

Rúhíyyih Khánum's personal remarks to the friends

International Convention, Wilmette, Monday night, 1953 ¹

Chairman: This afternoon someone quoted a statement from the *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, where he said: "*O ye the faithful loved ones of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! It is incumbent upon you to take the greatest care of Shoghi Effendi, the twig that hath branched from and the fruit given forth by the two hallowed and Divine Lote-Trees, that no dust of despondency and sorrow may stain his radiant nature, that day by day he may wax greater in happiness, in joy and spirituality, and may grow to become even as a fruitful tree.*"² Is there any one on earth who has taken such good care of Shoghi Effendi as Rúhíyyih Khánum? The Guardian says: "She has been my helpmate during the darkest day of my life and my indefeatable collaborator in my arduous tasks." I think that 'Abdu'l-Bahá must be very pleased with Rúhíyyih Khánum. Friends, we, all of us, are very happy that we are to have her all to ourselves for this whole evening that we may in some way express to her our gratitude and our love. Friends, Amatu'l Bahá, Rúhíyyih Khánum.

Mr Chairman, dear friends: I am inclined to think that the institution of chairmanship should be abolished because it embarrasses the speaker so much. You try not to get your heart to beat so fast—it makes life very difficult.

I have been looking forward to this occasion ever since last August when the Guardian told me that he was considering sending me to this great gathering. I wanted to say so many things for so many years and now that I am here I don't know where to begin first.

First of all, I want to say a few family things because we all are one family; and in spite of the fact that Bahá'ís often fight like cats and dogs they love each other devotedly. And when two Bahá'ís meet—especially from different parts of the globe they fly into each others arms. So I want to thank you all for your love which has been a great help to me during the years I have been in Haifa—and for the letters. I want to thank you for the gifts and the love, the food and the messages. Don't think they were not appreciated. Believe me life in Haifa is fretfully busy and preoccupied and we just have to take for granted that every gesture was deeply appreciated.

I would like to bring you the love and greetings of those who are not here tonight. There are others in Haifa whose heart is with you now, who are sustaining and helping the Guardian instead of being here at this moment. Leroy Ioas and his wife, Sylvia, and Jessie and Ethyl Ravel who are serving so devotedly. All of their thoughts and love are with you here.

I would like to say another personal thing before we go on to other suggestions. I was very sorry yesterday that the viewing of the portraits kept many of you waiting so long. It was just one of those things that cannot be any other way. I kept thinking we built too small a Temple or we just have too many Bahá'ís. I know that all of you longed with all your hearts to bow before those wonderful portraits. Your hearts were bowing and kneeling and there was not time for everyone to do that. I regretted it very, very much; and I know all the members of the National Spiritual Assembly felt the same way. They calculated—had they been able

¹ This document is from the Emma Maxie Jones Collection, https://bahai-library.com/emma_maxwell_jones_collection, prepared by E. Jones, M. Thomas, and J. Winters (2021-2022). Transcribed with minor typographical and spelling corrections from scanned photographic image of typewritten copy.

² 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 25.

to do what they wanted to do, it would have been 9:00 or 10:00 o'clock before the last ones would have been through. We could give you that little touch of perfume from the Guardian's hand which he wanted every believer to have on that occasion. I am sure you took away, nevertheless, a great deal in your hearts from that very brief moment in the Temple before those blessed portraits. I feel that this is our evening. Mine and yours. And I suggest that it might be nice if some have any questions if they would write down their questions and get them up here. If I feel I can or should answer them and they have a thought that would be of use, I shall be very glad to try to answer them within bounds, because we cannot otherwise commune with each other. We can leave that to the end of the evening.

I think the thing you want to hear most is about Shoghi Effendi. I know you always hear about him from the returning pilgrims; you hear about him from the Hands of the Cause. No one could convey him to you because like everybody we love most in the world, they are our beloved. It is an inner thing, it cannot be given to another person. But you might like to know a few of the thoughts that have been going through my mind during the last sixteen years and a few of my observations. When I went to Haifa, if the Guardian had told me that now you are to spend eight hours a day clothed in sack clothes and ashes that would have seemed perfectly natural. Anything he would have said that would have been all right. I felt like I was going to enter a cloister when I left [the] Pilgrim House. I found that those people were perfectly normal, natural people. They laughed and talked, were interested in other things as well as in the Cause, were spiritual in the right places and I found this wonderful, normal atmosphere. At first it was quite a shock to me. Well, I thought, where is the monastery? I could not quite get used to the fact that we have no asceticism in the Bahá'í Faith; that religion is something you live and breathe 24 hours a day and is as normal to you as the color of your skin. I had an idea from my Christian ancestors and I didn't know it could be so wonderfully natural all of the time in every way in one's life. There is nothing peculiar about being a Bahá'í.

Another idea that I had when I went to serve the Guardian—people form mental images. I had the image of the Guardian as being both the Course of God—as a ship. and the captain showing Shoghi Effendi the direction to guide the ship. The Bahá'ís were all hands on deck and I am one of the deck hands. And then I thought: No, there is something wrong about this. It doesn't sort of fit the facts. I think the Guardian must be the ship and the sea is the Cause of God and we are all being transported on this ship. Not just teammates of the Captain but traveling on the ship. Time went by and that simply was no longer big enough. Finally, I came to the conclusion that the ocean was the Guardian and the Cause of God was the ship; and the Cause of God often gets a rough ride and the ocean is tossed by the winds of God so you see the mental image came back so much more vast.

Another thing that happened to me. I was very, very happy as you can well imagine that I was going to be the Bahá'í that could be near Shoghi Effendi. I thought I had gotten to first base, all the other Bahá'ís would have to worry over their own souls. Because he says in the *Íqán* "*How often hath a sinner, at the hour of death, attained to the essence of faith, and, quaffing the immortal draught, hath taken his flight unto the celestial Concourse. And how often hath a devout believer, at the hour of his soul's ascension, been so changed as to fall into the nethermost fire.*"¹ Never a doubt

¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 194–5.

or worry the door had closed. One day Shoghi Effendi said to me: “Your destiny is right in your own hand to make or mar.” I haven’t felt comfortable since. I got right back where I was. Right back with you. We are subjected to very great forces there.

Another wonderful thing about Shoghi Effendi is the way he works. I wish all of us could come in contact with the dynamism of the Guardian. Everything he wants, he wants it done immediately if not sooner. He has abundant enthusiasm. If you ask him how it should be done and when it should be done, and which should be done first—. As I say, the sooner the better about anything. There is nothing diffuse about Shoghi Effendi. He is just like a point of flame, like what comes out of a blowtorch, an entity of concentration and action. I was telling one of the members of the Assembly this afternoon he had written twelve messages to twelve NSA’s and a seventeen page communication to the Persian Bahá’ís in under four days. That is the way he works. Just sits down and works right straight through until it is finished. We know we do not have the strength or the guidance of our Guardian, and we can see how he concentrates on a thing and gets it done.

He went over to Bahjí this year. It was nothing but sand. The earth is sand over there all around the Holy Land; and, in two and one-half months he had 1,200 square meters of land under cultivation. He planned the gardens, part of which you will see tomorrow evening. He had the beautiful vases put in position; he had the paths laid out, he did it because he didn’t do anything else for sixteen hours a day. Everything he does he does it that way. We have got to learn to work the way Shoghi Effendi does because in that way we will get the work of the Cause accomplished. I know it is unbelievable.

We have a little tiny machine which would make any American laugh. It grinds tiles. It has a little, tiny mouth and a little boy about ten years old would sit there and feed into this machine and grind up the tile and by sending our Bahá’í truck all over Acca, Haifa, even as far as Jaffa, to get roof tiles which had been left over from destroyed houses, carting them back, having our own servants bringing them in, stick it in the machine and Shoghi Effendi covered all the paths of Bahjí with lovely crushed tile. It is not the deluxe way of doing things but it got done. Because that all saves the Bahá’í Faith money. I don’t know how many hundreds of thousands of dollars Shoghi Effendi has saved the Bahá’ís through his economies and through his efficiency. He manages wonderfully well.

Once he was building a garden—the cactus garden. He was filling it in as we have had to do in almost all places. Some places it was nine to twelve feet deep. Anything that came along went into that area as fast as Shoghi Effendi could get it in. And I said to him: “You know, I think this land is going to sink because the things that are going in are going to collapse. It is going to let down and it is going to sink.” He said: “I know that; but, it won’t sink very much. In the meantime I will have filled it in and it will have cost us much less, and if it sinks we will fill in the hollows and get it all flat again.” And he did. It did sink. He did fill it in again and it cost relatively not so much. Everything that he has done he has done it that way. So many times I have heard him say he wanted a little gate for the end of the path, the boundary of the garden going into the mountain side. He would send everyone to find some railing and every piece of railing is valuable. Well, there just wouldn’t be any railing, and he would say I’ll have to go myself. And he would go

and walk around the properties. He would find a very thick bramble, so it would be dug out and taken. He is a very strange person. The Guardian of the Faith is quite different from other people to which we can add "Thank God".

I could give you hundreds of examples of his ingenuity and his economy. It is what he has done on Mount Carmel, I believe, in this last conflict that protected the Faith. Because, although there is no doubt about it, it is the spiritual things which we have to offer the world. These physical things count in the eyes of people; then, we know that Bahá'u'lláh has often told us to give up the things of this world. He told us not to be attached to them. The Guardian has created all this beauty on the side of Mount Carmel and I think that beauty saved us during the fighting because people had come to admire and to respect us. They did not know a thing about the Bahá'ís because they know nothing about the Faith; neither did the British pay any attention to us, nor the Arabs; whereas the Jewish people admire beauty and they have tremendously enjoyed the development Shoghi Effendi has created on Mount Carmel. And partly due to that they have taken cognizance to the fact that this is a World Center. But without many, many of the material things that Shoghi Effendi put up there and the material beauty created, I am sure we would not have been as protected as we were.

Shoghi Effendi is like the law, no respecter of persons. He has most tremendous courage where principle is concerned of anyone I have ever seen. I would like to give you two examples, and I debated if I should. But, I cannot help it. I want to share them with you. Some years ago when there were Bahá'ís in one of the intensely Catholic countries of Europe, there was a couple who wanted to get married. Shoghi Effendi said she could not have a church wedding. It seemed a very, very hard step for the European people to enforce. Of course, they wanted to do what Shoghi Effendi said. But in this country there is only one marriage and that is of the Catholic Church, and there is no civil marriage. They placed this before Shoghi Effendi. And Shoghi Effendi said: "No, the Bahá'ís cannot marry in the church." Well, I said to Shoghi Effendi: "After all, it is very hard for them not to marry. They are new Bahá'ís, maybe they will leave the Faith?" He said: "Let them. I don't care what every Bahá'í in Europe says, I am not going to compromise our principles." As long as we have that kind of a Guardian the Bahá'ís in the world are quite safe.

Another example of Shoghi Effendi's integrity: When my father was taking care of his affairs, he was absent from Haifa, and my daddy didn't know very much—didn't know any oriental languages, but when somebody came to him and gave him a check for \$34,000 which, in those days was almost \$100,000, daddy swallowed that check and put it in Shoghi Effendi's account legally. So, when the Guardian came home and my father was reporting to him the different things which had happened. With great joy said: "Now this is the sum I put in your bank." And Shoghi Effendi said: "Well, you can go back tomorrow morning and return it to such and such a Branch." We were very surprised. The man was not a covenant breaker but he was someone with whom Shoghi Effendi was displeased. He considered that his spirit was not right, that his motives were not pure, and he could not accept money from him. As he said: "How can I take his money and not reinstate him in my good graces?" So, he sent the money back. You see, it is these things that set the standard of the Bahá'ís for the world. When our

integrity is as shining and clear cut as Shoghi Effendi's we will not have much trouble bringing people into the Faith; especially people who are spiritually receptive already.

He is not interested in personalities. You cannot interest him in a lot of loose details and business. He does not like it. Of course, he gets a great deal fired at him. They often come and criticize each other; perhaps more so among certain types of people than among others. You know that person, what he has done, he is that and that. It goes over the Guardian as water off the duck's back. It does not interest him, it does not sway him. Yet, he may have intense feeling about somebody. I remember something about a National Assembly. More than two members were not getting along very well. A letter came in which all nine evidence pointed to one individual. And, everything was just sort of getting eased, poised, all set for Shoghi Effendi to set him off that body. Everything aimed at that particular individual. Then he sat down and sent a hair raising telegram to an altogether different individual and said that if he didn't pipe down and behave he was going to get into trouble. My eyes opened as big as saucers. He said, "Yes, that is the man that is causing all the trouble." Sometimes the friends think Shoghi Effendi does not know what is going on. I assure you he does. He reads all the minutes of the National Assemblies and all the reports that come in and he has that wonderful sensitive something in him which God has given him to detect what is right and what is wrong. There is no doubt he has that faculty. So, I think the friends need not worry about the fact that he is misinformed. He is watching everything very, very carefully. When he sees there is the slightest danger of any National Body deviating from an important principle, he will immediately inform them; and, all being loyal and devoted they will immediately conform to his wishes.

That brings me to something I should like to speak of for a moment. The question of personalities. It seems to be a terrible disease that we all have of constantly thinking in everything of personality. We never seem to get to terms of principle. Personality does not exist as far as Shoghi Effendi is concerned. His only regard is principle. It does not mean anything [about] what you have done or how prominent you are. You get rewarded for serving the Cause. But, if you think you are going to get some special category applied to you, you are not. It does not exist with Shoghi Effendi. Bahá'ís should learn to think of things in that way. They have got to quit thinking of personality. You have to learn, all of us have got to learn, that principle is the thing to be followed. When you have a Spiritual Assembly you must accept the manner of the Spiritual Assembly. We are not going to get this Administrative Order swinging until we forget about individuals and devote ourselves to the application of principle involved. During this ten year plan the National Assemblies have got to be freed of a great deal of their work in order to do the important work. And the only thing in the Cause that frees the NSA are the Local Assemblies. In other words, Shoghi Effendi used to have to attend to everything himself. Now, he keeps throwing back many, many of the things that you have sent to Haifa in your letters. He says, this is something for you to decide. And it is coming that the NSA must decide the more important things, that is what they exist for. When they were too weak he used to do it for them. They are, relatively speaking, mature bodies. Therefore, they must take care

of their own business on the National level. The LSA's simply have got to shoulder their responsibility and the National bodies will have to ever increasingly throw back to the Local Spiritual Assemblies the many, many problems and say: that is local. You sit down and tend to it. And, of course, that system will smother unless the Bahá'ís are willing to cooperate. And that means giving up personalities and thinking only of the principle involved. If the people on the Spiritual Assemblies will stop thinking I am so and so, and say: never mind, we are nine people and we are now going to function according to Bahá'í law and we are going to do our best. We are not going to tussle and pull with each other or argue with each other. We are going to do our best for the sake of God. Then, the community must abide by that. Then we will be able to get our ten year plan. You will be astonished what you can do if you get over that question of personalities. I should not, perhaps, be so direct, but this has been pent up in me for so many years it has just got to come out. I really feel it is a disease in the world, the degree to which all human action—all of us dwelling on personality and not on principle.

There is another thing I thought about for years and puzzled over it. And I think we ought to think about it a little, i.e., what comes over people that makes them flair up so. Why is it, that suddenly somebody seems so possessed with a negative attitude—some innocent, harmless person. It is as if something devilish came over them. I think we have all seen it happen—something that sweeps over them. You know that person is perfectly sweet, nice businessman or housewife. You are all sitting there in the committee meeting and suddenly that person lets loose and just about lays you all out of the room with a negative force that comes out of the room. We were talking about this with the Persian friends. I think this is what the Master calls dark forces. This is the animal thing that is so strong within us. We are just beginning to come of age and all of that seems suddenly to come out. Now, what are we going to do about it? Many communities are disrupted because of it. We know that between two people there is something strange that disrupts the whole thing. The work, of course, falls down in the middle. What can we do in this situation? I think the first thing is to recognize what it is. It is not the individual. It is something else. Perhaps, as I said it is the darkness in the world that comes through them and if that comes over your fellow Bahá'í. Instead of calling him all kinds of personal names, say I have had it, he is having it now. Somebody else will have it next week. I will not let it come between us because there is only one remedy for that that I know of and that is love. That Love we will not have unless we do something concrete for the Guardian. Love him far more deeply than you can imagine. Try to focus that love on each other. That is the thing that will help these dissensions. That will be the thing that will steady that person when they are having that fight. Say: "Darling, for the sake of the Cause of God we will forget all about it." We got to. If we don't we will not get this thing done. "Be forgetful of self and be ever mindful of what is Thine." Look at the Bahá'ís, they are lovers of God. Be patient with each other and love each other. Take that love in your heart for Shoghi Effendi. Say, "Already I love you. This is where I'll apply it—where it will do the most good and where it is most desperately needed."

Once I said the Tablet of Carmel is the Charter for the World Center of the Faith and its institutions. The charter is the conversion of the Will and Testament of the Faith. The Will and Testament is the administrative Order for the entire planet. Another wonderful thought the Guardian has often expressed is that we belong to no party and we promote the policy of no government. We belong to God's party. Our Faith is supernatural. It is supernatural in origin. Over and over again he has stressed to the Bahá'ís the necessity for not taking sides with communism, democracy and autocracy. We have our own solution. It is a new creation and we have nothing to do with these others.

You have heard of the African Bahá'ís. These new Teso's Spiritual Assembly messages come posted from entirely so-called primitive peoples living in a jungle: "Have received the Message of Bahá'u'lláh. Hoping Guardian may pray for us. Are praying for you." Then from the Spiritual Assembly of Bahá'ís of Autlan (Jalisco) Mexico: "Grateful Faith arrived here." Then, "May the Sun's own light over the world remove religious prejudices and open our eyes." NSA of Tillen, Morocco, Spiritual Assembly of Tillen, Morocco, Spiritual Assembly of Tillen. After 107 years, the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is reaching these continents of the world. The Guardian has said he thinks there is more hope in Africa than there is in the highly over civilized centers of the world. He is no great admirer of the civilization of the West. He does not feel that it is creating either an atmosphere that is clean and where a healthy civilization can grow, or that it is particularly good for the individual. I think the American Bahá'ís must struggle against the natural characteristics developing in this country. Our forefathers are not as the people of today. Our country, this country did not used to be like that. There is a deterioration going on. The Bahá'ís must be on their guard and not be towed under in this undertow.

It is the capacity to give up everything that is perhaps most needed in us now. What is detachment? Detachment, I think, is not the willingness to give up everything but you must be ready at the drop of a hat to give it up. It is this wonderful spirit of detachment among the pioneers in Africa that has brought in these people. Javid Banani's daughter told the following: She said that her husband had been out digging in a village with one of these groups of villagers. They all sat around and were eating out of the common pot. Their food is quite different from ours—much more simple. One of these primitive villagers took a mouth full of food in his hands; which is the way they eat, put half of the food in his mouth and left half of the food in his fingers; then, he stretched out his hand with the food in it and offered it to him. When Ali Nakhjavani accepted the food, the man embraced him and then he became a Bahá'í. Talk is not going to affect people. Especially people of different colors. It is only facts that is going to affect them and if you realize there is a terrific spread of venereal diseases in Africa—. You see, we must carry this out; and, as I said before, and tactlessly, I think the old ones can do it too. Everything I wanted to say—I feel so much lighter.

I think one thing that is important is that the Bahá'í youth, who are desirous of going out and teaching the Faith during this ten year plan are able to shape their careers so that they will get jobs in many of these very isolated places in the world. In other words, those who are still in high school, if the committees in charge will make it a point of finding out in exactly what area what kind of skills are needed, whether there are hospital technicians, nurses, doctors, engineers or contractors, whatever it may be that is most needed in that part of the world and let the Bahá'í youth know. Let them know that there is a panel of professions

which will be a key to such and such a type of territory. Then they can shape their careers to be pioneers. Then they will know there is a place they can go and say we are ready to come and we will have such and such skills. We can fit our skills to fit your needs. That is only a suggestion.

Now, if any of you have any questions you would like to send up, and if the chairman will bear them, I shall be happy to try and answer.

The standard of Bahá'í youth to morality. Chastity is enjoined among all, both men and women. These are the standards that young Bahá'ís have. It is unfortunate that young Bahá'ís have to live in these times. There just isn't any morality left. I think the Bahá'í young people are to be greatly admired for which they are struggling, in the atmosphere in which they have to struggle.

It is very difficult to find out how to live in a home where one of the partners is not a Bahá'í. Of course, if one is going to be forced to give up their Faith, that is different. But I think they should be patient. The only standard the Guardian states, and the Bahá'í is being forced to give up their religion. But I think we should be very considerate of our non-Bahá'í partners in life.

Shoghi Effendi says that Western civilization must be cleansed through destruction. The Guardian objects to hypocrisy.