

Guidance Regarding Bahá'í Archives

by Bahá'u'lláh, Shoghi Effendi and Universal House of Justice

Compiled by Bahá'í International Archives.

Extract from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

Extracts from the Writings of Shoghi Effendi and letters written on his behalf

Extracts from letters written by or on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Extract from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

Thou shouldst alert the company of the faithful to the need for all to exert every effort and to spare no pains in preserving and honouring the Tablets and Holy Writings. Blessed the regions in which the fragrance of the Pen of the Most High is spread abroad. The preservation of the peerless, incomparable and blessed Tablets is highly requisite and beloved in the sight of God, lest either the pages of which they are composed or the ink in which they are inscribed should lose their pristine quality. Do thou guide and instruct the friends in the method of preservation. All that hath been said in this regard was at His sacred and exalted behest. Blessed are those who do His bidding.

This Tablet is in the form of a letter from Áqá Ján Khádim'u'lláh quoting words of Bahá'u'lláh, and dictated in its entirety by Him.

Extracts from the Writings of Shoghi Effendi and letters written on his behalf

...undertakings of great institutional significance were initiated by these newly founded Assemblies, among which the institution of the Hazíratu'l-Quds—the seat of the Bahá'í National Assembly and pivot of all Bahá'í administrative activity in future—must rank as one of the most important. Originating first in Persia, now universally known by its official and distinctive title signifying “the Sacred Fold,” ... this institution, still in the early stages of its development, has already lent its share to the consolidation of the internal functions of the organic Bahá'í community, and provided a further visible evidence of its steady growth and rising power. Complementary in its functions to those of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár—an edifice exclusively reserved for Bahá'í worship—this institution, whether local or national, will, as its component parts, such as the Secretariat, the Treasury, the Archives, the Library, the Publishing Office, the Assembly Hall, the Council Chamber, the Pilgrims' Hostel, are brought together and made jointly to operate in one spot, be increasingly regarded as the focus of all Bahá'í administrative activity, and symbolize, in a befitting manner, the ideal of service animating the Bahá'í community in its relation alike to the Faith and to mankind in general.

God Passes By (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974, 1999 printing), pages 339-340)

Reference should, moreover, be made to the establishment of National Archives for the authentication, the collection, the translation, the cataloguing and the preservation of the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and for the preservation of sacred relics and historical documents...

God Passes By, page 342

Finally a reference should be made to the establishment of the international Bahá'í archives on Mount Carmel occupying the two chambers adjoining the Shrine of the Báb. Here have been collected, arranged and preserved the relics, articles of clothing, writings and photographs of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and the Master, as well as a mass of invaluable documents and manuscripts, consisting mostly of unpublished and untranslated and authenticated Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, some of them beautifully illuminated and

mounted. Some of these have been so arranged that the pilgrims visiting the Holy Land will be able to view these priceless relics. This institution, Shoghi Effendi hopes, will serve as a model and stimulus to the National Spiritual Assemblies in the different parts of the world to establish similar institutions which will serve to collect, arrange and preserve for posterity any documents, sacred or otherwise, connected with the Bahá'í Faith.

From a letter dated 16 January 1932 to a National Spiritual Assembly

He trusts that his gift, offered to your National Archives through the kind care of Miss ___ will serve to remind the ... believers of the importance and sacred character of that institution, and to encourage them to help in contributing their full share towards its further development and expansion. The institution of the National Bahá'í Archives, which all the National Assemblies have already established, is, indeed, highly important, the significance of which will be increasingly realized as years go by. It is now that so many precious sacred relics are still in the possession of individual believers, that steps must be taken in order to ensure their safe preservation in the National Archives. The friends must be encouraged to co-operate with their National Spiritual Assembly for the attainment of this objective.

From a letter dated 5 July 1935 to an individual

National archives are in the process of formation in Egypt, Persia, Germany, America and India. As soon as these national archives are established, local archives will be formed under the direct supervision of the Local Assemblies.

From a letter dated 10 June 1936 to a National Spiritual Assembly

Regarding the preservation of relics associated with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the general principle should be that any object used by Him in person should be preserved for posterity, whether in the local or the national archives. It is the duty and responsibility of the Bahá'í Assemblies to ascertain carefully whether such objects are genuine or not, and to exercise the utmost care and caution in this matter.

28 July 1936 to a National Spiritual Assembly

The importance of the institution of Bahá'í Archives is not due only to the many teaching facilities it procures, but is essentially to be found in the vast amount of historical data and information it offers both to the present-day administrators of the Cause, and to the Bahá'í historians of the future. The institution of Bahá'í Archives is indeed a most valuable storehouse of information regarding all the aspects of the Faith, historical, administrative as well as doctrinal. Future generations of believers will be surely in a better position than we are to truly and adequately appreciate the many advantages and facilities which the institution of the Archives offers to individual believers and also to the community at large.

Now that the Cause is rapidly passing through so many different phases of its evolution is the time for the friends to exert their utmost in order to preserve as much as they can of the sacred relics and various other precious objects that are associated with the lives of the Founders of the Faith, and particularly the Tablets They have revealed.

Every believer should realize that he has a definite responsibility to shoulder in this matter, and to help, to whatever extent he can, in rendering successful the valuable work which National and Local Bahá'í Archives Committees are so devotedly accomplishing for the Faith in America.

From a letter dated 25 September 1936 to a National Spiritual Assembly

He thinks that when things are collected for the archives as much information as possible should be given about them. It is easier now, while the old Bahá'ís dating from the early days of the Cause in America are still living, to collect accurate information than it will be later on, and every attempt should be made to amplify local records and accumulate historical data.

From a letter dated 25 November 1948 to an individual

It is very important that the old Bahá'ís should accurately record their experiences with the Master, and events in the Cause's progress, for these things form data for future histories of the Cause. They have not, however, the authority of the revealed Word or the Tablets, etc.

From a letter dated 23 October 1949 to an individual

As regards the things you have, associated with the beloved Master, he feels that, unless you have some objection to the suggestion, the best thing you could do would be to entrust them to the Bahá'ís of France....

He is trying to assist the friends to build up, in a modest way, National Archives; and any object associated with the Master is naturally a very prized possession. Also it seems to him befitting that you, as one of the older "French" Bahá'ís, should be associated with this institution, which in the future will no doubt grow to be of considerable importance.

From a letter dated 26 March 1956 to an individual

Extracts from letters written by or on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

It was the wish of the beloved Guardian that both national and local archives be instituted as one of the component parts of every Hazíratu'l-Quds.

From a letter dated 5 July 1973 from the Universal House of Justice to an individual

When friends offer sacred relics for preservation in the International Archives they are invariably asked to give any and all information they have about each relic, specifying the manner in which it came into their possession. If the information they give is complete and reliable, the relic is included in the Archives, properly identified, and usually together with the information which has been provided about its authenticity. The House of Justice suggests that this is what you ought to do with the hair now received by you.

From a letter dated 25 April 1977 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly

The organization of your archives and the extent to which archival material is shared with individual believers is within the discretion of your National Spiritual Assembly. However, those responsible for the archives should be sure that material released in response to requests of individual believers is not of a nature which, if disclosed at the time, would harm the interests of the Faith. Also, personal items, particularly if the individuals concerned are still living, should only be made available to researchers after the most careful consideration, even referring back to the National Spiritual Assembly if necessary.

From a letter dated 16 June 1982 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly

The archives of the Faith at the World Centre and in Iran, and indeed in most national communities, are as yet in no condition to permit access to just anyone who wishes to study them. Most of these archives still need to be studied, sorted, preserved and catalogued by competent archivists so that vital historical evidence is not lost and so that easy access will be possible in future.

From a letter dated 23 March 1983 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter ... concerning the precious relics which are in the possession of your Assembly...

Each of these relics should be preserved with the utmost reverence in a safe place, together with a meticulous record of its provenance to ensure that, in future, no question of its authenticity will arise. A separate list of the relics owned by your Assembly should also be kept in another location, describing them and stating where they are being held.

As to the actual preservation of the relics themselves, the House of Justice suggest that you consult a local authority ... such as one of the museums, which will have expertise not only in the preservation of such objects, but also concerning the conditions in ... or wherever they are being held.

From a letter dated 19 October 1983 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly

The archives of a Spiritual Assembly are its responsibility and are held in trust for the Cause. Their confidentiality is an element of the confidentiality with which a Spiritual Assembly must deal with the personal problems of the members of its community. To give or deny access to the archives lies within the authority of the Assembly...

From a letter dated 23 July 1985 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual

While the House of Justice requests your National Spiritual Assembly to give every encouragement to ... in spearheading the collection of such materials from the children of early believers in your

country, you should impress upon them that ultimately such archival material should be deposited in your National Archives. Time is of the essence, and the sooner a systematic effort is undertaken to collect material such as tablets to the early believers, diaries, old photographs properly identified, and correspondence with the prominent early believers, the more productive it will be. Many of the important historic documents may have already been destroyed by the descendants of early believers who do not realize their importance.

From a letter dated 6 August 1985 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly

As you can understand, it is very important for such details of the provenance of any relic to accompany it so that doubts of authenticity which might arise in future will have reliable information against which the matter can be checked.

From a letter dated 28 November 1985 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual

The House of Justice understands that much has already been done to collect in note form or on tape recordings the recollections of the older faithful believers in... These recollections will be of great value to the history of the Faith there, and you have, no doubt, given Mr. ___ access to whatever is not of a confidential nature. In his efforts to collect additional recollections or to obtain access to documents still in private hands, Mr. ___ may find that some of the friends are reluctant to divulge their memories to a young researcher, especially if some of them are painful. It is, however, most important that as many as possible be recorded while there is still time, so that there will be numerous sources of information for future historians. The House of Justice therefore suggests that the committee or individual whom your Assembly has made responsible for collecting and preserving such historical archives and information, could collaborate with Mr. ___ and could arrange for friends who would be acceptable to the older believers to approach them and obtain tape recordings or other records of their reminiscences, as well as alerting them to the need to preserve for the Faith whatever historically valuable documents they may have in their possession.

From a letter dated 3 December 1985 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly