



SHOGHI EFFENDI

SHOGHI EFFENDI (Šawqi Rabbāni; b. ‘Akkā, 1 March 1897; d. London, 4 November 1957), eldest grandson and successor of ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ as leader of the Bahai Faith (1921-57). Iranian Bahais usually refer to him as Ḥażrat-e Waliy-e Amrallāh, the title given to him by ‘Abd-al-Bahā’, usually translated as “the Guardian of the Cause of God, or simply “the Guardian.” In the West, he is chiefly known as Shoghi Effendi.

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i. BIOGRAPHY

Shoghi Effendi, eldest son of Mirzā Moḥammad Hādi Širāzi (1865-1955), a member of the [Afnān](#) family, and Žiā’iya Kānom (1878-1951), eldest daughter of ‘Abd-al-Bahā’, was born in the House of ‘Abdallāh Pāšā in Acre (‘Akkā). He was educated at the Collège des Frères, Haifa, Protestant Syrian College, Beirut, and Balliol College, Oxford. In his second year at Oxford he learned of the death of ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ and returned to Haifa to find that, in his Will and Testament, ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ had appointed him head of the Bahai Faith, with the



title of Guardian, and the authorized expounder of the Bahai scriptures. Shoghi Effendi wrote in private correspondence of his feelings of “agitation” and “inadequacy” and of being overwhelmed at this unexpected appointment (Rabbani, 1969, pp. 43, 48).

For consultations about the future of the religion, Shoghi Effendi invited senior members of the main Bahai communities (in Iran, North America, Britain, France, and Germany) to Haifa in January-March 1922. One solution would have been to call for the immediate election of the Universal House of Justice (*Bayt-al-'adl*), the international elected body referred to in the writings of Bahā'-Allāh and of which Shoghi Effendi had been appointed the permanent head in 'Abd-al-Bahā's Will and Testament. Shoghi Effendi appears to have decided that such a move would be premature, given the lack of administrative structure and experience in the world Bahai community (Rabbani, 1969, pp. 55-6).

Finding the situation in Haifa “intolerable” (Rabbani, 1969, p. 58), no doubt partly on account of the attack upon his leadership launched by 'Abd-al-Bahā's half-brother Mirzā Moḥammad-'Ali (see below); partly on account of the condescension he sensed from those enjoying power and prestige in the town, the British administrators and Muslim notables (who compared “the Boy” unfavorably with his grandfather), and partly from the pressure that he felt from his own family (who wanted him to conform to what they expected of him as his grandfather's successor), Shoghi Effendi left Haifa for an extended stay (April-December 1922) in Switzerland, where he was better able to come to terms with his grief at the loss of his grandfather and with the responsibilities laid upon his shoulders (Rabbani, 1969, p. 54). He left the affairs of the Bahai community in the hands of a committee of senior Bahais headed by his great-aunt, *Bahā'īya Kānom*, who was his main support during the early years of his leadership. It was from such inauspicious and uncertain beginnings that his ideas about the future of the Faith were formed.

During the period of his leadership, Shoghi Effendi maintained an austere lifestyle, working hard and for long hours on a daily basis. His routine daily work involved a combination of personal devotions, attendance to a voluminous correspondence, work on his translations, personal supervision of construction work on the Bahai holy places and gardens at the Bahai world center, daily meetings with the Bahai pilgrims who came in a constant stream, and dealing with the problems that arose for the Bahai community locally and internationally. His secretaries and assistants, initially members of his family,



eventually consisted of an appointed body, the International Bahā'ī Council. In 1937, Shoghi Effendi married a Canadian-American Bahai, Mary Maxwell, who is generally known among Bahais as Ruḥiya Kānom or Amat-al-Bahā'. Shoghi Effendi died of Asian Influenza during a trip to London to purchase furniture for the International Archives building. He held only an Iranian passport and nationality all his life.

ii. LEADERSHIP OF THE BAHAI COMMUNITY

Establishment of the Bahai administration. From 1922 to 1937, Shoghi Effendi concentrated on building up the Bahai administration so that it functioned consistently and efficiently. Following the instructions given in 'Abd-al-Bahā's Will and Testament, he urged the election, wherever possible, of local and national elected councils, called "Spiritual Assemblies (*Mahfel-e ruḥāni*)." He gave instructions on the manner of their election, how they should elect their officers, and standardized the functioning of these institutions throughout the world. He also paid attention to such matters as how consultation should be conducted, the rectitude of conduct expected of the elected members of Bahai assemblies, the attitude of humble fellowship and frank and loving consultation that should characterize the relationship between the members of the institutions and the rest of the community (see Shoghi Effendi in *Principles of Bahā'ī Administration*; idem, 1990, pp. 22-23; idem 1968b, p. 63). In his writings, Shoghi Effendi looked forward to the eventual election of the crowning institution of this administrative edifice, the Universal House of Justice, which was formed in 1963, six years after Shoghi Effendi's death.

As well as these elected institutions, Shoghi Effendi also expanded an appointed institution called the Hands of the Cause of God (*Ayādi-e amrallāh*), which, together with their Auxiliary Boards, is concerned with the propagation and defense of the religion. Shoghi Effendi had earlier named a number of individuals Hands of the Cause posthumously, but in 1951 he appointed the first cohort of living Hands of the Cause and set out their responsibilities. By the time of his death, there were 27 living Hands of the Cause.

Creating an egalitarian structure in the Bahai community. Bahā'-Allāh had stated that the Bahai community was to have no religious professional class and no individuals with stations above other believers (see, e.g., *Lawḥ-e etteḥād* (Tablet of Unity,) in Baha'-Allāh, 2004, pp. 378-80). The Bahai community in 1922, however, was still very much patterned along traditional



lines of leadership. In Iran, for example, although there was a national elected body, the Central Assembly, and many towns and even villages had elected local assemblies, and although these bodies were increasingly taking on the functions of leadership, much authority was still in the hands of the traditional community leaders. Known as *moballeḡs* (teachers) these were mainly converted Islamic clerics, who, as they traveled around the country, maintained some of the attitudes of the clerical class, dictating to various communities what they should be doing. The Bahai community itself was in a cultural setting that expected traditional leaders to give instruction that they would follow. In his second letter to North America, Shoghi Effendi cited the occasion when Shaikh Farajallāh al-Kordi, a prominent Egyptian Bahai, had sent ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ his Arabic translation of Bahā’-Allāh’s Tablet of *Ešraqāt* and ‘Abd-al-Bahā’, instead of merely approving it, which he could easily have done, directed him to submit it to the Cairo local Bahai assembly for approval. In this way, Shoghi Effendi began to drive home the message that all Bahais, even the most eminent, were now to be under the authority of the elected Bahai institutions (1968b, p. 23).

Shoghi Effendi opted for a collaborative and decentralized style of leadership. At the outset of his ministry he appears to have decided against trying to emulate his grandfather’s leadership style. ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ had exercised a patriarchal style of leadership which fitted in well with traditional and conservative expectations of a religious leader; on the other hand, the writings of Baha’-Allāh and ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ call for democratic institutions and consultative decision-making. Shoghi Effendi decided to give priority to developing this aspect of the Bahai Faith. He himself set an example of the sort of collaborative, selfless ethos of service that he considered should become the norm in the Bahai community. Although his character and personal charm gained him the respect and even adulation of many Bahais, and despite the elevated station accorded him in ‘Abd-al-Bahā’’s Will and Testament, he always sought to remove his own personality from the stage of the Bahai Faith. Thus, for example, in *God Passes By*, his history of the first century of the Bahai Faith, almost a quarter of which was under his leadership, he never mentions himself and only a few times refers to his office of guardianship. He never addressed a public audience, did not usually allow himself to be photographed and only met with the Bahais in small groups of pilgrims in Haifa. He signed most of his English letters to the Bahais of the world with such words as “Your true brother.” He delegated many responsibilities to the newly elected national assemblies. While intervening sometimes in even quite small matters, if he felt



an important issue was at stake, he also directed the Bahais to take many of the questions that they would previously have addressed to 'Abd-al-Baha' to their local and national assemblies.

Unity, Identity and Independence of the Bahai Faith. In 'Abd-al-Bahā's Will and Testament, Shoghi Effendi was appointed the center of "the Covenant" (*Mitāq*), a Bahai term that designates the succession and authority of the leadership and is the focal point of the unity of the community. To maintain this unity, Shoghi Effendi had to repel a number of challenges to his leadership. The first of these was that of Mirzā Moḥammad-'Alī, who had been disinherited from his succession to the leadership on account of his opposition to 'Abd-al-Bahā'. Another was the challenge to his establishment of the Bahai administration by such individuals as Ruth White and Ahmad Sohrab, who claimed that he was moving the Bahai community away from the ethos that had been created under 'Abd-al-Bahā' (Bransom-Lerche, pp. 265-80).

While setting out the "undoubted right of the individual to self-expression" and the freedom of the individual Bahai "to declare his conscience and set forth his views" that lies at "the very root of the Cause" (1968b, p. 63), Shoghi Effendi considered that these rights and freedoms should be balanced against the needs of society, stating that the Bahai Faith "neither suppresses the individual nor does it exalt him to the point of making him an anti-social creature, a menace to society" (1981, p. 436). In matters affecting the unity, interests or honor of the Bahai Faith, Shoghi Effendi was decisive and firm, excommunicating, for example, individual Bahais who had acted against his explicit instructions in matters such as dissimulating their faith for personal gain (e.g. 'Ayn-al-Molk who hid his faith for political gains), marrying with only Muslim rites when both parties were Bahais (such as Dabiḥ Qorbān, followed by several other prominent Bahais of Shiraz who supported him, e.g. 'Abd-al-Ḥosayn Dehqān and 'Azizallāh Bahādor), or Iranians who traveled to North America in the period 1943-54, when Shoghi Effendi felt that the presence of too many Iranian Bahais was inhibiting the organic development of the American Bahai community. Such individuals, however, were few and Shoghi Effendi allowed them to return to the community if they rectified their situation.

Throughout his ministry, Shoghi Effendi strove to establish an independent identity for the Bahai Faith. He himself took the lead in this by choosing not to follow 'Abd-al-Bahā's custom of wearing oriental robes, going to the mosque every Friday, and passing the time of day with visiting Muslim clerics



(Rabbani, 1969, 54-5). When Mirzā Moḥsen Afnān, ‘Abd-al-Bahā’s son-in-law, died in 1927, Shoghi Effendi unexpectedly arranged a Bahai funeral service with no Islamic content. His insistence on separation from the Muslim community in Haifa caused a rift with the members of his family, some of whom had close business ties with Muslims. A series of events then caused this rift to widen: Sayyid Ḥosayn Afnān (a descendant of Bahā’-Allāh, two of whose brothers were married to Shoghi Effendi’s sisters) was excommunicated in 1933 after he refused to dissociate himself from the Iraqi government which had allowed the Shi’i seizure of the House of Bahā’-Allāh in Baghdad to continue despite a judgment against this by the League of Nations; successive members of the Shoghi Effendi’s family were then excommunicated, mainly for refusing to sever their links with those who had already been expelled; others were excommunicated when a cousin of Shoghi Effendi married in 1944 a relative of al-Ḥosayni, the grand mufti of Jerusalem and an enemy of the Bahai community, with only a Muslim wedding ceremony.

When, in 1925, as part of the settlement of a divorce case, an Egyptian court declared the Bahai Faith to be independent of Islam, Shoghi Effendi seized on this and instructed the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais of Egypt to press it to its logical conclusion by asking for the personal status laws of the Bahai Faith (marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc.) to be legally recognized in Egypt and for the assembly to have the right to issue marriage certificates (Shoghi Effendi, 1999a, pp. 364-65; Pink, pp. 419-20). Although this did not succeed, Shoghi Effendi continued to regard “emancipating the Bahā’ī Faith from the fetters of orthodox Islam” (1968b, p. 122) as one of the main goals of his ministry.

Shoghi Effendi also used his creation of the Bahai administration to further the goal of establishing the independence of the Bahai Faith. To elect local assemblies, voting lists had to be established and Shoghi Effendi used this as an opportunity to insist that everyone on the voting lists had an unequivocal loyalty to the Bahai Faith. Those in Iran who had only a superficial link to the Bahai community would not agree to be on the community lists, as there was a risk of being identified publicly as a Bahai if the lists fell into the wrong hands. At this time, the practice in a few places in Iran of holding gatherings of Jewish and Zoroastrian converts (separate from those of the main Bahai community) ceased. Western Bahais were gradually encouraged to withdraw from church membership. Establishing the independence of the Bahai Faith was a necessary step towards bringing the Bahai communities in different parts of

the world closer together and establishing a common global Bahai identity. This was difficult as long as Bahais had mixed identities and attended the mosque, church, synagogue or temple.

Shoghi Effendi was also engaged in defending the Bahai community from persecution in countries such as Iran, Egypt, the Soviet Union, and Germany. His strategy for this often included urging the various Bahai communities around the world to write to the authorities concerned. He used this strategy when Mirzā Moḥammad-‘Ali seized the keys of the shrine of Bahā’-Allāh; when persecutions erupted in Iran in 1926 and 1955; and over the case of the House of Bahā’-Allāh in Baghdad (see for example, Shoghi Effendi, 1968b, pp. 94-5; idem, 1995c, p. 21). Such campaigns both alerted the authorities in each of those countries to the worldwide distribution of the Bahai community and increased the sense of solidarity among the Bahais. His call for all Bahais to contribute to the building of the Wilmette House of Worship and to funds for the relief of Bahais in Iran (1946 and 1955), Germany (1944), and Burma (1944) also increased the sense of solidarity and unity in the global Bahai community (Shoghi Effendi, 1995c, pp. 264-65; idem, 1982, pp. 117-18, 139-40; idem, 1971, p. 90). Despite the persistent persecutions in Iran, Shoghi Effendi demonstrated in his writings a great love for the country itself and for the Persian language and always urged the Iranian Bahais to strive to be of service to their country (see, e.g., 1972a, p. 205).

Geographical Spread of the Bahai Faith. As soon as Shoghi Effendi felt that the Bahai administrative structures were in place and functioning sufficiently well, he set them the task of disseminating the Bahai Faith to areas where there were no Bahais, an undertaking mandated by ‘Abd-al-Bahā’s Tablets of the Divine Plan. Thus in 1937 Shoghi Effendi launched the first Seven Year Plan (1937-44), giving the North American Bahais the goal of establishing a Bahai assembly (*Mahfel-e Ruhāni*) in every state in Latin America. Over the next ten years, he gradually gave the other existing national Bahai communities their own plans for spreading the Bahai Faith. The increasing number of Bahais moving to or visiting other countries and of international news organs such as *Bahā’ī News* and the multiple-volume *Bahā’ī World*, all actively promoted by Shoghi Effendi, consolidated the feeling among Bahais that they were part of a closely-knit global community.

This process of globalizing the Bahai community geographically took a major step forward when Shoghi Effendi launched the first co-ordinated global plan, the Ten Year Plan (1953-63), which required cooperation among the different



national Bahai assemblies. Each national Bahai community was to send Bahai “pioneers” (*mohājerin*) to goal areas and support them there if needed, translate Bahai literature into the indigenous languages of these areas, enroll ethnic and tribal minorities and acquire properties such as Bahai centers, temple sites, and endowment lands. During Shoghi Effendi’s ministry, the number of countries and territories in which Bahais resided grew substantially (*The Bahā’ī Faith 1844-1952*, pp. 6-7; Momen, 2009).

Acquisition and Development of Bahai Holy Places. Taking Bahā’-Allāh’s Tablet of Carmel as his mandate, Shoghi Effendi made great efforts to develop the Bahai world center in the Haifa-‘Akka area as a place of pilgrimage and a worldwide focus for Bahais. He built an impressive structure over the shrine of the Bab, obtained ownership of the Mansion of Bahji and other sites in the area associated with Bahā’-Allāh, and purchased land and personally supervised the development of extensive gardens around the shrines of the Bab and Bahā’-Allāh. He also constructed the International Archives, the first of a series of buildings at the administrative center of the Bahai Faith on Mount Carmel in Haifa. All of this was against a backdrop of the turbulence at the end of the British Mandate in Palestine and the establishment of the state of Israel.

Shoghi Effendi instituted a program of acquiring and restoring other places, in Iran, Iraq and Turkey, associated with the central figures of the Bahai Faith and its history. He also initiated the building of (*Mašreq al-aḏkār*) on each continent. Persecutions that broke out in Iran in 1955 prevented the construction of a planned House of Worship in Tehran and Shoghi Effendi responded to this by giving instructions in 1957 for the building of three Houses of Worship, in Kampala for Africa, Sydney for Australia, and Frankfurt for Europe (Shoghi Effendi, 1971, p. 111), a project that was completed after his death.

Recognition of the Bahai Faith and Links with International Organizations. Shoghi Effendi was very concerned to obtain state recognition of the Bahai Faith. To this end, he encouraged the local and national Spiritual Assemblies to become legally incorporated, to obtain recognition of the Bahai marriage ceremony and for school authorities to exempt Bahai children from attendance at school on Bahai holy days.

Shoghi Effendi promoted the establishment of links with international organizations. He created the International Bahai Bureau in Geneva in 1926 to



liaise with the League of Nations. In 1928, the case of the House of Bahāʾ-Allāh in Baghdad was taken before the League; the verdict was in favor of the Bahais, but was never implemented. Shoghi Effendi established the Bahai International Community in 1948 to develop and coordinate the relationship between the Bahai community and the United Nations (UN). In the same year, the Bahai International Community registered with the UN as an international non-governmental organization (NGO). From that time onwards, the Bahai community presented statements to the UN on such issues as human obligations and rights (1947) and proposals for the UN Charter revision (1955), as well as taking part in UN-sponsored conferences and other activities.

iii. WRITINGS

Shoghi Effendi wrote in Persian, Arabic and English. He only wrote one book, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, 1944) and a slightly shorter version of this in Persian, *Lawḥ-e qarn* (Tehran, 1944), a faith-based interpretation and schematization of the first one hundred years of Bahai history. His prolific correspondence (thousands of letters in English, Persian, and Arabic) form a considerable body of work that Bahais regard as authoritative, although not as scripture. Of his works, more than ten Persian and fifteen English volumes have been published. Some of his letters are of such length that they have been published as individual volumes: *Advent of Divine Justice* (New York, 1939) and *The Promised Day is Come* (Wilmette, 1941). In these two works, Shoghi Effendi lays out his vision of the present state of the world, the causes of World War II, and the future of both the Bahai Faith and the world. In *Dispensation of Bahāʾuʾllāh* (New York, 1934), he laid out the stations and relationships of the central figures of the Bahai Faith. He also wrote a series of letters in Persian that he sent at Nowruz or Reżwān (21 April) each year, some of which were published individually (Lawḥ-e 105, 108, 110, 111; Tehran, 1948-54). Most of his published writings are, however, compilations of the letters that he wrote to various national Bahai communities (see Bibliography). Middle Eastern Bahais use volumes of his prayers in Persian and Arabic (no English translation of these has been published).

Shoghi Effendi also undertook the translation of several works of Bahāʾ-Allāh into English. These included whole works such as *Kalamāt-e maknuna* translated as *The Hidden Words* (London, 1923, rev. ed. London, 1929), *Ketāb-e iqān*, translated as *The Book of Certitude* (New York, 1931), and the *Lawḥ-e Ebn-e Dīʿb*, translated as *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette, 1941). In addition, he translated his own selection of the most important writings of Bahāʾ-Allāh



as *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahā'u'llāh* (New York, 1935) and *Prayers and Meditations of Bahā'u'llāh* (New York, 1938). In view of Shoghi Effendi's position as authorized interpreter of the Bahai scriptures, these translations have a special status and translations into most other languages are made from these English translations rather than from the original language. Shoghi Effendi also edited and translated the chronicle of the Babi period written by Nabil Zarandi (*The Dawn-Breakers*, New York, 1932). Moreover, Shoghi Effendi closely supervised and sometimes wrote material for the successive volumes of *The Bahā'ī World* and prepared for publication three statistical compilations (see Bibliography).

Shoghi Effendi's writings and translations were all directed to specific ends. He strove to communicate his vision of where the world was and where it was heading according to the Bahai teachings; he laid out for the Bahais an overview of humanity's religious history and the place of the Bahai Faith in it; and he advised and directed the Bahais as they strove to create the institutions laid down in Bahā'-Allāh's writings. Many letters he wrote were to encourage, praise, and persuade the Bahais to rise to more intensive efforts and greater sacrifice. His editing and translation of *The Dawn-Breakers*, for example, was linked to his call to the Western Bahais to see themselves as the spiritual descendants of the Babi heroes and to be prepared to sacrifice, in such ways as leaving their homes to spread the Bahai Faith (Shoghi Effendi, 1990, pp. 7-8, 11; idem, 1995b, pp. 45, 66f, 83f, 102, 109, 131f; idem, 1995c, pp. 299, 350; 1981, p. 290; 1971, pp. 35, 40f, 49, 120, 133).

It is remarkable that Shoghi Effendi, who never visited Iran and spent only a short time in England, was able to write fluently and expressively in both Persian and English. His style in both languages varies according to whether he is dealing with doctrinal and spiritual matters or administrative details to Bahai institutions. In the former mode, his Persian is eloquent, frequently rhythmical and characterized by a heavy use of Arabic words and phrases. In both English and Persian his use of long complex sentences makes his works difficult to access for some but he nevertheless succeeds in creating a momentum and driving home his points effectively. For his translations of Bahā'-Allāh's writings into English, he chose a style reminiscent of the King James Authorized Version of the Bible as a fitting vehicle (Rāseḳ; Varḳa; Giachery, pp. 29-48).

iv. THE INSTITUTION OF THE GUARDIANSHIP



There were no children from Shoghi Effendi's marriage and, by 1952, none of the members of the family of 'Abd-al-Bahā' remained within the Bahai community. Therefore, although 'Abd-al-Bahā's Will and Testament provides for a succession of Guardians, who must be descendants of Bahā'-Allāh, there was no-one whom Shoghi Effendi could appoint as his successor. When Shoghi Effendi died, he was found to have made no will. The Hands of the Cause, whom Shoghi Effendi had designated as "Chief Stewards of Baha'u'llah's embryonic World Commonwealth," therefore took over the administration of the Bahai community for the remaining years of the Ten-Year Plan that Shoghi Effendi had initiated. They decided that when the Plan came to an end, the Universal House of Justice should be established. Thus an International Convention was held in Haifa in 1963 at which the members of all of the National Spiritual Assemblies elected the Universal House of Justice. One of the first acts of the Universal House of Justice was to declare that they could find no way in which they could legitimately appoint another Guardian (1996, p. 14).

In the absence of a living Guardian, some aspects of the Guardianship, such as the headship of the Bahai Faith, devolve, according to the Will and Testament of 'Abd-al-Bahā', upon the Universal House of Justice. Other functions such as the authorized interpretation of Bahai scripture continue in that the Universal House of Justice considers itself bound by Shoghi Effendi's interpretations and therefore searches through Shoghi Effendi's writings on each issue on which it intends to make a decision.

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