



A Deepening Session on the Covenant

Presentation for the Baha'i youth in the City of Manningham

by Nick Edwards

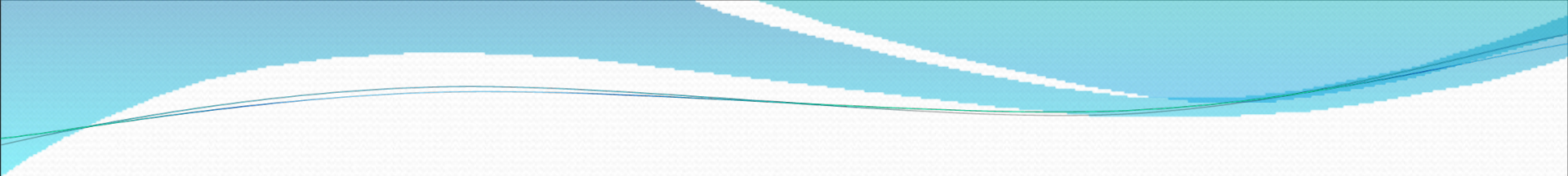
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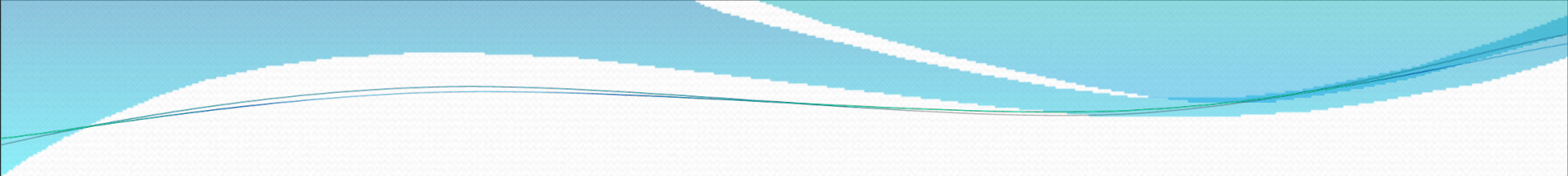
An extract from a letter of the Universal House of
Justice to the Friends in Iran 18 February 2008

“Firmness in the Covenant is among the
distinctive characteristics of the believers
in that land.”

Protection Arm SA 2009

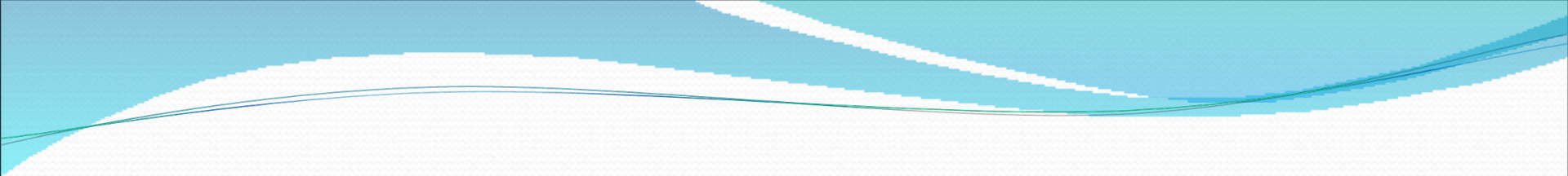


The House of Justice states: “Questions concerning the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice can be resolved through careful study of the Bahá'í Writings including the elucidations of the Universal House of Justice”



Abdu'l- Bahá states: “The Universal House of Justice will deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book...whatever they decide has the same effect as the Text itself.”

Prior to the passing of 'Abdu'l- Bahá in 1921, the content of His Will and Testament regarding the guardianship was generally unknown. The believers anticipated a day when the Universal House of Justice would be established since it had been specifically mentioned in the Sacred Texts. There was, however, no definite understanding that there would be a Guardian.



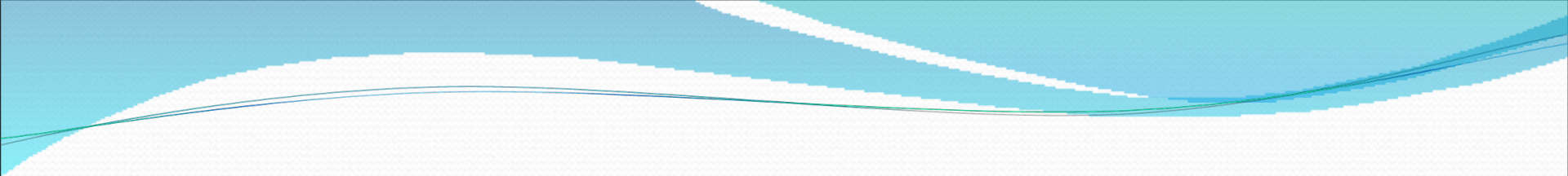
Shoghi Effendi indicated that he had no foreknowledge of the position to which he would be called, at most he thought the Will and Testament might charge him, as the eldest grandson of 'Abdu'l- Bahá, with responsibility for arranging for the election of the House of Justice



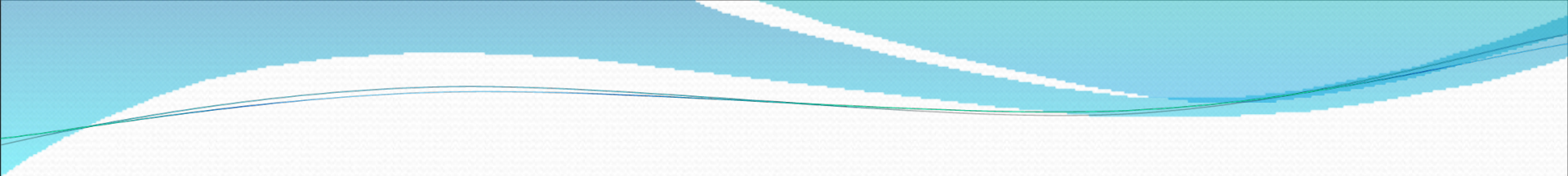
Institution of the Guardianship became
widely known only after the Will and
Testament of Abdu'l- Bahá

Abdu'l- Bahá's Will indicated a number of circumstances which, depending on future conditions, might eventually confront the Faith.

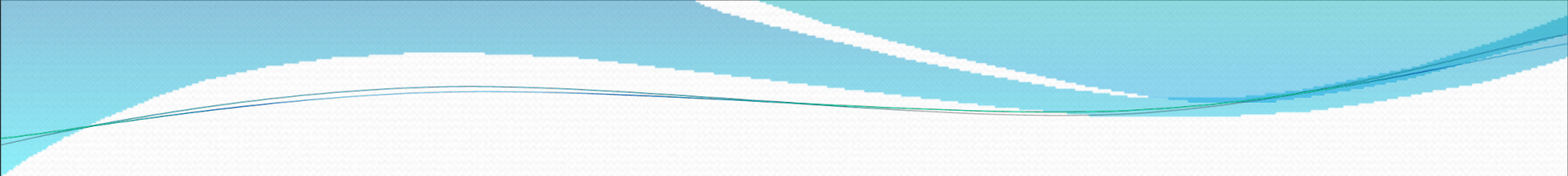
The second section of the Will which refers only to the Universal House of Justice and not to the Guardianship was written at a time when His own life was in imminent danger and Shoghi Effendi was but a small boy.



During that same period 'Abdu'l- Bahá had made arrangements for the election of the Universal House of Justice to take place immediately, should the threat on His life materialize.



After the passing of 'Abdu'l- Bahá, Shoghi Effendi determined that the foundations of the Administrative Order needed first to be firmly laid at the local and national levels.



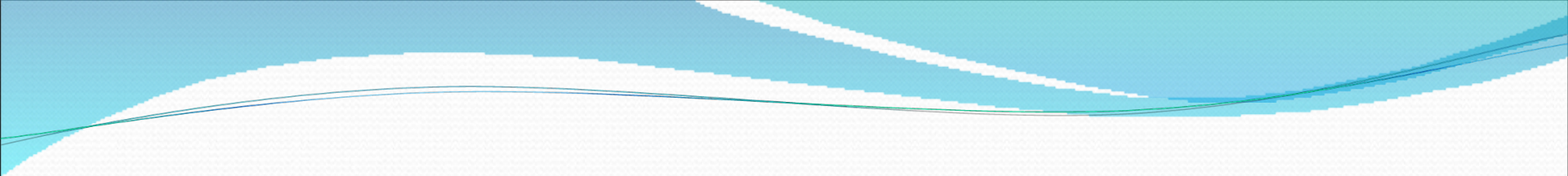
Abdu'l- Bahá's Will and Testament clearly allows for the possibility of a successor to Shoghi Effendi

However, there are no assurances in the Writings that the line of Guardians would continue throughout the Dispensation

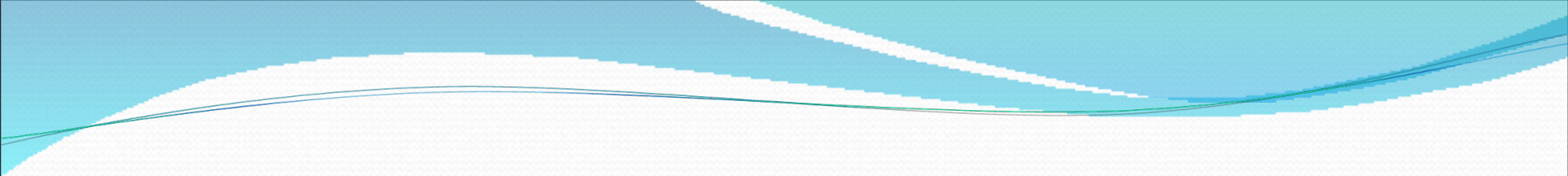
Rather the possibility is envisaged that such a line would come to an end.

Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas states:

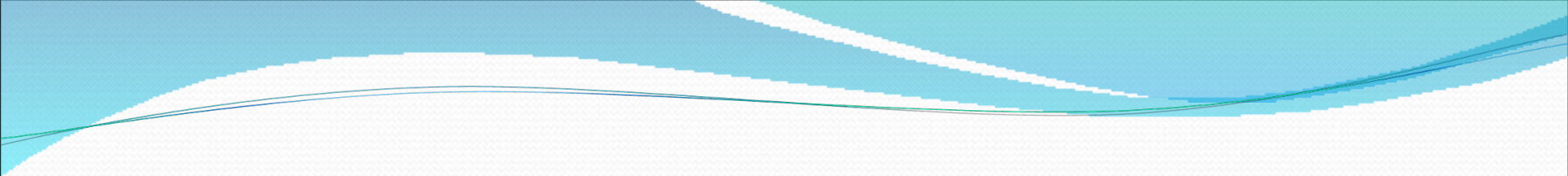
“Endowments dedicated to charity revert to God, the revealer of Signs. None had the right to dispose of them without leave from Him Who is the Dawning-Place of Revelation. After him this authority shall pass to the Aghsan, and after them to the House of Justice—should it be established in the world by then—that they may use...”



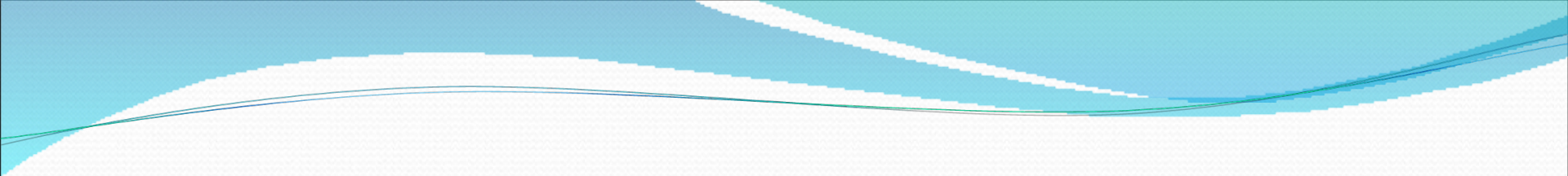
“...these endowments for the benefit of the Places which have been exalted in this Cause, and for whatsoever hath been enjoined upon them by Him Who is the God of might and power. Otherwise, the endowments shall revert to the people of Baha who speak not except by His leave and judge not save in accordance with what God hath decreed in this...”



“...Tablet—lo, they are the champions of victory betwixt heaven and earth—that they may use them in the manner that hath been laid down in the Book by God, the Mighty, the Bountiful.”



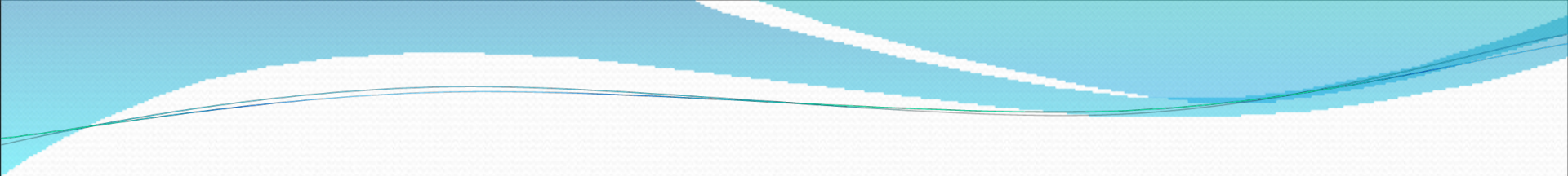
The passing of Shoghi Effendi precipitated the situation described in which the authority vested in the Aghsan - first in 'Abdu'l- Bahá and then in Shoghi Effendi- ended before the House of Justice was established.



In His Will and Testament 'Abdu'l- Bahá specifies in the clearest terms the conditions according to which Shoghi Effendi was to have named his successor as Guardian.

- It is incumbent upon the Guardian of the Cause of God, to appoint in his own lifetime him that shall become his successor
- He that is appointed must manifest in himself detachment from all worldly things
- Must be the essence of purity
- Must show in himself the fear of God, knowledge, wisdom and learning

- Should the first-born of the Guardian of the Cause of God not manifest in Himself the truth of the words: “the child is the secret essence of its sire” which means
- Should he not inherit of the spiritual within him (the Guardian of the Cause of God)
- And his glorious lineage not be matched with a goodly character then must he choose another branch to succeed him.

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- The Hands of the Cause of God must elect from their own number nine persons that shall at all times be occupied in the important services in the work of the guardian of the Cause of God
 - The election of these nine must be carried either unanimously or by majority from the company of the Hands of the Cause of God

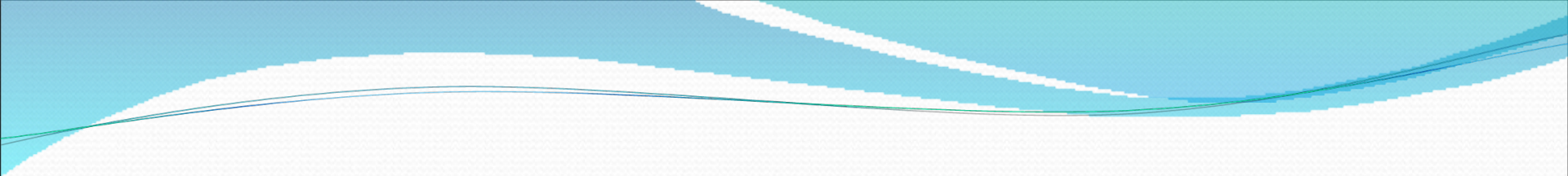
- And these whether unanimously or by a majority vote, must give their assent to the choice of the one whom the Guardian of the Cause of God hath chosen as his successor.
- This assent must be given in such wise as the assenting and the dissenting voices may not be distinguished (i.e. secret ballot).

- Importance of the infallible understanding of the Guardian of the passage
- The fact that Shoghi Effendi did not name a successor should be seen as a sign of his meticulous adherence to every word of Abdu'l- Bahá's Will and an indication of his conclusion that there was no qualified individual whom he could appoint

- The end of the line of Guardians was not the result of any decision or action taken by the Hands of the Cause of God
- To entertain the possibility that it may one day be re-established is futile
- ‘Abdu’l- Bahá wrote that: “ere the expiration of one thousand years, no one has the right to utter a single word, even to claim the station of Guardianship.”

- And exhorted the friends that: “Should there be differences of opinion, the Supreme House of Justice would immediately resolve them.”
- The House of Justice stated: “it finds that there is no way to appoint or to legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi.”

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- The interpretations of Shoghi Effendi inform the decisions of the Universal House of Justice



Bahá'u'lláh states: “The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an assailable, an enduring foundation...storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men’s fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure.”

The meaning of the designation “Aghsan”
“Ghosn” is the singular form of “Aghsan”.
In some cases the term applies specifically to
Bahá'u'lláh's sons.

Other cases it is used to broadly refer to
Baha'u'llah's male descendents.

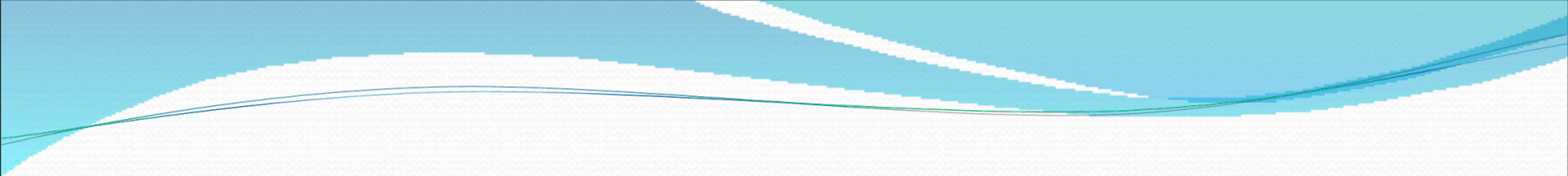
For e.g. ‘Abdu'l- Bahá in His Will refers to
Shoghi Effendi “the chosen branch” (Ghusn-i-
Mumtaz) just like Bahá'u'lláh names His
sons ‘the Most Great Branch’, ‘the Greater
Branch’, and the ‘Purest Branch’.

Shoghi Effendi explains that the word “Aghsan” refers to Baha’u’llah’s descendents”

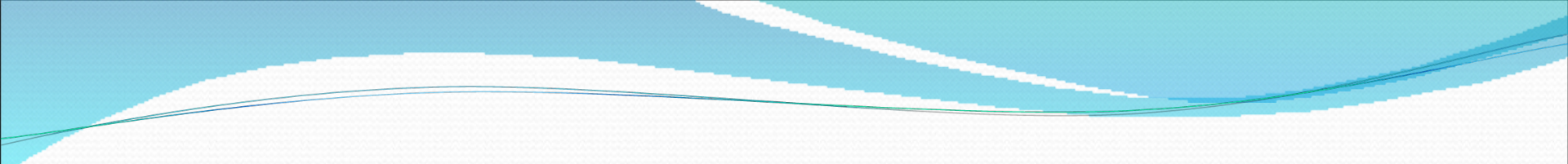
“If at any time, male descendents of Bahá’u’lláh appear who are faithful to the Covenant, it would nevertheless not be possible for any of them to occupy the office of the Guardian, for in the absence of appointment by Shoghi Effendi they cannot claim the station of Guardianship and there is no way for one to be named to it by an act of the House of Justice.”

Question – *Was the functioning of an “officially recognized” International Bahá’í Court in the Holy Land, an essential preliminary step in the evolution of the Universal House of Justice?*

Answer – ‘Abdu’l- Bahá Himself contemplated the possibility of the formation of the Universal House of Justice in His own lifetime which did not include the establishment of a religious court

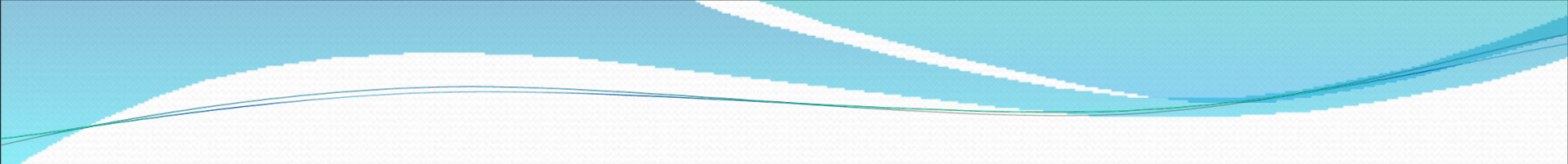


“The Supreme House of Justice should be elected according to the system followed in the election of the parliaments of Europe. And when the countries would be guided the Houses of Justice of various countries would elect the Supreme House of Justice.”



“At whatever time all the beloved of God in each country appoint their delegates, and these in turn elect their representatives, and these representatives elect a body, that body shall be regarded as the Supreme House of Justice”

“The establishment of that House is not dependent upon the conversion of all the nations of the world. For example, if conditions were favourable and no disturbance would be caused, the friends in Persia would elect their representatives, and likewise the friends in America, in India, and other areas would also elect their representatives, and these would elect a House of Justice. That House of Justice would be the Supreme House of Justice. That is all”.



Over the thirty six years of his ministry, Shoghi Effendi laid the foundations of the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

There was an increase in the Local and National Spiritual Assemblies, the appointment of the International Bahá'í Council and its evolution into an elected body.

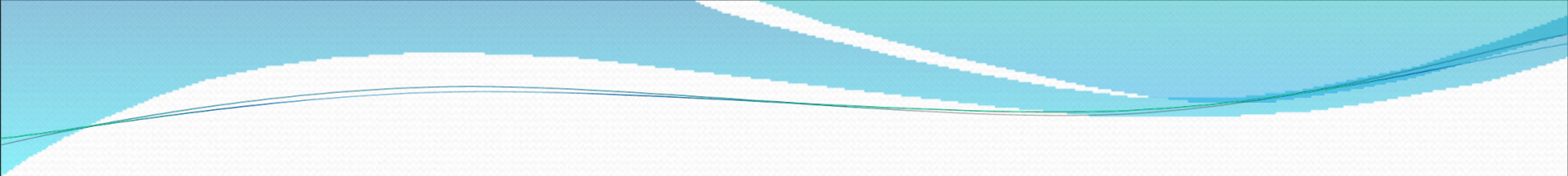
- Goals were specified by Shoghi Effendi to establish Bahá'í courts.
- National courts were established in certain countries in Asia.
- And as a step in the development of the International Bahá'í Council, the precursor to the Universal House of Justice, a court was established in the Holy Land.



The Egyptian government recognized the National Spiritual Assembly as an independent Bahá'í court in 1929

However, overtime, changing conditions rendered the formation of such religious courts impossible

As the Hands of the Cause of God commented in 1959 in calling for the election of the International Bahá'í Council and the eventual establishment of the House of Justice:



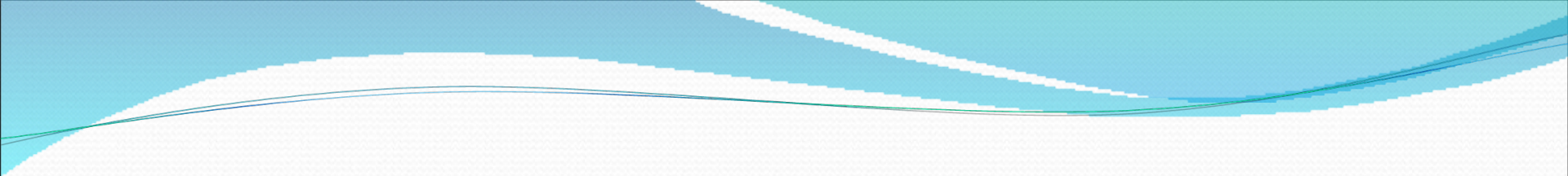
“We wish to assure the believers that every effort will be made to establish a Bahá'í court in the Holy Land prior to the date set for this election. We should however bear in mind that the Guardian himself clearly indicated this goal, due to the strong trend towards the secularization of Religious Courts in this part of the world, might not be achieved.”

The disposition of the Huquq and the expulsion of the covenant breakers are duties which the House Justice now performs as the centre of authority to whom all must turn.

The current procedures followed in this respect are outlined in the statement, “*The Institution of the Counsellors*”.

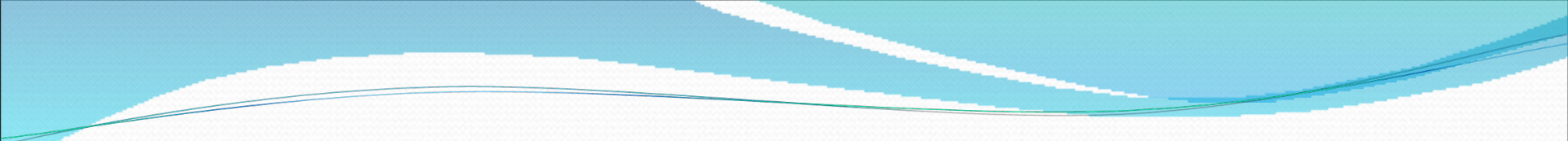
Two years after Shoghi Effendi's death Charles Mason Remey who was at that time one of the Hands of the Cause laid claim to the Guardianship.

His claim was that his appointment in 1951 as president of the nascent International Bahá'í Council meant that he should automatically assume the position of head of the Universal House of Justice and was therefore the second Guardian.



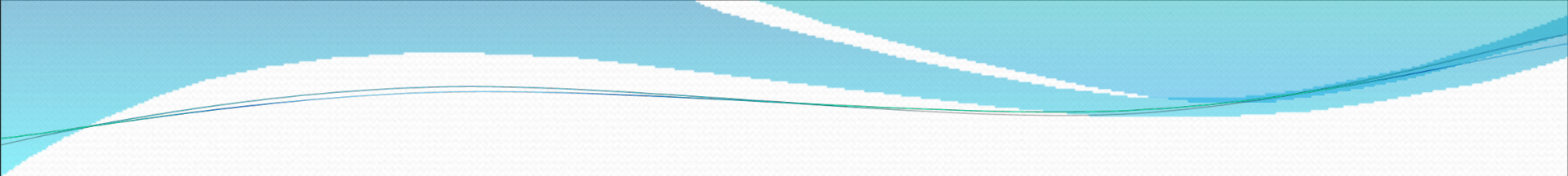
In 1957 he was among the Hands of the Cause who gathered in the Holy Land to consider the course of action following the unexpected passing of the Guardian.

He personally affirmed that Shoghi Effendi had appointed no successor signing a document issued unanimously by the Hands to this effect.



He signed another document in which he agreed that the entire body of the Hands of the Cause would determine when and how the evolution of the International Bahá'í Council would culminate in the election of the House of Justice

For two years as one of the nine Hands designated to serve in the Holy Land, he participated in the consultations that guided the development of the Bahá'í community



Then without notice or discussion with his fellow Hands, he claimed the station of Guardianship.

Exercising the authority conferred on them in accordance with 'Abdu'l- Bahá's Will, the Hands of the Cause expelled him from the Faith as a covenant-breaker.

The advice of the Universal House of Justice regarding the Covenant:

- The friends must be firm and steadfast.
- Should be wary lest the arguments put forward by those who sow seeds of doubt become the cause for confusion or lead to disputation and disunity.

What should the friends do when questions arise that cannot be resolved?

They should be placed immediately before the House of Justice.

What should the friends be especially careful to avoid?

Being enticed by the whispering of the remnants of the Covenant-breakers and their supporters.

What do the Covenant-breakers seek to do?

To shake the faith of the believers

What is the difference between the Covenant-breakers of the past and the present?

Whereas in the past the violators of the Covenant sought to undermine the authority of the Central figures, today they challenge the Universal House of Justice

*According to 'Abdu'l- Bahá, which of the
Covenant breakers are of particular concern?*

Those who assert their firmness and
steadfastness in the Covenant but when they
come across responsive ears they secretly
sow the seeds of suspicion

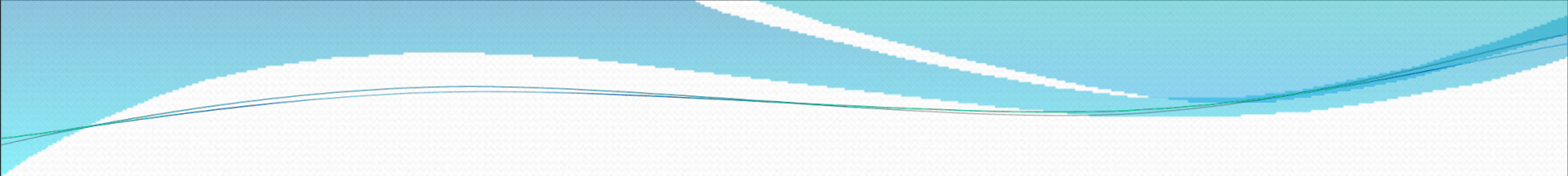
According to the House of Justice, who can easily be misled and fall away?

- Those who are naive
- Those who are not deepened in the Teachings
- Those who are not firm in the Covenant
- Those who are controlled by their egos and lust for leadership

How can the friends protect themselves and the community?

By adhering strictly to the emphatic exhortations repeated throughout the Sacred Texts:

“Unto the Most Holy Book everyone must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself. Whoso doth deviate therefrom is verily of them that love discord, hath shown forth malice and turned away from the Lord of the Covenant. By this House is meant that Universal House of Justice which is to be elected from all countries,…”



“...That is from those parts from the East and West where the loved ones are to be found, after the manner of customary elections in Western countries such as those of England....”

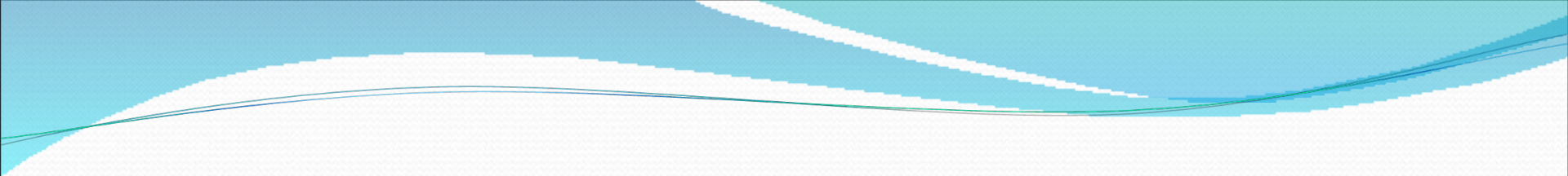
What is one of the greatest and most fundamental principles of the Cause of God?

To shun and avoid entirely the covenant-breakers.

Why?

For they will utterly destroy the Cause of God, exterminate His Law and render of no account all efforts exerted in the past.

“O friends! It behooveth you to call to mind with tenderness the trials of His Holiness, the Exalted One, to show your fidelity to the Ever-Blest Beauty. The utmost endeavour must be exerted lest all these woes, trials and afflictions, all this pure and sacred blood that hath been shed so profusely in the Path of God, may prove to be in vain....”



“O ye beloved of the Lord! Strive with all your heart to shield the Cause of God from the onslaught of the insincere, for souls such as these cause the straight to become crooked and all benevolent efforts to produce contrary results.”



Thank you for your time... .