peace and security in the world. He would be almighty God, the eternal father, and the prince of peace (Isaiah 6-9). He further adds that God, or ‘rabb’ shall be your guide (21-52). Zoroaster too, spoke of the day of the Lord when Ahura Mazda shall appear and bring about a great renaissance. Christians equated this renaissance with the coming of Christ. However, what Isaiah foretold did not occur. They therefore went on waiting for the next manifestation. In the meantime Islam appeared and in the sura of

Al Naba' (The Great News) it is stated that those who ask about the great news, and about which they disagree, shall soon know. The Bab, in the Bayan, states that wherever the mention of 'rabb' appears in the holy books it refers to Him whom God shall make manifest. Baha'u'llah, in the tablet of Al Haykal, addressing the Pope, states that the 'father' that Isaiah spoke of has come and his promise has been fulfilled. In one of his poems Baha'u'llah refers to himself as the Eternal Youth that has arrived – a phrase repeated many times and which he equates with the Youth mentioned in Isaiah.

In the tablet of Al Haykal Baha'u'llah says that God has adorned the Youth with His likeness and granted him His Word with which to rule as he wills and as he sees fit, meaning that God's will shall be the fountainhead of the creative energies that will give rise to the new civilisation. He then states that this Youth shall, with God's permission, appoint 'mirrors that shall speak of his greatness and power' and shall make manifest his qualities to the people of the world. He goes on to add that God has made him the source of light for the mirrors, and their guiding light. He further adds that they should not be deceived by their position and forget to prostrate themselves before their dear and beautiful God. 'Say' he continues, addressing the 'mirrors' 'you have been created at my command and my will, so beware from turning away from the verses of God and thus be of those that cause suffering, and are the losers'. To this he adds that instead of clinging to what they possess and be grossed in the enhancement of their positions and their names, God wills them to forgo what is both in heaven and on earth.

As that Spirit of God, the Eternal Youth, the Heavenly Father, and the Prince of Peace and Reconciliation appears in that renaissance and as one that does what he wills and rules as he wishes – meaning that the Primal Will is the fountainhead and lawgiver of a new civilisation – then he sheds His radiance upon the mirrors that speak of Him and makes them shine. The mirrors, however, must purify themselves from worldly matters and should not be deceived by their outward power and position and do things that are not worthy of them and their good name.

In *The Priceless Pearl*, on its second page, Ruhyyih Khanum tries to establish that Shoghi Effendi was that child mentioned in Isaiah, who, after the passing of Abdul Baha would take over the reins of power and would guide the believers.

Ruhi Afnan states that this is all based on hearsay, and that in Baha'ism hearsay is not acceptable. The writer of *The Priceless Pearl* accuses Ahmad Sohrab of having made that mistake, and that it had caused his expulsion from the Cause. Then she proceeds to do it herself, for most of her book is based upon hearsay, recollections, stories and incidents relating to herself or others. This he considers null and void, especially regarding this subject and in view of the clear and specific writings of Baha'u'llah.

Secondly, the words 'after the covenant' had been added to the text (used for the argument) and do not appear in Isaiah, thus completely changing the meaning of 'child'.

Thirdly, Isaiah also calls that 'child' or 'youth' and 'son' Almighty God, Everlasting Father and King of Peace and love. This means that he is the one who lays the foundations and laws of that world encompassing civilisation. Nor can 'youth' and 'son' be given bodily, physical characteristics, as the writer of *The Priceless Pearl* does. Almighty God and everlasting father are purely spiritual and divine realities – 'neither born of, nor giving birth to' (as the Quran says). Ascribing these characteristics to Shoghi Effendi places him at the level of the Sun of Reality like the Bab and Baha'u'llah, whereas he was, like the Master, Abdul Baha one of the 'mirrors' that reflected the radiance of the prophets upon humankind. He was born of the word of the Sun of Reality and derived grace from that

source.

Fourthly, all through the times that I spent in the service of Shoghi Effendi I do not recall that he, either in speech or in writing, ever considered himself as that ‘child’ or on the level of the Sun of Reality. He never considered calling himself ‘almighty God’ or ‘eternal father’, or ‘king of love and reconciliation’, or the fountainhead and builder of a new civilisation. In the same way, when Abdul Baha, in answer to a question, said that the triumph of the Cause of God is in His hands, he was referring to the eternal spirit of Baha’u’llah which ever shines its radiance upon the ‘mirrors’. It was that reflected radiance that granted Shoghi Effendi renewed life and designated him as the Ghosneh Momtaz (The Most Excellent Branch). I think that these exaggerations in *The Priceless Pearl* would make Shoghi Effendi’s soul most uneasy.

Belief in Divine Inspiration made Manifest is the only thing that differentiates between a Baha’i and a non-Baha’i

Total belief is both knowing and acting in accordance with that knowledge. The difference between inanimate bodies, vegetation, or animals and a human believer is that a believer is one who has first become aware of the radiance of the Sun of Reality and then is so inspired by it that he actually reflects it. For example, belief in the Bab and Baha’u’llah as the sources of divine inspiration and of all good is not enough for one’s salvation unless it is accompanied by a clear and obvious knowledge of those sources and their words bringing about a new way of understanding things and a new way of acting upon things. Such belief creates a new spiritual, intellectual and cultural life that favourably affects their lives and ennobles their speech and their actions.

In his will Abdul Baha made such a faith the thing that differentiates a Baha’i from a non-Baha’i and makes the admission of the individual believer the proof of that faith and belief. Even the acceptance of the guardian is not placed on the same level – for that acceptance is regarded as the outcome of that faith. Guardianship is simply being the mirror that speaks of the Sun of Reality and is a creature that belongs to the world of creation. He is not self-subsistent and an ultimate reality to become the ‘balance’ in which belief is weighed.

To commit serious sin is to deviate from the Sun of Reality and deny his being a divine manifestation. The sin committed by Azal was that when Baha’u’llah declared his mission he did not differentiate between the Sun of Reality and the mirror that spoke of it. He denied the former and clung to his position as a mirror. And having distanced himself from the source of divine spirituality he lost all worthiness. The fact that he was a brother of Baha’u’llah had nothing to do with the matter. The same applied to the covenant breaking of the brothers of Abdul Baha. After the passing of Baha’u’llah they set their sights upon a worldly inheritance and not upon the desire of their Creator who had placed the guardianship in the hands of Abdul Baha. With this refusal of the will and the position of Abdul Baha, they were deprived of divine light and suffered for it.

The Tablet of Baha’u’llah regarding the future of his sons and their future. [extracts]

He expected his sons to follow God’s laws and not to exceed what was stated in God’s book the Bayan, ordering them and others to do that which was good

and to forbear from that which was evil. He wanted them to uphold what God had revealed in his sacred tablets and to steadfastly believe in Him whom God shall make Manifest on the day of judgement . . . and not to disagree and create conflict in that which God ordains. For they are the leaves and fruits of the trees of unity . . . they are God's glory amongst people and a mercy to the world From them God's breezes waft upon people They are the pen of God, his orders and his words amongst his creation They light up the world with His radiance and His verses appeared to those who accepted and complied with them Whoever harms them, he says, has harmed me and whoever turns against them has strayed from God's ways. You shall find those who shall belittle and blame and find fault without any proof or evidence. He continues, 'Say O people, they were God's proof amongst you. Beware of arguing against them or of killing them and of being of those that are unjust without even being aware of it We ask God to grant them success in obedience to Him and to bestow upon them that which pleases the heart and conscience of those who are ever headed towards God.'

One hundred years have passed, says Ruhi Afnan [who was writing in 1970], since the above tablet was written by Baha'u'llah . . . and as He said, some of His descendants, spent time in this world, and like mirrors were able to reflect God's divine qualities. Some profited from these divine qualities and others, captured by the allure of the world, did not. In every case, the true and ultimate test of their faith was, is, and shall always be, their faith in the Bab and Baha'u'llah. who in turn, shall be their true 'measure' and adjudicator.

The daughters of this Blessed Family and their being accused of being of little faith.

Since in his prayers Abdul Baha considered himself capable of error, his daughters did not regard themselves as being above sin and error. Especially at a time when their father, an ever kind and considerate advisor, had recently passed away. My late mother, in her will, for example, admits her shortcoming and begs God's forgiveness. This was a feeling shared by the Master's daughters. They belonged to the world of creation and were subject to error and sin, but it did not in any way shake their faith in the religion. Maybe the stronger one's faith and understanding is one becomes even more aware of one's own sins and is therefore even more penitent, standing in greater need of God's guidance. Ignorant is he who considers himself incapable of sin.

In *The Priceless Pearl* it is stated that the reasons for what is called the enmity of the family of Abdul Baha with regard to the Guardian Shoghi Effendi lay way back in the family history, dating to the refusal of Azal to accept Baha'u'llah. Following that pattern, the daughters of Abdul Baha rose against Shoghi Effendi. The book states that:

'The Covenant-breaking inside the family of Baha'u'llah was like a vine, it entwined the tree and strangled it. Wherever its tendrils reached out it plucked up what it wound itself about and destroyed that too. This is why so many of the minor relatives, the secretaries, the member of the community surrounding the Centre of the Cause, became involved in the periodic disaffections of

various members of the family, and every time one of the diseased members was lopped off, some blinded sympathisers went too.' (p. 122)

Ruhi then mentions his mother's will in which she reiterates her firmly held belief and total acceptance of Baha'u'llah's will in nominating Abdul Baha as his successor, her allegiance to him and to Shoghi Effendi as Abdul Baha's successor.

Ruhi Afnan goes on to relate that while the family were at the Citadel in Acre, Haji Mirza Hassan Khurasani invited the sister and wife of the Master and his daughters to Cairo. Ruhi's mother, Tuba Khanum, stayed behind to be with her father, Abdul Baha. One day, when she unexpectedly enters his room she finds him engrossed in writing something. At first, her unexpected arrival disturbed him, but then he told her that times had become very difficult and it was not farfetched that something would befall him. This paper, he said, is my will. Shoghi Effendi is still a child, he said, but when he reaches maturity he will take matters in hand and will be a good guardian and source of confidence for you all. However, he asked her not to speak of the matter to anyone. Thus, for years she knew that it was the Master's will that Shoghi Effendi would succeed him. Ruhi adds that 'from my childhood she therefore brought me up upon this basis of complete acceptance of the Master's wishes.' The day when Shoghi Effendi threw me out of the Cause, he says, she very firmly told me that if the reason for that had been my lack of acceptance and full support of the Master's wishes she would have been the first person to throw me out of the house!

The opinion and faith that were stated in my mother's will were not restricted to her alone, he continues, it was the sincere and heartfelt belief of every member of the Master's family. It was on that basis that they raised their children. Contrary to what *The Priceless Pearl* states, none of them denied or refuted the Guardianship of Shoghi Effendi. The reason why they did not gather around Shoghi Effendi at the time of Abdul Baha's passing was because they were all students. By the time they were adults they soon found themselves out of the Cause, shunned by Baha'is. What is more, in his will, the Master does not state that they should remain in Haifa; rather, comparing them to the disciples of Jesus, he says that they should travel the world in the service the Cause. Service to the Guardian was the domain of the elected Hands of the Cause, not the Afnans and Aghsans (members of the families of the Bab and Baha'u'llah), unless they had been elected to perform those duties.

The sudden, unexpected death of the Master, the shock and anxiety that it produced in Shoghi Effendi affected my mother, Tuba Khanum, very badly, causing her to become ill for the rest of her life. When Shoghi Effendi threw me, (Ruhi) out of the Cause and ordered me to leave Haifa she knew what the reasons were, and therefore did not denounce me. She too was therefore thrown out of the Cause together with her other two sons and daughter, saddled with the painful accusation of disobedience. They had not broken any covenant, nor had any such move ever proceeded from her. Out of the Cause, she remained, unwell and alone until her death. Her constant advice to me was that since I could not be of any service inside the Cause, I should not be the source of any harm or discord out of it. This, Ruhi affirms, had always been his way.

The ideal 'mirror' that speaks of the Sun of Reality and who 'instinctively' seems to exude divine spirituality and power in all that he said and did was Abdul Baha. That holy presence was the supreme example of human excellence. The standard he set was so high that after him it created a sense of unworthiness and shortcoming in everyone. It

became a very difficult act to follow, especially for those who were in charge of the Cause – and in particular for Shoghi Effendi himself. Many a time I heard this from him. For example, his words, in a letter dated September 1924 (quoted on p. 72 of *The Priceless Pearl*) where he wrote

‘I deplore the disturbing effect of my forced and repeated withdrawals from the field of service . . . my prolonged absence, my utter inaction, should not, however, be solely attributed to certain external manifestations of inharmony (sic), of discontent and disloyalty – however paralysing their effect has been upon the continuance of my work – but also to my own unworthiness and to my imperfections and frailties.’ [In the Persian text it reads ‘I do not see myself as worthy of this position and do not consider myself as capable of carrying out these duties.’]

Ruhi Afnan sees three important points in these few words:

1. There were no ‘external manifestations of dis-harmony, of discontent and disloyalty.’
2. ‘paralysing effects . . .’
3. ‘my own unworthiness . . .’

The first point needs no explanation. The statement is clear. Those who had assumed the task of running the affairs of the Cause were loyal people who desired nothing but the safekeeping of the Cause. Shoghi Effendi had complete confidence in the family of the Master, Abdul Baha to the extent that he could confidently leave for Europe where for almost one year; he and I were in Switzerland, I as his secretary – though there were no letters to attend to. We spent our days in reading and playing tennis . . . until one day Mr. Hippolyte Dreyfus arrived, sent by Zia Khanum, Shoghi Effendi’s mother, to enquire about him and his health. Spending a day in the company of this good friend Shoghi Effendi heard that some Persian Baha’is were concerned about him and were looking for him. Disturbed by this news, a few days later we moved to Interlaken. The mountains were inviting and he took to mountaineering. I followed suit. After a time Zia Khanum herself came with Ghodsi Onsi, [a cousin whose father was the brother of the Master’s wife Moneereh Khanum], and convinced him to return to Haifa.

This absence doubtless caused ‘paralysis’ in his work and caused distress to the members of the community. The real cause of this absence was, as he himself stated, that he considered himself unworthy of the position he had been propelled into. After Baha’u’llah the Master took over the affairs of the Cause as a mature, experienced adult. In the company of his father he had been through torture (shekanjeh), imprisonment (essarat), exile (darbedari), all forms of suffering (azab), in the service of the Cause, and was well honed and prepared for the many tasks he inherited. To all this must be added that he was an outstanding and well-known personality in the Baha’i world. Even before assuming the leadership bequeathed upon him, all fingers pointed in his direction. The Sun of Reality had set but the moon of the Master’s guardianship ‘was at the height of its radiance and luminosity’. There was no place for darkness between the two phases.

This, however, was not the case with Shoghi Effendi. He was yet but a crescent which needed time to attain full brilliance. The Master was not unaware of this. That is why, in his will, he stated that everyone should do his utmost best that ‘the dust of despondency’

should not cloud his luminous heart and mind until that young tree reaches maturity. The members of the family always had that admonition (sefaresh) in mind and did their utmost best to put it in effect. It was not in relation to a son or a member of the family. It was a matter of sustaining and strengthening the guardianship of the Cause – and like all worldly matters, ‘dust’ was not in short supply.

Before the passing of the Master, his youngest daughter, Monawar Khanum, was living in Port Said, where her husband, Ahmad Bey Yazdi had a business. After the Master passed away Zia Khanum, Shoghi Effendi’s mother, requested him to fold up his business in Egypt and to come to Haifa to help and advise in matters relating to the Cause. Both husband and wife were proud to accept this suggestion and disposing of the business in Port Said, came to Haifa.

To perform their duties the family felt in need of assistance. The first person they thought of was Aziz’ullah Khan Bahador who during the lifetimes of Baha’u’llah and the Master had been very active in the service of the Cause, was well versed in these matters and had everyone’s confidence. A paralysis of the hand had taken him back to Iran. The ladies of the family (wife, sister and daughters of the Master) asked him to return to Haifa, which he most willingly did. Once there he resumed the work he did during the Master’s times and with the same dedication and sincerity, This continued until the disagreement with the government of Iran arose over the Baha’i Tarbiat school in Tehran. [Shoghi Effendi wanted the school to close on Sundays and be open on Fridays, something the government disagreed with]. Another matter was over the registration and elections to be held for the establishment of the spiritual assembly of Iran. On both these two matters Aziz’ullah Bahador disagreed with Shoghi Effendi, arguing that many Baha’is, for a variety of personal reasons, would be reluctant to register, thus not showing the correct number of Baha’is, which, in turn, would reflect badly on the Cause. With regard to the school he believed that in such matters it would be best to cooperated with the government. I also (says Ruhi Afnan) agreed with Aziz’ullah, but did not insist on my opinion, since I recognised that the responsibility lay in the hands of the Guardian. Aziz’ullah’s insistence angered Shoghi Effendi and led to a separation of ways. However, his sincerity, strength of belief and faith in the Cause were never in question, nor was his loyalty to the Guardian ever doubted.

I remember how, after this incident, Shoghi Effendi wanted to take some reed pens with him on one of his trips to Europe. He gave me the reeds and asked me to take them to Aziz’ullah to sharpen and shape the tips. The latter was in the garden, and after shaping the tips, asked me to take the following lines from Hafez back to Shoghi Effendi:

‘Ride gently camel driver³ for my life’s slowly sliding by, and that heart that
I had, with my Beloved, is gliding by.’

A line that very well indicated Aziz’ullah’s feelings, and I have no doubt that he took those deeply felt spiritual emotions to his grave.

At any rate, the three daughters of the Master, Zia Khanum, Rouha Khanum and Monawar Khanum served the Cause and Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Cause, in utmost unity, sincerity and faith. In turn, Shoghi Effendi had the utmost confidence in them, which was why he could spend so much of his time in Switzerland, with me or Ghodsi Effendi as his chosen companions.

³camel driver being the leader of the caravan

When Baha'u'llah declared his mission, Yahya Azal declared his enmity. In the same way, after the reading of the will of Baha'u'llah, the covenant breakers declared their opposition and enmity to the Master. However, after the passing of Abdul Baha no member of his family rose to dispute Shoghi Effendi's right to the Guardianship. No one rose in opposition to the will of the Master. Every member of the family, each to the best of their capacity, tried to serve the Cause. This they continued to do until Shoghi Effendi was slowly able to take matters into his own hands. I, for example, from the time of the passing away of the Master in 1921 and until 1937, had Shoghi Effendi's utmost confidence in my faith and sincerity, even though we were very different in character and personality. He was quick and bright. I was much slower. He was a perfectionist and particular. I was much more easy going. We often disagreed over things but he never had cause to doubt my sincere loyalty to the Faith and to his Guardianship. After my return from my second trip to America – that is a couple of months before my expulsion – and without any suggestion on my part, he told me that if I wished, during the summer, when he was away in Europe, I could go on a tour to spread the Cause. If he doubted my faith and my complete sincerity he would not have made such a proposal. Had I had any hidden resentment (hiqd), or enmity in my heart it would have appeared years before. This was how everyone in the family felt. No one was a traitor (kha'en) to him or to the Cause, nor was there any lack of total faith and acceptance of Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship. Even after Shoghi Effendi's death, there was no move made by any member of the family (by then all expelled from the Cause) to work against the unity of the Cause. My beliefs and convictions are clearly stated in the books that I have written.

In *The Priceless Pearl* it is stated that:

‘Faith and obedience are the most important factors in one's relations to God, to his Manifestation and to the Head of the Faith. One must believe even if one does not see, and even if one does not believe, one must obey.’ (p. 122)

In these few words the writer makes a difference between belief and obedience and gives prevalence to obedience. Is it really thus?

With reference to the Guardian of the Cause and the House of Justice, in his will, Abdul Baha says that whoever obeys them obeys God. There is no doubt obedience and submission are necessities in human society. It has undoubtedly been important in all religions. Without obedience to the heads of the Cause the unity of the Cause cannot be achieved. But it does not supersede faith. As was seen at the start of Kitabeh Aqdas, recognition of the Manifestation, meaning belief in the Sun of Reality, comes before everything else. First, with knowledge and faith a person turns his heart towards the Manifestation for divine radiance to be reflected upon it and make it shine and **then** obeys the laws and regulations laid down and lives according to them. What is more, Baha'u'llah himself, in the tablet of Heykal and the tablet of the Sun of Reality (lowheh shamseh haqiqat) and the tablet honouring Sheikh Salman, regards obedience as conditional. He very clearly states that the ‘mirrors that speak of Him’ should first relinquish worldly matters so that divine light might be shed upon them and then require obedience from others. All the political and social institutions of this world work according to this principle. Obedience to the laws and regulations of those institutions are required when they comply with the basic values and principles of the founders of those institutions. The words of the Sun of Reality are like a constitution which states the nature, intent and aim of civilisation, for at least a 1000 years. These are divine words and obedience

to them is unquestionably required. The laws and regulations that the representatives draw up should be obeyed when derived from the constitution of a country. Otherwise they would be null and void and following them would be wrong. In such a case both the balance (meezan) and yardstick (miqyass) of these laws as well as those who enforce them derives from the consultative assembly and its members. If that is the case, then within a short time the true nature, intent and goal of the author of that constitution would be completely changed and soon forgotten. The unity and advance of that civilisation is dependent upon that. In all previous religions this principle has been clearly proven. Whenever religious leaders act in the service of their own position and set aside God's requirements and heavenly inspiration, only considering obedience and submission as proof of faith, that religion would be on a downward slide and slowly its spiritual value will diminished and disappear.

Reasons for Expulsions

Almost half a century [Ruhi Afnan was writing in 1969/70] has passed since the passing of Abdul Baha. What has happened? Many people have been expelled and most have remained out. Was that because they denied Baha'u'llah or questioned the positions of Abdul Baha and that of the Guardian? Or were there other reasons, relating to matters worldly, or of a personal nature?

As was stated at the start, I myself encouraged a group to seek a return to the Cause, which they succeeded to do, while I was an outcast. I myself never succeeded to be accepted back. If the reason was my lack of faith, I would never have succeeded in convincing others to seek a return to the Cause. The strong faith I saw in them goaded me on to continually encourage them to seek a return. It was such a pity to see such strong believers deprived of membership in God's community. And since their faith had remained unshaken, after their return they succeeded in rendering worthy service to the Cause.

In most cases the reasons for casting people out were 'worldly matters' which had nothing to do with their faith and sincerity to the Cause. For example, Ghodsi Effendi, [Ghodsi Onsi, whose father was Sayyid Agha Mirza Yahya Isphahani, the brother of Mon-eereh Khanum, the Master's wife, and whose mother was Khanum Afandi, the daughter of the King of the Martyrs and therefore the cousin of Shoghi Effendi's mother] who had drunk the milk of the same wet nurse as Shoghi Effendi, and who was his life-long friend and companion, was cast out for an unimportant matter that had nothing to do with his faith and sincerity. His story was as follows:

After the end of the 1st World War the Master had chosen Ghodsi Effendi to collect the mail by hand from the post office and to bring it to him. His remuneration for this service was a daily meeting with Abdul Baha. After the Master passed away, he continued to render this service to Shoghi Effendi. At one point a member of the family asked him to deliver his mail to him directly and not to take it to Shoghi Effendi first. This he found difficult to do, and consequently asked Shoghi Effendi to relieve him of this duty. Shoghi Effendi became very angry at the idea that his mail would not be brought to him daily and by hand. As a result he kicked out Ghodsi Effendi. But matters did not stop there. Agha Sayyed Mirza Yahya. Ghodsi's father, was also kicked out because he did not shun his son, and expressed the opinion that for such an unimportant matter his son did not deserve to be thrown out of the Cause. This reached the ears of Shoghi Effendi

and made him still more angry. He considered it a protest against the prerogatives of his guardianship and as a result kicked out the father, mother, brother and sister of Ghodsi Effendi. Soon after Agha Sayyed Yahya died, as, in time, did his wife and two sons. His daughter, Khorsheed Khanum, (an intelligent, educated lady) was left alone and is now old and unwell, in Haifa.

[Translator's note: Ruhi Afnan did not live long enough to see the end of this story. Khorsheed Khanum was a good friend of Shoghi Effendi's cousin, Soyara Khanum Afnan, (Ruhi Afnan's sister), daughter of Toubra Khanum, the Master's third daughter and Mirza Mohsen Afnan. They had grown up together and had both been students at the American School for Girls in Cairo. After her mother's death Soraya Khanum was also living alone in Haifa and Khorsheed Khanum often visited her. It was at one of these get-togethers that Soraya Khanum suggested to Khorsheed Khanum to try to return to the Cause, instead of suffering the loneliness and ill health of old age all by herself. Khorsheed said she would be willing to offer all she had (meaning her house at No. 11 Persian Street and another property in the German Colony) to the Cause and to return to the fold. She took up this matter with the lawyer of the Community, Mr. Weinshall, who relayed the message and brought back a positive answer. As a result, the Community provided someone to look after her at home, her house was refurbished, her garden put in order and at the end of her life she died in the warm embrace of the Cause and the covenant.]

The case of Zia Khanum

[She was the eldest daughter of the Master, the wife of Mirza Hadi Afnan Shirazi and the mother of Shoghi Effendi.]

None of the cases of those that had been cast out of the Cause and with whom I had spoken and tried to encourage to seek a return to the fold was, in my opinion, as important and as unfavourable to the welfare of the Cause and good name of the Guardianship as that of the distancing of Zia Khanum from the Community.

When, after 1948, the Iranian government arranged for the return to Haifa of its citizens who had taken refuge in Lebanon, Zia Khanum, [who was Ruhi's aunt] invited me and my son Parviz, to stay at their home, until such time as my apartment had been vacated by those who had occupied it. During this period most of our conversations concerned the Cause. One day I gathered enough courage to ask her why Shoghi Effendi had cast her out of the Cause as well, adding that one day history might say that I, Ruhi was kicked out due to jealousy on my part and that my mother, Toubra Khanum had sided with me. Wrong as that assertion would be and no matter how devoid of truth, it would seem logical to some historians. Nor would that be such a blow to the good name of the Cause. But what will they have to say with reference to her case? How will they explain that? She answered that Shoghi Effendi never cast her out, as some people think. It was the treatment of his wife, Ruhiyyih Khanum and the servants of the household, who took their orders from her, that compelled her to leave the house and seek her distance. She went on to say that as the eldest daughter of the Master and the mother of Shoghi Effendi she had a position to maintain. She could not tolerate a situation where she was insulted and demeaned, and she illustrated that by recounting occasions when that had actually occurred. I answered by saying that that did not seem a good enough reason. After all, the good name of the Guardian was more important, adding that it might have been better to have borne the insults and unseemly treatment and kept it all a closed

secret. I then made bold and asked about the cause of dispute between her and Ruhiyyih Khanum.

Causes of Dispute between Zia Khanum and Ruhiyyih Khanum

As has been stated above, in his will, the Master had said that every effort must be made that 'the dust of despondency' should not disturb Shoghi Effendi until 'the tree reaches maturity and becomes fruitful'. Twenty years after the passing away of the Master, when Shoghi Effendi had gradually taken matters into his own hands, the 'tree' was as yet not 'fruitful', in the sense that he had not yet married and had any children. Bahiyeh Khanum [The Master's sister] was greatly disturbed by this, but the marriage of Shoghi Effendi was the personal responsibility of his mother, Zia Khanum.

Mr. M. Mills was a close friend of Shoghi Effendi and as he also was the head of the Spiritual Assemblies of America, Shoghi Effendi very openly and frankly discussed and consulted with him regarding important matters pertaining to the Cause. So whenever Mr. Mills was in Haifa he stayed for a good while.

I believe it was the beginning of 1937 that Mr. Mills visited Haifa for the last time. Mrs Marjory Morton was in Haifa too. Every lunch time there would be long discussions with Shoghi Effendi, but in the evenings I would be at dinner with them. One evening I found Mr. Mills very disturbed and sorrowful, and excusing himself from dinner declared that he would be leaving Haifa the next day. I asked Mrs Morton what had happened, and she told me that Zia Khanum had asked to see them both and had sought their opinion regarding Shoghi Effendi's marriage. Mr. Mills had said that in the West that was a personal matter decided by the young people themselves and that other people had no right to interfere. Therefore whatever the Guardian's decision was would be accepted by everyone. However, when Zia Khanum mentioned the name of Mary Maxwell, neither of them considered it to be the right choice. When Shoghi Effendi heard that, he had become very angry. It was in view of that anger that Mr. Mills thought that his presence in Haifa was not appropriate any more.

During my first trip to America I was at Green Acres and Mrs. May Maxwell, the mother of Mary Maxwell [Ruhiyyih Khanum] told me a story about her daughter which, in the light of what happened later, clearly proved that the tears that were shed by her at her daughter's wedding to Shoghi Effendi were not tears of joy and pride, but maybe those of sadness, pain and shame in the eyes of God, – and fear for what later transpired, – as well as its effects on Shoghi Effendi and his Guardianship. However, in spite of this sadness and pain, she added, they could not refuse such an honour, nor could they speak of their disapproval of the marriage.

Again, during my second trip to the US, while in Washington as a guest of Mr. Charles Mason Remy, I was given another account of Ruhiyyih Khanum which showed that he too did not approve of this marriage.

When the news of the impending marriage became known, a lady called Mrs. Edna Balloura Belmont, who had met the Master in America and had become a Baha'i, and who, upon her return to the Middle East had become a good friend of the family, was in Beirut undergoing medical treatment. Upon hearing the news she told the ladies of the family that she had nursed Mary Maxwell and knew her medical history and that it was impossible for her to have children. Soon after Mrs Belmont died, but her words were proved to be true.

In short, many of those who knew Mary Maxwell well were unhappy about this marriage but did not dare to express their opinions. My mother, Toubha Khanum and her sister, Rouha Khanum were in Beirut at the time and apparently far removed from the matter. They were not capable of doing anything and therefore remained silent. The responsibility rested completely with Zia Khanum. She, in turn could not verify Mrs. Edma Belmont's words and upon that basis, prove anything.

Time passed, and Ruhiyyih Khanum did not become pregnant.

Dr. Raf'at Bek, a Turkish, Baha'i gentleman, residing in Beirut, educated in Germany, and a gynaecologist by profession – he had been head of that department in the Turkish Medical School, – wrote to Shoghi Effendi, offering his services. Ruhiyyih Khanum refused to be examined by him. Dr. Raf'at Bek wrote again, suggesting that the problem may be with Shoghi Effendi himself. He recommended that he should eat strengthening food, including ten fresh eggs a day. Shoghi Effendi did not answer his letter, but asked his mother to provide him with such a diet. She obeyed. Time passed, but without any results. This was a source of anxiety for Zia Khanum, for too many eggs could cause other medical problems. She therefore asked Shoghi Effendi to relieve her of this duty and to ask Ruhiyyih Khanum to do it for him. This she refused to do, accusing Zia Khanum of not wanting her to get pregnant. This was the basis of the disagreement between the two parties and raised Shoghi Effendi's suspicions.

Some years later, in Beirut, I heard from Rouhanguise Khanum, Shoghi Effendi's eldest sister, that Shoghi Effendi finally convinced Ruhiyyih Khanum to see a doctor. In fact, two doctors saw her: Dr. Costero of the Italian Hospital in Haifa and Dr. Zondek, the gynaecologist of the Hebrew University and the Hadassa Hospital in Jerusalem. They both stated that because of a problem that existed she was unable to bear children.

At any rate, I remained a guest at Zia Khanum's home until my own apartment was vacated and I returned to it. Early one morning, Zia Khanum came to visit us. That was the first and last time that she honoured me with such a visit. She said that her intention was to bid farewell to my mother, her sister, because upon further consideration, she had concluded that my opinion was probably the better one and that she had decided to return to the Master's house (and Shoghi Effendi's residence), and spend the rest of her days, no matter how they turned out, near Shoghi Effendi. After bidding my mother and myself farewell she left to do just that. Later we heard that she had asked her sister, Monawar Khanum, who at the time resided at the Master's house, to deliver her request to Shoghi Effendi. When Ruhiyyih Khanum heard of this she presented Shoghi Effendi with an ultimatum, to the effect that 'if your mother returns I leave'. Shoghi Effendi thought it better to decide against his mother's return and thus refused her. But Ruhiyyih Khanum did not stop at that and told Shoghi Effendi that when his mother had arrived Monawar Khanum had received her with such affection and warmth that it proved that in her heart she had never cast out her sister. This only served to further complicate the situation and resulted in Shoghi Effendi expelling Monawar Khanum as well. From that day on, old, ill and alone, she lived at the Italian Hospital in Haifa.

Suitcase full of requests from members of the family seeking to return to the Cause.

For twelve years after Shoghi Effendi cast me out of the Cause I regularly wrote a petition – at least once a year – and more often than not, took them to the House myself. Several

times I saw Ruhiyyih Khanum who would meet me and end up by rejecting my request. I always wondered whether Shoghi Effendi read those letters or not. One day I asked Zia Khanum. She told me that other than myself, many people wrote such petitions, for example Rouha Khanum [Zia Khanum's sister and Ruhi's aunt.] Apparently Shoghi Effendi had a special suitcase full of such letters from members of the family, all of which he saved. Zia Khanum added that she herself, every month, sometimes every week, would write such a petition and pour out her heart, in an effort to clarify matters to her son. I don't know whether that suitcase full of letters still exists. If it does, it would tell the story of those people and the pain they bore. Their expulsion was not due to lack of faith. The way they bore their pain and nevertheless persisted in their belief was good proof of that faith and belief. What they wanted, by all means, was to avoid a blow to the Cause or create problems for the Guardian that would bring the 'dust of despondency' upon him. The silence that the family maintained was proof of their faith and belief, not their lack of it. They did not want a repeat of the stories of the covenant breakers, and at all cost wanted to avoid another calamity afflicting the Faith. If I now briefly speak of all this it is because Ruhiyyih Khanum, in her book *The Priceless Pearl* has strayed from the truth, or, for personal reasons, has stated only a part of the truth; or has reinterpreted or misrepresented the truth in such a way as to advance her own arguments. Keeping silent about such matters would have been preferable. He who is innocent, however, does not fear the truth.

The real cause of the casting out of people, whether members of the family or other believers had absolutely no connection with what Azal or those who were unfaithful to the covenant of Baha'u'llah did or said – as is stated in *The Priceless Pearl* (p. 182). Zia Khanum was the mother of the Guardian of the Cause and the first lady of the Baha'i world. Whom would she be jealous of? Everyone looked up to her. Monawar Khanum had no children to want the Guardianship for her son. None of the daughters of the Master sought anything but service in the shelter of the Guardian of the Faith.

What Ruhiyyih Khanum says is based on her own beliefs and interpretations of affairs in the service of her own desired version of events. Being a Baha'i she did not measure by belief and faith in the Sun of Reality and the 'mirrors that spoke of Him'. The measure of belief for her was blind, unquestioning obedience. For it was only by such means that her plans could progress. Belief in the Sun of Reality required that Guardians first become 'a mirror that spoke of Him' and then demand obedience. The command (amr) of the Sun of Reality and the 'mirror that spoke of Him', meaning Abdul Baha, was that the position of the guardianship was safeguarded and passed on to Shoghi Effendi and his progeny. Ruhiyyih Khanum knew that she could not have any children and that due to her, that line would come to an end. In spite of that, and for the sake of position and power she said nothing about it and proceeded with the marriage and succeeded in bringing the line to an end. A sin greater than this was inconceivable. The power and position she wanted through enforced obedience she put above the wishes of the Sun of Reality.

On page 82 of her book Ruhiyyih Khanum writes:

'Baha'u'llah was the prophet The Master was the embodiment of His powers and teachings Then something else was needed; this is where . . . a lot of people, including members of the Master's family and some of the Baha'is, have fallen down in their perspective of things. They wanted a second Abdul Baha – a series of patriarchal repeats in the form of the Guardian. But

God seems to have had another idea.’

Then Ruhiiyyih Khanum proceeds with her own planning, though nothing is clarified and things still require explanations. This line of descendants that she disputes and denies is that which Abdul Baha clearly stated in his will. Shoghi Effendi was the interpreter of the Faith, and after him, his descendants – a matter that required him to marry and have children.

What is more, the idea of a chain of descendants was not created by Abdul Baha. As has been seen, it was an idea stated in the tablets of Baha’u’llah and among others, in the Baha’i daily prayer. Abdul Baha only applied that principle to Shoghi Effendi and his descendants. Baha’u’llah finds that this is true in all religions: The appearance of the Sun of Reality to be followed by ‘the mirrors that speak of Him’ and of the eternal truths expressed by all prophets. Human beings have not followed that route and have strayed from that path – which is why they have not arrived at unity. If the Guardianship in Islam had been maintained the diversity and divisions would not have occurred and the unity of the religion of God would have remained safe.

Lastly, he who has laid the rules and regulations is the Sun of Reality, namely Baha’u’llah himself, and not the ideas that Ruhiiyyih Khanum came up with, which contradicted their true meanings. The correct explanation of these principles is the duty of the interpreter of God’s verses, meaning the ‘mirrors that speak of Him’ and not the duty of Ruhiiyyih Khanum or me. Actually what she sought to do was to give some sort of explanation for leaving the Faith without an interpreter and thus leaving the words of God at the mercy of various and contradictory interpretations.

Ruhiiyyih Khanum mentions the Guardian’s loneliness, his sense of having no one around him and the tears that that caused him to shed. In his will the Master states that the Afnans and the Aghsans [members of the Bab and Baha’u’llahs families] must be involved in matters concerning the Faith and remain close to Shoghi Effendi. He adds that like the disciples of Jesus they should also travel the world and, each in his own way, seek to spread the word. The Guardian should be surrounded and helped by the Hands of the Cause and the most prominent Baha’is of the world and the members of his family. The loneliness of Shoghi Effendi was not caused by the absence of people like me. It was caused by the fact that he had no children and grandchildren. Due to the absence of descendants to inherit the task left to him. There was no one to carry on the heritage. And the reason for it was the fact that Ruhiiyyih Khanum could not have children. And if Shoghi Effendi’s mother left it was because of the treatment she received at her hands. It was not destined by God. It was due to Ruhiiyyih Khanum’s behaviour. She accuses the daughters of the Master of wrongdoings and passes judgements regarding thing of which they were never guilty. From the beginning they all accepted, obeyed and served the wishes of the Master. Each one of them, in their ways and to the best of their abilities, tried to serve Shoghi Effendi. The spirit of Abdul Baha is maybe a witness to that. And after their death they must have received their just rewards. It is only right that judgement should not be passed without having all the facts available.

Zia Khanum and the Running of the Affairs of the Faith

Bahiyeh Khanum (the greatest holy leaf) the sister of the Master, was the personification of goodness, patience, love and kindness. No one knows this better than people like myself

who grew up and were nurtured in the shelter of that loving care, always and everywhere, so generously given. After the passing of the Master, though, she was not in a condition, with regard to age and health, to take actual and complete charge of the affairs of the Cause. However, her caring, loving nature had gained for her a very special place in the hearts of the Baha'is. This was a spiritual asset that she offered and which served to safeguard the Cause and its unity. Her name, the love she engendered in everyone and the dedication and self-sacrifice with which her wishes were met, safeguarded the Cause during that dangerous period. At the time, the actual running of the Cause was in the hands of Zia Khanum. From the day of the passing of the Master and until 1937, while I was serving at the centre of the Faith, this was the case. At the start, while the Guardian spent most of his time in Europe, all the affairs of the Cause were under the supervision of and were run by Zia Khanum. However, year by year, this situation changed. The more Shoghi Effendi took matters into his own hands, the more Zia Khanum withdrew, happy and reassured to see him taking over and attending to his duties.

Though Zia Khanum, together with the other daughters of the Master, rendered their services to the Cause during that difficult early time, not one word appears in Ruhyyih Khanum's book. All she has to say consists of blame, reproach and reprimand.

After the passing of Abdul Baha, whenever the suitable occasion arose and someone with sufficient knowledge in law and national constitutions was present, Shoghi Effendi would discuss the will of Abdul Baha, asking whether it had sufficient scope and value for the institutions of the Faith. Whoever read that will was amazed at its comprehensive scope and nature – thus far in theory only. But when it came to the implementation of those ideas, people wondered why they were never actually acted upon by the Master and what had been the obstacles to that end, especially as the condition of the Faith needed such institutions. I, personally, often heard this question asked by Shoghi Effendi at the time. Until one day the Guardian found a tablet among the papers of the Master in which he stated that had it been possible he would have established the House of Justice and would have accepted its decisions. One wonders why, during the years of his stewardship such an occasion had not arisen.

We know that in Acre, soon after the passing away of Baha'u'llah and as a result of submissions made by the covenant-breakers, a commission of inquiry was formed by the government to look into the affairs of the Faith. As a result of that, the conditions of imprisonment in the citadel became more difficult. At the same time, the Baha'is in Iran were under greater pressure. Under such circumstances the election of spiritual assemblies and the establishment of institutions was impossible. The Faith had neither national nor international presence. Nevertheless, in many places some people were enthusiastically and secretly practicing it. With the constitutional revolution in Turkey and the release of all political prisoners, Abdul Baha took the opportunity to visit Europe and America, thus spreading the Cause. During that earlier period of travel and preaching restrictions it was not possible to establish any institutions. In the West there were no people able to take such initiatives and establish institutions. Upon the Master's return to the Holy Land the First World War broke out and the road to both East and West were both completely closed. The Turkish government once more resumed pressure, interrogations and investigations. On the whole, from the time of the passing away of Baha'u'llah until the end of WW1 – that is until the writing of the above-mentioned tablet of Abdul Baha, he did not find a convenient or suitable period of time to set up the institutions that he had in mind. During this time, Shoghi Effendi, who had been appointed as the central

figure in all these institutions, was still a student at university. Abdul Baha was awaiting his grandson's graduation to give the reins over to him.

Shoghi Effendi's departure for Oxford

In *The Priceless Pearl* Ruhiiyyih Khanum says that Shoghi Effendi's going to Oxford University was the 'decision and wish' of Abdul Baha. This was not so. In July of 1918 Shoghi Effendi graduated from the American University of Beirut. Early in 1919 he decided that he wanted to continue his education in England. When he sought the permission of Abdul Baha his request was refused. Age had taken its toll and this was visible on Abdul Baha's tired face and form. Besides, there was no one to replace Shoghi Effendi. It was not at all as Ruhiiyyih Khanum recounts it. I had not finished my studies as yet and was a sophomore at the AUB. My knowledge and experience were insufficient to be deserving of that position. Secondly, the Master had written his will and had chosen Shoghi Effendi as his heir. He wanted to personally familiarise and train him before gradually putting matters in his hands. There was no other person, including myself, who could replace Shoghi Effendi. The Master suggested that if the reason was to improve his English and facilitate his translation work, then ways could be found to do that in Haifa. Leaving for Oxford was not necessary.

Shoghi Effendi consulted Dr Youfi, the Master's personal physician. His opinion was that there was no special reason for concern regarding the Master's health, and that considering his age, he was in good health, and if he remained thus he might well live for another ten years. Shoghi Effendi took this doctor's opinion and insisted on going. Abdul Baha, however, did not give his permission until Mr. H. Dreyfus and his wife, Mrs. Laura Barney arrived in Haifa. Seeing the situation thus and Shoghi Effendi very nervous and upset, they urged Abdul Baha to give his consent. The Master finally agreed, but upon the condition that he should first go to the American Hospital in Neuilly, Paris, for a cure for his nerves. After Shoghi Effendi's departure, the Master sent for Aziz'ullah Khan Bahadur, to come to Haifa from Shiraz, and help him with writing and correspondence. In any case, the Master was not happy about the departure of Shoghi Effendi.

If, as it is maintained by Ruhiiyyih Khanum in *The Priceless Pearl*, that Shoghi Effendi went as a result of the decision and with the consent of the Master, then the responsibility for the conditions and turbulence that pertained after his passing should be borne by him – for not thinking of what might happen after a sudden and unexpected death, which is, after all, part and parcel of human fate. The Master was a far-sighted man, but was not able to stop Shoghi Effendi from leaving for Oxford.

A few days before the Master passed away, Zia Khanum asked me, while busy with the correspondence, whether anything new had occurred, for the Master had requested that Shoghi Effendi be asked, by cable, to return to Haifa. I answered that nothing new had come about, adding that a few days before, the Master had given me a prayer book and had asked me to mark all the places where the subject of covenant breaking was mentioned, and to bring them to his attention. He then wrote a detailed tablet and in a very sorrowful and disconsolate way asked God to relieve him of the cares of this world. He also requested believers to remain faithful to the covenant. It never occurred to me that this pointed at his eminent departure.

Zia Khanum thought that there must be some problem that made him request the quick return of Shoghi Effendi. In a letter, the situation was explained to Shoghi Effendi

and his early return insisted upon. The next day the Master enquired whether the cable had been sent. When Zia Khanum told him that instead a letter had been sent, the Master's response was that Shoghi Effendi would not be back in time to see him.

The guardianship that the Master designed for Shoghi Effendi did not envisage a period at Oxford which might leave a void in the period of transition and endanger the interests of the Cause. Had Shoghi Effendi remained at the side of the Master the transference from the Master to Shoghi Effendi would not have experienced the serious difficulties it did, and as he himself admits, created a 'paralysis' in the affairs of the Cause. Shoghi Effendi, faced with these heavy responsibilities, would not have been so shocked and bewildered. His departure from and distance from Haifa created problems that the Master wanted to avoid. These were matters that were clear to those who were aware of them at the time. Vis a vis Abdul Baha Shoghi Effendi felt ashamed that though he went to Oxford against his wishes, nevertheless he assigned the Cause into his hands. In those days Shoghi Effendi himself spoke of these matters and shed tears of regret and remorse over it. Abdul Baha was heartbroken. Zia Khanum did not want the Master to be further hurt by the possibility that Shoghi Effendi would not return. The outcome was that a heavy burden of responsibility fell upon her shoulders and those of the ladies of the household. All of which they bore, trying their utmost, – and succeeding – in steering matters to safety.

What does Ruhiyyih Khanum mean when she accuses the family of being covenant breakers? Covenant breaking is to renege on an agreement. It is the breach of a promise made between the Sun of Reality and his followers. It specifies that after the setting of that Sun people should turn to the moon of the guardianship to obtain radiance from him. This 'the ladies of the household' did at the most sensitive period in the history of the Cause, neither asking for, nor expecting any remuneration from anybody. However, they certainly did not expect insults and reproach. Baha'u'llah, in the prayer to be chanted at the shrine of the Bab asks for God's blessings upon the members of the families of both the Bab and Baha'u'llah and safety and security from the attack of enemies and the unjust, as long as godly characteristics and God's good names are seen in them. Almost 50 years have passed, says Ruhi Afnan, writing in 1970, since the passing of the Master and three of his daughters have died. They were all human and capable of making mistakes. But none of them were guilty of covenant breaking. All of them asked for forgiveness and hoped for His mercy, but they never broke the Covenant. During periods of great sensitivity and danger their faith and belief in the Sun of Reality and their loyalty to the will of Abdul Baha and the Guardianship of Shoghi Effendi was clear and evident. They endured great hardship, they suffered insults and degradation, they were outcasts, lonely and alone, but unfaithful to the will of the Master, Abdul Baha, their father, they were not. Their constant hope was that godly characteristics and God's good names should ever be present in their speech and their actions and make them worthy of God's mercy.

In brief, essentially my mother, Toubia Khanum, ill and mostly bed ridden since the passing of Abdul Baha, was 'expelled' because she would not 'shun' me when I was cast out.

Rouha Khanum, essentially was 'expelled' because she was keen that the Master's wishes regarding Shoghi Effendi's marriage to her daughter Maryam, be carried out, while Shoghi Effendi preferred Ruhiyyih Khanum.

Zia Khanum, essentially was 'expelled' because she was keen to find out why Ruhiyyih Khanum could not have children and arrived at the truth.

Monawar Khanum was 'expelled' because she received her elder sister too warmly

when she returned to see Shoghi Effendi.

Had they committed a sin it was related to unquestioning obedience and not to lack of faith in the Sun of Reality and the Guardian. Their sin was that when Shoghi Effendi cast me out he considered it their duty to obey him with no whys and wherefores asked – and to distance themselves from me. However, obedience of the ‘mirrors’ that speak of the Sun of Reality is a duty when that mirror is inspired by that spiritual source and practices the principles therein enshrined. Obedience of ordinary, personal or worldly orders that caused my expulsion are outside that orbit. Here the measure of one’s faith is belief in the Sun of Reality and not in matters that don’t even have any moral aspects.

As was seen, Baha’u’llah in the opening lines of the Aqdas stated that:

‘The first duty prescribed by God for his servants is the recognition of Him who is the Dayspring of His revelation and the fountain of His laws and who represents the Godhead in both the Kingdom of his Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieves this duty has attained unto all good, and whoso is deprived thereof has gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. It behoves everyone who reaches this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him who is the Desire of the world.’

But, as has been mentioned, Ruhyyih Khanum gave preference to the obedience of the ‘mirrors that spoke of Him’. She says ‘Faith and obedience are the most important factors in one’s relation to God, His Manifestation, to the Head of the Faith. One must believe even if one does not see, and even if one does not believe, one must obey.’ Obedience of the ‘mirrors that speak of Him’ is conditional upon their words conforming with the words of the Sun of Reality. Otherwise it would be wrong. And whoever places obedience before belief is wrong and that obedience is no longer mandatory. Following that line is to follow sin and sinners. It is not following the Sun of Reality, the source of all good and the means of salvation. Negation does not result in being and obscurity does not bring about manifestation.

God expresses his wishes, makes clear that which is best for humankind and shows them the means of salvation. But at the same time people are free to choose to follow that route, benefit from and enjoy its outcome, or to turn away and bear the consequences. This does not require blind obedience. Rather, it needs complete knowledge, freedom of choice and faith in the words of God. Blind obedience turns a human being into an instrument devoid of conscience or will, depriving his speech and actions of any moral content. Here action becomes worthless. In this world knowledge, insight and freedom of choice are the supreme sources of justice. Without them God’s will could not be realised. What humanity needs is the radiance of the Sun of Reality, not obedience of the Guardians. Obedience should apply to the divine characteristics and qualities that are seen in them. Only divine radiance should shine in their hearts to make them worthy of leadership. Obscurity and obedience produces nothing but darkness.

Baha’u’llah and Abdul Baha, like the Prophet Mohammad, established a centre and system of guardianship, writing wills and making covenants with Baha’is to look towards those they appointed, and if they found divine lights emanating from them then to benefit from that and to reflect it upon others. The ladies of the household followed this route and tried their best that no ‘dust of despondency’ should disturb Shoghi Effendi, until that ‘young plant’ reached full maturity and assumed his responsibilities. These are the

loyal intentions that one can expect in this world. Ruhyyih Khanum, however, in her ambitious desire for position and power and in an effort to hide her inability to have children, brought the whole institution of guardianship to an end. And now, in *The Priceless Pearl* she makes it appear as if it was God's will that what occurred should have happened. The negative outcome of all these actions remains to be seen. The future will tell what the effects upon humankind shall be and what conflicts the Cause will suffer as a result.

Forbidding me from teaching the Cause

Preaching the Faith is to spread the knowledge of the 'Dayspring of inspiration and fountain of His love' in the world. It is the spread of God's mercy upon human society. As has been mentioned, God's mercy is shed upon all of creation. It is by that heavenly energy that grass grows, animals are animated and humans are spiritually nurtured. But then, everything in the world must proceed to share and spread that divine bounty for it to become a source of guidance and salvation for others. In this world of humanity the result of such an outpouring of divine inspiration should result in the outpouring of knowledge and wisdom for everyone to benefit. This is the purpose and goal of the preaching of the Cause: spreading the outpouring of God's mercy upon one and all. Preaching is therefore a primary and essential aim of every person in human society. Whatever enlightenment and wisdom one attains one must spread and place at the service of others. This preaching has not only been seen in the Bab's Bayan but also in many of Baha'u'llah's tablets. Abdul Baha, in his will, states that after him the Afnans and the Aghsans [members of the Bab's and Baha'u'llah's families] should, like the disciples of Jesus Christ, go to all parts of the world to preach the Cause. To this he added that:

'If anyone or any assembly forbids that, they must not be obeyed and people must continue to persue their essential duties. Disobeying such orders becomes their religious duty.'

Such preaching was and is my supreme desire. Twice I succeeded in realising this goal and spent time in the US and Canada spreading the message of the Cause to the best of my ability. If I did not go again it was due to the fact that being in Haifa in the service of Shoghi Effendi took precedence over traveling abroad.

Sometime after I was 'expelled' from the Cause and after the Bab's shrine on Mount Carmel had been completed, a club of university graduates – chaired by an old friend of my sister's – invited me to talk about the Cause. This I was honoured to do and at the appointed date spoke at that meeting. However, upon leaving the hall, Mr. Mohammad Baha'i and Mr. Mansour, who, at that time worked at the house of Abdul Baha (and were in the service of Shoghi Effendi) came forward, spat in my face and slapping me in the face said 'You are an enemy of the Cause and you give talks about it!'

Firstly, I have always been most faithful and steadfast in my faith and most dedicated in my belief in the Sun of Reality and the established guardianship. Nothing has shaken my faith, nor will ever do. Why should I therefore be barred from sharing and spreading that knowledge that I have gained and from which I have benefited. Could it be that I have been bereft of that divine mercy and grace? Is it not my duty, in whatever manner I am capable of doing it, to share that radiance? What is more, as an Afnan and an Aghsan, should I allow anyone to stop me from spreading the Cause?

Preaching is not limited to speech. God's message can be transmitted by the written word as well. I therefore kept to myself and spent my time writing. Some of these books are already published, others are ready for publication. All of them, directly or indirectly regard the teachings of Baha'u'llah. My sources are his tablets and his writings. How can the reading of such books harm Baha'is? But they have been blacklisted and Baha'is forbidden from reading them. Investigating the truth is the first step on God's way. In the Seven Valleys Baha'u'llah states that no ropes shall bind him and no belief deter him. Investigating the truth and intellectual independence to search are basic principles of Baha'ism. In the essay entitled 'Siyasiyyeh', (to which I do not have access at the present time to quote directly from it), Abdul Baha writes about the subject. Baha'u'llah speaks about that in his tablet to Sheikh Salman, where he says:

'Do not respond to anyone's words with argument and disputation, rather look at them with the eyes of pity and mercy – unless they have written vitriolic things against God's Cause. For today that Cause must be defended with the spoken and written word and not by the sword. The defence of God's Cause, he adds, grants them that do it an enviable position among the elect.'

In another place Baha'u'llah, having heard that certain things written to repudiate the Cause had been burnt, condemned it, adding that God forgives what has happened, but that the burning or destroying of anyone's words are not pleasing in His sight.

From such statements it becomes clear that unless writings are grossly antagonistic to God's call, they should not be destroyed. Rather, they should be kept and read and critically assessed, so that the truth is arrived at. Today such behaviour is not only a duty of every believer but maybe the greatest service that can be rendered to the Cause. For example, what leads the young astray is a disbelief in God which we see clearly in Europe and America. Such disbelief is contrary to the principles of the Cause. Answering such matters is a duty of every Baha'i writer. My book entitled *Existentialism* is the answer of the Cause to such disbelief in God. As is my book *Zoroaster's Influence on Greek Thought* which is an explanation of a truth that Baha'u'llah states in his tablet of Hikmat, to the effect that philosophy has acquired and adapted things from religion. So why should Baha'is avoid reading these books? They must read them and if they find anything there which is contrary to the principles of the Cause they should refute them – all in the service of truth and the Cause.

Forbidding me from visiting the Shrines

One problem I had after my expulsion was visiting the shrines. Not wanting to be a cause of trouble I read the 'ziyaratnameh' (prayer chanted at the shrine) from a quiet street south of the Shrine of the Bab. Abdul Baha was my example. During their time at the citadel of Acre, he would climb a wall where he could face Bahji from a distance and chant the 'ziyaratnameh' from there. One day, I wanted to visit the shrine at Bahji. It was summer and Shoghi Effendi and Ruhiiyyih Khanum were in Europe. I took the opportunity and went early one morning. Upon arrival I requested the doorman to grant me entrance, which he did. For one hour or more I was alone at the shrine, crying and pouring out my heart, seeking forgiveness from Baha'u'llah for my sins and shortcomings. Sometime later, Mr. Mansour came to my house with the message from Ruhiiyyih Khanum telling me that if I went to the Shrine again orders had been given to beat me and throw

me out. I do not believe that in any faith excepting Catholicism, is an excommunicated person forbidden to enter a place of worship to pray.

When I first arrived in Iran I requested a visit to the house of the Bab in Shiraz. Permission was not granted. Not wanting to create a problem I refrained from going. The Bab, however, in the Persian Bayan, section 14 of the 4th unit says that whoever seeks to visit shrines should be granted security and will be forgiven that which God forgives. The summary of that chapter is that anyone who seeks refuge at a shrine should be granted that refuge, for shrines everywhere are a manifestation of Him who grants refuge but never needs it. In the next chapter he states: 'No one is permitted to deny refuge to anyone wishing to seek it in such places (shrines).' What is more, he will lose the right to issue such commands.

In accordance with the above, the right that the Sun of Reality grants me to visit holy shrines and seek refuge there cannot be taken away from me. If the Spiritual Assembly deprives me of that right it will immediately lose its moral authority and will no longer be able to demand obedience. For obedience of the Spiritual Assembly or the House of Justice depends upon their decisions or orders being in conformity with the principles of the Sun of Reality and not the opposite. Divine inspiration takes precedence in all cases and it is only the orders of the Sun of Reality that are not bound by any conditions. The orders of the assemblies and House of Justice are conditional since they are the orders of the 'mirrors that speak of Him'. As has been previously pointed out, Baha'u'llah, in the tablet of The Sun of Reality and in the tablet addressed to Sheikh Salman, has clearly stated this principle. In short, as the Bab states, he who seeks refuge at the shrines cannot be deprived of that.

In one of the letters that I wrote to Shoghi Effendi I included this prayer by Baha'u'llah, one which very fully expresses my inner feelings and condition. This prayer was often on my lips and I still sometimes say it and seek the peace it grants me:

In the name of God on high
My God, do you deprive him who approaches the sacred place of your being?
My Beloved, do you further separate someone who seeks the city of your nearness?
My desired one, do you demean him who clings to the hem of your glory?
My goal and my desire, do you forbid one who has arrived at the font of your benevolence?
My Adored one, do you impoverish him who clings to your great bounty?
Worshiping you, do you put to death him whose heart you revived with the brilliance of your illumination?
Do you strike dumb one who is ever grateful for having heard the wonders in your verses?
No, by your Glory and Greatness. You do not deprive him who comes towards you. Nor do you throw out him who calls on you.
Nor do you refuse him who seeks your realm of 'fana' (non-being).
For you are high above all else, the giver of all to one and all, and the ruler of both earth and the heavens.
For you are the Sacred. the Beloved, and the Forbearing.

This I submit, having dared much.

'Fani' (perishable one)

Ruhi Afnan