

COMPILATION ON BAHÁ'Í TRANSLATION WORK

compiled by Gerald Warren, Botswana, 2008
(revised 2017)

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A. BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

I implore Thee, O my God, by Thy Most Great Name, to enrapture the nations through the potency of the Word which Thou didst ordain to be the king of all words, the Word whereby the goodly pearls of Thy hidden wisdom were uncovered, and the gem-like mysteries which were wrapped up within Thee were unravelled. . . .

Thou knowest, O my Lord, that I am but one of Thy servants. I have tasted of the sweetness of Thy speech, and acknowledged Thy unity and Thy singleness, and set my face towards the Source of Thy most excellent names and the Day-Spring of Thy transcendent attributes. . . .

Assist me, by Thy strengthening grace, O my Lord, to do what Thou didst will, and withhold not from me the things Thou dost possess. So enravish me with the wonders of Thine utterances that the noise and distraction of this world may be powerless to deter me from turning unto Thee, and may fail to shake my constancy in Thy Cause, or to distract my gaze from the horizon of Thy grace.

(Prayers and Meditations, No. 69)

O friend of mine! The Word of God is the king of words and its pervasive influence is incalculable. It hath ever dominated and will continue to dominate the realm of being. The Great Being saith: The Word is the master key for the whole world, inasmuch as through its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven, are unlocked.

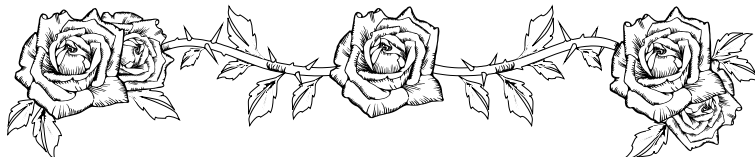
(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 173)

It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action.

(Lawh-i-Maqsúd, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 166)

Take heed lest ye alter or pervert the text of the Word of God.

(Suriy-i-Haykal, ¶132)



B. 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

1. Act in accordance with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. All His Books will be translated. Now is the time for you to live in accordance with His words. Let your deeds be the real translation of their meaning.

(Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 239)

2. Regarding the translation of the Books and Tablets of the Blessed Beauty, ere long will translations be made into every tongue, with power, clarity and grace. At such time as they are translated, conformably to the originals, and with power and grace of style, the splendours of their inner meanings will be shed abroad, and will illumine the eyes of all mankind. Do thy very best to ensure that the translation is in conformity with the original.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 66 / Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v3, p. 543)

3. Concerning the effect of translation, it is evident that it is not as effective as the original. For instance, the Tablets of His Holiness BAHÁ'O'LLAH which have been translated from Persian or Arabic, the original text exerts a wonderful power, while translation may produce certain effect but cannot be measured with the original. The delicacy, smoothness and sweetness of the Words of His Holiness BAHÁ'O'LLAH are beyond any human conception. It is, however, conditioned upon one's knowledge of Persian and Arabic.

Translated by Shoghi Rabbani, January 26th, 1919. Home of Abdul-Bahá, Haifa, Palestine

(Star of the West, Vol. 10, No. 7, p. 144)

4. Thou intendest to print and publish the addresses of 'Abdu'l-Bahá which thou hast compiled. This is indeed very advisable. This service shall cause thee to acquire an effulgent face in the Abhá Kingdom, and shall make thee the object of the praise and gratitude of the friends in the East as well as in the West. But it is to be undertaken with the utmost care, so that the exact text may be reproduced and will exclude all deviations and corruptions committed by former translators.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 224)

5. Great care should be exercised in preparing this translation. Mr. . . . should make a supreme effort so that the language will be most exquisite, eloquent and lucid, even if the translated text is to be submitted to, and made dependent upon the opinions of, experts in language.

(From a Tablet to an individual believer, Compilation on Writers and Writing, IN Compilation of Compilations, No. 2221)

6. Truly translation is very difficult. One has to have the utmost proficiency in science and religion, in divine wisdom, in the current trends of thought in Europe, and in philosophical and scientific terms.

(Má'idíy-i-Asmání, vol. 9, p. 141, from 'The Story of My Heart' by 'Alí-Akabar Furútan, p. 208)

7. Books and pamphlets must be either translated or composed in the languages of these countries and islands, to be circulated in every part and in all directions.

(Tablets of the Divine Plan, p. 42)

8. Likewise, whenever it is possible a committee must be organized for the translation of the Tablets. Wise souls who have mastered and studied perfectly the Persian, Arabic, and other foreign languages, or know one of the foreign languages, must commence translating Tablets and books containing the proofs of this Revelation, and publishing those books, circulate them throughout the five continents of the globe.

(Tablets of the Divine Plan, pp. 54-5)

9. . . . if thou desirest to get the translation of a Tablet from the Blessed Writings, it must be translated by a committee of two Persian translators together with two competent English writers. The Persians should translate, and the writers mould the significance into profound, musical and perfect cast of style in English, and in such wise that the musical sweetness of the original Persian may not be lost. Then the material must be forwarded to me. I will consider the matter and give permission for its publication and circulation. Consequently, rejoice thou that thou hast already become specialized with

this permission, that thou hast circulated publications.

In brief, translation is one of the most difficult arts. In both Persian and English utmost proficiency is necessary, that the translator be a writer and use as the vehicle of expression great eloquence and fluency of tongue.

(Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v1, pp. 151-2)

10. Thou hast written concerning the translation of Tablets. Perfect translation will be made at a time when a committee of translators is organized. The members of that committee must be composed of several Persians and several Americans, all of whom must have the utmost proficiency in both the Persian and English languages. Then the Tablets will be translated through this committee. For the present the organization of such a committee is not possible. Therefore, whenever the publication of a Tablet becomes necessary, have a proficient person translate it, then circulate it and the end will be attained. . . .

Concerning the Book of Akdas: Undoubtedly it must be translated by a scientific committee of translators. The translation of one person is not sufficient.

(Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v2, p. 466-7)

11. Ye have written concerning the printing and the publication of the Tablets.

The translation of the Surat-u'l-Hykl is of the utmost difficulty. It must be translated by a committee who are exceedingly efficient both in Persian and English, exercising the closest and most minute attention. Otherwise the text would not become intelligible. The same rule applieth to other Writings and Tablets. For the present the organization of such a committee of translators is not possible and there is no other means than the translations made by individuals. In the future, God willing, means will be brought about. Translations

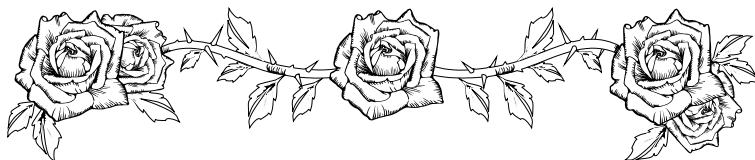
will be made by a committee composed of two most erudite Persians and two learned Americans, all of them having the utmost proficiency in both languages and possessing a certain knowledge of sciences and arts. Then others from among the scholars and thinkers must assist. At that time Tablets will be translated correctly and published. What ye have in your hands and what is already printed will impart a certain degree of information.

(Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, Vol. 1, Introduction, pp. iii-iv)

12. As to the translation of the *Surat-el-Hykl*, at present we do not find a translator who can give it its merit. God willing, in the future a committee shall be organized whose members are experts in Arabic, Persian and English. By that perfect committee, the *Surat-el-Hykl* will be translated, but one person cannot arise and give the translation that it deserves. God willing, this committee will be organized. . . . *(July 24th, 1919, Haifa, Syria IN 'Star of the West', Vol. 10, p. 250)*

13. His honour, Sheikh Faraju'llah, has here rendered into Arabic with greatest care the *Ishraqat* and yet I have told him that he must submit his version to the Spiritual Assembly of Egypt, and I have conditioned its publication upon the approval of the above-named Assembly. This is so that things may be arranged in an orderly manner, for should it not be so any one may translate a certain Tablet and print and circulate it on his own account. Even a non-believer might undertake such work, and thus cause confusion and disorder. If it be conditioned, however, upon the approval of the Spiritual Assembly, a translation prepared, printed and circulated by a non-believer will have no recognition whatever.

(Quoted by Shoghi Effendi IN Bahá'í Administration, p. 23)



C. SHOGHI EFFENDI

Letters written on his behalf unless otherwise indicated

Part I — Africa

14. The translation of ever more literature into African tongues is . . . very important as the new believers are ready and eager to learn, and must have the facilities placed at their disposal.

(4 July 1956, to a National Spiritual Assembly,)

15. Special attention should, moreover, be paid to the no less vital duty of completing the translation, the publication and the dissemination of Bahá'í literature in the languages assigned to your Assembly, in accordance with that same Plan, an achievement which will greatly stimulate the work to be undertaken in the course of the future phases of this world spiritual Crusade as it unfolds itself in the African Continent.

(17 June 1954, NSA of British Isles, Unfolding Destiny, p. 339)

16. He hopes that every effort will be made to get out a pamphlet in each of the languages chosen, or those that you have substituted for a chosen language. He fully realises that, in many cases, the

people who speak the language are illiterate, and, strictly speaking, do not require a printed pamphlet in their own tongue. He considers however the psychological values of having something translated into their own language, the compliment implicit in it, so to speak, of great importance, sufficient to offset the time, effort and expense involved.

(4 June 1954, to the British Africa Committee, The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community, p. 330)

17. TENTH TRANSLATION BAHÁ'Í LITERATURE THIRTY-ONE AFRICAN LANGUAGES: ACCRA, AFRIKAANS, ALADIAN, ASHANTI, BANU, BEMBA, BUA, **CHUANA**, GIO, GU, JIENG, JOLOF, KUANYAMA, KRONGO, KROO, LIUMBI, MALAGASY, NUBIAN, PEDI, POPO, RONGA, SENA, SHILHA, SHONA, SOBO, SUTO, WONGO, XOSA, YALUNKA, YAO, ZULU.

(Shoghi Effendi, Message to National Convention of the British Isles 1953, The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community, p. 298)

Part II — The Importance of Translation

18. He was very happy to receive these reports, which indicate that the work of translating is actively in hand. He feels this is a very important aspect of our teaching work, as it is impossible, or at least, most difficult to teach natives, without some of the literature being translated into their languages. Thus he hopes you will follow up the matter quite actively.

(19 January 1957, Messages to the Indian Subcontinent, p. 412)

19. The translation, the publication and dissemination of Bahá'í literature, whether in the form of leaflets, pamphlets or books, in the nine selected languages, should, as the work progresses and the demand is correspondingly increased, be strenuously carried out, as a preliminary to its free

distribution among the public on certain occasions, and its presentation to both the leaders of public thought and the numerous and famous libraries established in those countries.

(Shoghi Effendi, 5 June 1947, Citadel of Faith, p. 22)

20. I wish you to do all in your power to ensure the speedy and correct translation of this book [*Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*] into these two languages, and if necessary to hire the services of a competent non-Bahá'í translator. I shall be only too pleased to assist financially both with regard to their translation and publication. May the Beloved guide and assist you in this vital and important task. Shoghi *(Shoghi Effendi, 12 March 1932, Messages to the Indian Subcontinent, p. 79)*

21. In short, Shoghi Effendi would be very thankful if you should arrange for its [*Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*] translation into the Burmese language. It should, however, be done by a person who is well versed in that language and also is thoroughly conversant with English. He also promises to send a contribution when it is ready for publication as he has been doing in the case of the other translations.

(24 March 1932, *Messages to the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 79)

22. In regard to the translation of Dr Esslemont's book into Burmese, Shoghi Effendi wishes you to persevere in your efforts and not be discouraged by the difficulties and obstacles that stand in your way. He sincerely trusts that through your devotion, wisdom and selfless endeavours the book will be soon translated and published.

(10 July 1932, *Messages to the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 84)

23. Shoghi Effendi wishes me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated October 10th 1932 regarding the translation of Dr Esslemont's book into Burmese.

He was very glad to learn that the work is progressing gradually and surely, and that already a considerable amount of pages have been translated.
(26 October 1932, *Messages to the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 89)

24. The Guardian feels we should concentrate upon the Hindi and Urdu translations. We should not permit so much unnecessary delay. If one way seems closed or difficult we could try another and strive for the speedy completion of those books. The more we see the crying need of the world for the spiritual teachings of our Faith the more restless we should feel in giving out the Message and improving the means of diffusing the precepts of the Cause.

In his moments of prayer at the Blessed Shrines the Guardian will think of you and ask God to guide and sustain your efforts. He knows fully how difficult it is these days to bring a task to a speedy and successful conclusion, but to a person who is determined and lays his trust in God nothing is impossible.

Personal footnote from Shoghi Effendi

Dear and precious co-worker:

I rejoice to hear of the steps that are being taken for the printing of the Burmese edition of the 'New Era' but deplore the delay in the translation of the book into Hindi and Urdu. The Gujrati copies have already been placed in the library of the Mansion at Bahjí, and I long with all my heart to witness these remaining translations in their final and printed form, side by side with the nineteen printed versions which have already been collected and distributed throughout the world. I would urge you to concentrate your energy on this important and essential preliminary to an intensive campaign of teaching among the masses in India. Persevere and rest assured that my prayers will continue to be offered on your behalf.

(24 March 1933, *Messages to the Indian Subcontinent*, pp. 95-6)

25. He was very glad to receive the Gujrati translation of Dr Esslemont's book, and he hopes that through your efforts the Hindi and Urdu translation of it will soon be ready for publication.

As you may know, this work has already been translated into nineteen different languages, and its rendering into eleven others will be soon completed. This is really encouraging.

Recently the Guardian received a letter from Mr. Habibo'llah M. Monji, one of our young Bombay friends, telling him of his intention of having the Hidden Words translated into Gujrati and Hindi. This is a splendid idea, provided Mr. Monji's knowledge of these languages be sufficiently extensive. He seems to be a very devoted and enthusiastic Bahá'í. Shoghi Effendi would like you to find out whether he is really competent to undertake such an important work, and in case you find that he is really capable, he would strongly urge you to help him and encourage him to bring his work to successful completion.

Personal footnote from Shoghi Effendi

I am also eager to receive the good news of the completion of the translation and early publication of the Urdu and Hindi versions of the "New Era". The utmost effort should be exerted to ensure the consummation of this work, which, I feel, must precede an intensive teaching campaign among the

masses in India.

(8 June 1933, *Shoghi Effendi, Messages to the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 96)

26. With reference to the Bengali translation of “Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era”, he wishes me to convey to you . . . his hearty congratulations and grateful thanks for your splendid, sustained and successful efforts in this connection. He feels certain that nothing short of divine assistance, and of your painstaking and continued labours, could have brought this task to a successful consummation.

(17 December 1934, *Messages to the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 121)

27. Although your Assembly has succeeded in getting out a number of new language publications, you should not relax for a moment in your efforts to translate and publish the “New Era” in the remaining languages chosen, as this work is of the utmost importance, enables you to teach new language groups the Faith, and adds to the prestige of the Cause not only in India but abroad.

(13 March 1947, *Messages to the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 278)

28. He (the Guardian) sincerely hopes that the translation of Dr. Esslemont’s book will proceed at a rapid pace, because no real advance can be made in the teaching work without proper literature, and this book is undoubtedly the most comprehensive exposition of the Teachings yet written. The language should, however, be worthy of the theme otherwise it would not make the necessary appeal to the educated classes.

(*Japan Will Turn Ablaze*, p. 60)

29. Needless to say the translation work must also go on uninterruptedly and receive first attention, as there is now a wealth of Bahá'í literature in English for you to draw upon and which is much needed by the German friends to help deepen their understanding of the Divine Cause, and better enable them to teach it.

(*Light of Divine Guidance Vol.1*, p. 112)

30. So great is the importance and so supreme is the authority of these assemblies that once ‘Abdu’l-Bahá after having himself and in his own handwriting corrected the translation made into Arabic of the *Ishraqat* (the Effulgences) by Sheikh Faraj, a Kurdish friend from Cairo, directed him in a Tablet to submit the above-named translation to the Spiritual Assembly of Cairo, that he may seek from them before publication their approval and consent. These are His very words in that Tablet: -

“His honour, Sheikh Faraju’llah, has here rendered into Arabic with greatest care the *Ishraqat* and yet I have told him that he must submit his version to the Spiritual Assembly of Egypt, and I have conditioned its publication upon the approval of the above-named Assembly. This is so that things may be arranged in an orderly manner, for should it not be so any one may translate a certain Tablet and print and circulate it on his own account. Even a non-believer might undertake such work, and thus cause confusion and disorder. If it be conditioned, however, upon the approval of the Spiritual Assembly, a translation prepared, printed and circulated by a non-believer will have no recognition whatever.”

This is indeed a clear indication of the Master’s express desire that nothing whatever should be given to the public by any individual among the friends, unless fully considered and approved by the Spiritual Assembly in his locality; and if this (as is undoubtedly the case) is a matter that pertains to the general interest of the Cause in that land, then it is incumbent upon the Spiritual Assembly to submit it to the consideration and approval of the national body representing all the various local assemblies.

(*Shoghi Effendi, Baha’i Administration*, p. 23)

31. (1) When Shoghi Effendi orders someone to translate some book it does not mean that the work could be published without the sanction of the National Spiritual Assembly even though that sanction may be a function of formality, for Shoghi Effendi has submitted for the sanction of the National Spiritual Assembly things that he has himself translated.

(2) The National Assembly should be interested in such translations and help as much as possible for it is, after all, a service to the Cause. That body should therefore be responsible for copyrights and other matters. Their attitude should be that of assistance rather than obstruction.

(3) The National Spiritual Assembly should feel

interested and help in such translations.

(4) The National Spiritual Assembly is free to help in its publication or not, according to whether they deem the work worthwhile. Their objective should be the highest good of the Cause and not obstruction of individual initiative.

(27 December 1932 to an individual believer)

Part III — Strategies

32. It must have been very distasteful to you to read some of the off-hand and ungrammatical translations that more out of necessity than choice won circulation and were even published. Furthermore, it was always the expressed wish and desire of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to have proper and adequate translations that would not only convey the true spirit of the original but also possess some literary merit. And for this he emphasised the necessity of a board of translators. Such a board it has unfortunately been impossible to form as yet.

Meanwhile Shoghi Effendi, realising the urgent necessity of the translation of some of the important writings, has translated some of the passages.

(28 March 1926 to George Townshend, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community*, p. 422)

33. Some of Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets are so poorly translated that it is almost impossible to grasp the true meaning . . .

(24 February 1947, to an individual believer)

34. The books of laws or Aqdas has not yet been properly translated because as you mentioned we do not have any competent person for the work. When the Cause was first introduced to west one of the Arab friends made such an attempt but it was so misleading and confusing that the Master forbade any individual to make another trial. He said that it is the work of a group of competent translators and not of one person. Most of the important subjects mentioned there are, however, quite familiar to the friends through other tablets and there is no pressing need for such a work at present.

(*Light of Divine Guidance Vol. 2*, p. 10)

35. He does not believe there is anyone at present capable of translating the passages you referred to in the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá into befitting and accurate English. Arabic is especially difficult, and many of the Bahá'í writings will require a well-qualified group of translators, not just one person.

(15 July 1947)

36. The whole question of translation from the original text is very important. He has just written on this subject, at some length, to Baroness von Werthern, explaining to her that he considers now is not the time to translate the teachings into German from Persian and Arabic. No Persian with a sufficient expert knowledge of German is available to help in this matter; he does not feel, therefore, that such works as "Some Answered Questions", "Seven Valleys", etc. should be embarked upon at all. People who have not spent years steeped in the atmosphere and language and literature of the East cannot possibly grasp the subtleties of oriental usage. A good example of this very point is that Prof. Sussheim has not grasped what Bahá'u'lláh means by the word "[Arabic script]". He is using it in a loose and colloquial sense which means "a passing thing", a small amount, and not literally associating it with food.

He feels you should continue your study of the teachings in the original and, from time to time, if you desire to, translate material from the original in short excerpts; but not at present important books and Tablets. These you can better translate from good English editions.

(3 May 1947, *Light of Divine Guidance Vol. 2*, p. 66)

37. He was very glad to hear that Mr. Hishmatu'llah has undertaken to translate Dr Esslemont's book into Urdu for he is sure that he will exert himself to produce a first class translation.

Even though we can refer to a non-Bahá'í when we have no one among the friends to undertake a proper work of translation, yet it is always preferable to have it accomplished by a person who is imbued with the spirit and is already familiar with the different expressions of Bahá'í conceptions unfamiliar to a non-Bahá'í. Shoghi Effendi wishes him success and will pray for his guidance.

(31 May 1932, *Messages to the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 83)

38. The decision reached by the N.S.A. concerning the matter of Spanish translations, he hopes, will be carried out promptly and vigorously, so as to avoid any further delay. He feels the highest literary standard possible should be maintained in any future translations of Bahá'í Writings into Spanish, and for this reason he heartily welcomes the suggestion to refer such work to Spanish professors, even though this may involve some expenses which your Committee, or the N.S.A., might find somewhat difficult to bear in the beginning.

(14 December 1938)

39. Shoghi Effendi was very glad to know that the new edition of the *Íqán* has reached you safely and that you are going to use it in going over your translation into German. He is surely very sorry that not knowing Persian you cannot go to the very original. He sincerely hopes that before long we will have some of the younger members of the German Bahá'ís who would make translation their life-work, and with that object in mind make a thorough study of Persian and Arabic. They would surely be rendering a wonderful service to their nation as well as to the Faith as a whole.

(24 February 1932, *Light of Divine Guidance Vol.1*, p. 40)

40. As regards the translation of the *Íqán*, as this is a very important and fundamental book, the Guardian hopes that it will be published as soon as possible.

The basis of your translation should be his English translation of it and not the Persian original. He feels that you should adhere as closely as possible to the English text without making your translation so literal as to be un-German and unidiomatic, and therefore not very readable to German-speaking people.

(15 November 1956, *Light of Divine Guidance Vol.2*, pp. 121-2)

41. He is interested in accomplishing two things – he would like in the European languages to have as much uniformity with the English translations as possible; he does not wish the Bahá'í translations to be in any way a flagrant violation of the rules of the language into which our literature is being translated.

Your Committee must conscientiously study this question, and then do the best you can to have the Bahá'í literature in French meet the high standards of the French language and grammar.

If the possessive and demonstrative adjectives and pronouns in French are never capitalized where they stand for “God”, then this should not be done in the Bahá'í literature. If there is a precedent for doing so in the French language, however, they should be. The same is true of the attributes of god.

(15 February 1957 to the National Translation and Publication Committee of France)

42. I am directed by Shoghi Effendi to acknowledge receipt of two chapters of the French translation of Dr. Esslemont's book which you had sent him.

He has read them and is well pleased except that he wishes me to remind you and Mrs. Roa not to attempt a too literal rendering because that is bound to affect the language of the French translation unfavourably. He wishes you rather to attempt a faithful rendering of the thought and meaning of the original in as good French as possible without of course deviating too much.

(19 March 1930)

43. You need not worry if the rendering is not absolutely correct. For the essential is that it should convey the Message in a fairly good and understandable language. In teaching literary

considerations are, no doubt, important, but are quite secondary when compared to the ideas and thoughts constituting the Message itself.

(14 October 1936)

44. As to translations, this is certainly very important, but he would not suggest that at present with the limited facilities at your disposal, that you translate whole books. Make selections of subjects that will interest the Japanese; some prayers, some of the chapters from "Some Answered Questions" on

things of general interest rather than the purely Christian topics; some of the excerpts from "Gleanings". In other words try and get together a selection from our Teachings that covers a wide range of subjects and is representative of our beliefs, and translate these at first. Whole books can be undertaken in the future.

He feels the teaching and translating work can go hand in hand as you teach with new material translated.

(*Japan Will Turn Ablaze*, p. 104)

Part IV — Specific Terms

45. As regards the question of how to write some of the Oriental words, like Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the translations which have Latin script, he feels that at least in parenthesis a phonetical pronunciation should be included after the name when the English transliteration is used. There is no use giving people the Teachings, and not enabling them to pronounce correctly the names that have the deepest association of all with our Faith.

(*Letters to Australia and New Zealand*, p. 119)

46. The Guardian wishes your Committee to capitalize all pronouns when referring to Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and the Master, even though the newspapers do not use them.

(*From a letter written to the Bahá'í News Service Committee, February 5, 1938 IN Lights of Guidance*, p. 105-6)

47. In regard to your question about capitalizing the pronouns: the Guardian realizes this looks a little strange to non-Bahá'ís, but he feels we, being believers, and having the full sense of the Stations of the Central Figures of our Faith, should do this as a sign of respect under all circumstances.

(22 November 1949 *IN Lights of Guidance*, p. 106)

48. In Persian it is impolite not to use the word "Hadrat" before the name of the Prophet, so that strictly speaking a proper translation should always

have 'His Holiness Moses' etc. However, as this seems peculiar in English, and not in the best usage of our language, he feels it can be dispensed with. Pronouns referring to the Manifestation, or the Master, should, however, invariably be capitalized."

(November 8, 1948: *Bahá'í News*, No. 216, p. 1, February 1949)

49. He also wishes me to inform you that the symbol of the Greatest Name represents an invocation which can be translated either as 'O Glory of Glories' or 'O Glory of the All-Glorious'. The word Glory used in this connection is a translation of the Arabic term 'Bahá', the name of Bahá'u'lláh."

(*Directives of the Guardian*, p. 33)

50. . . . concerning those passages in "The Hidden Words" in which Bahá'u'lláh refers to man as "Son of Spirit", "Son of existence", "Son of humanity", etc., the word "son" used in this connection is a kind of collective noun meaning mankind and has, therefore, no connotation of any sex differentiation between man and woman whatever.

(*From a letter dated 19 January 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer*)

51. The word "Say" is used in Arabic as an interjection and sign of emphasis on what follows.

(11 November 1930—in response to a question about the word "Say" used by Bahá'u'lláh at the beginning of some of His sentences)

52. You say that in Irish, the word “Báb” is not appropriate to be used; and as the word “Gate” is not as nice in translation in any language, he suggests that in place of the word “Báb”, you use “Herald”. . . .
(13 December 1955, *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 359)

53. . . . He attaches great importance to a suitable

title for the book*, and feels that you should not necessarily try to get a short one . . . As you know, the concept embodied in the English words is very subtle . . . a very powerful spiritual concept, but a beautiful term in the English language . . . He cannot, alas, provide you with the originals of the less well-known quotations.

(19 April 1947)

* Translation of ‘God Passes By’ into Arabic

Part V — A High Standard for Bahá'í Publications

54. Much of the progress of the Cause depends upon you for more people are attracted through reading than by hearing lectures given. The first requisite, however, is that every thing that is put before the public should be of the highest type, both literary and artistic. The Cause is in great need for first-class publications.

(15 March 1931 to a Bahá'í Publishing Committee)

55. Shoghi Effendi was very pleased with the standard edition of "The Dawn-Breakers" and many of the non-Bahá'í friends of the Cause, to whom he made a present of a copy, have especially remarked on the workmanship used in publishing the

books. . . . Shoghi Effendi is now anxiously waiting to see what the de luxe edition will look like if the standard edition is already so beautiful.

(15 May 1932)

56. I trust the printing will be completed, and the book issued by next month, in a most attractive form. You should take care that the binding should be as solid as possible, unlike the French edition which is in paper cover. For, as you well know, the Guardian wishes the friends to maintain a high standard of printing and binding in all their official publications.

(1 March 1939)

Part VI — Shoghi Effendi's own translations

57. Concerning the different translations of the Words: It is surely the original text that should never be changed. The translations will continue to vary as more and better translations are made. Shoghi Effendi does not consider even his own translations as final, how much more translations made in the early days of the Cause in the West when no competent translators existed.

(14 August 1930 to John Hyde Dunn)

58. This is one more attempt to introduce to the West, in language however inadequate, this book of unsurpassed pre-eminence among the writings of the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation. The hope is that it may assist others in their efforts to approach what must always be regarded as the unattainable goal – a

befitting rendering of Bahá'u'lláh's matchless utterance.

(*Shoghi Effendi: introduction to The Kitáb-i-Íqán*)

59. As the ‘Íqán is the most important book wherein Bahá'u'lláh explains the basic beliefs of the faith, he thought a proper rendering of it would infinitely enhance the teaching work in the West. He hopes that this new rendering will be an improvement on the previous one, but he fully admits that it is far from perfect, far from the original itself. Shoghi Effendi has given the proper transliteration of the Eastern terms and wants you to abide by them, keeping every dash, point, accent or inverted comma. To help you in this, he has also on a separate sheet written these in their proper form.

As Shoghi Effendi has been emphasizing the need of submitting all publications to the Reviewing Committee, he wants to be the first to abide by that rule, though he hopes that they will not make unnecessary delay. In Germany they have translated the 'Íqán from the last translation and they are waiting for Shoghi Effendi's rendering to make the necessary alterations and publish their own. The proceeds of the sale of the book Shoghi Effendi wishes to go to the American National Assembly in an unlabelled form. This is a gift of his own personal labours that he wishes to present that body and he wishes it to be considered as a token of appreciation for the help they have rendered him in carrying on his arduous task.

Personal footnote by Shoghi Effendi

"Unable to find a good typist, I have had to do the work myself, and I trust that the proofreaders will find it easy to go over and will not mind the type errors which I have tried to correct. I would especially urge you to adhere to the transliteration which I have adopted. The correct title is, I feel, 'The Kitáb-I-'Íqán,' the sub-title 'The Book of Certitude.' May it help the friends to approach a step further, and obtain a clearer idea of the fundamental teachings set forth by Bahá'u'lláh."

(Shoghi Effendi, Extracts from the USBN, No. 46 - November 1930 - p. 2)

60. Concerning his translation of the Íqán, Shoghi Effendi has finished it, but it needs going over and retyping, and this he cannot do before summer.

(14 June 1930, The Light of Divine Guidance v I, p. 37)

61. He would like to draw your attention to the word 'tribulation' on page 9. Bahá'u'lláh is quoting the famous words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 24:29-31, 'Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened . . . ' etc. The Authorized Version reads 'tribulation' whereas the Arabic, from which Bahá'u'lláh is quoting, gives 'narrowness'. As there is a difference, Shoghi Effendi would like you to please find out what the original in Greek or Hebrew is. If you think proper he would welcome such alterations from you which would make the language of the rendering more Biblical as he thinks it preferable.

(19 January 1930, to George Townshend concerning the translation of the Kitáb-i-'Íqán)

62. As to the 'Ighan', Shoghi Effendi is very grateful for your kind assistance. He is now working on the translation into English of Nabil's history. . . . Shoghi Effendi would be grateful if you would go over his translation of Nabil and make suggestions and alterations like the 'Ighan'. Of course in this case you need not be as literal as with sacred writings.

(17 April 1930, to George Townshend)

63. I am taking the liberty of forwarding to you some of my recent translations and if you feel that you would like to reshape and reconstruct the whole sentence or bring about a fundamental change in the expression of the thought in some passages, please do not hesitate. I would greatly value your opinion as to the standard of English represented by these recent renderings and would appreciate your detailed comment, criticism and suggestion.

(Shoghi Effendi, 1 May 1926, personal note to George Townshend)

64. I am in correspondence with Rev. Townshend in connexion with various alterations in my rendering of the Hidden Words. I have just received his second letter containing suggestions which I greatly appreciate and value. I am hoping to revise it for a third time after my correspondence with Mr. T. is over.

(16 July 1926, Personal footnote from Shoghi Effendi, The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community, p. 55)

65. "Translated by SHOGHI EFFENDI with the assistance of some English friends*."

(Shoghi Effendi's title page of his translation of the Hidden Words)

* George Townshend & Ethel Rosenberg

66. He leaves it to your discretion to suggest such terms as will render it* more idiomatic, just as you have already done with the Hidden Words.

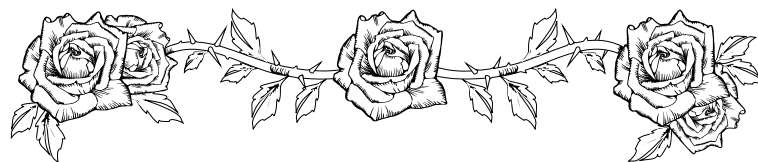
(12 March 1930, to George Townshend)

* The Kitáb-i-'Íqán

67. Also he specifically requests you to go carefully over the manuscript* with the view of improving its style and of making it as idiomatic as possible.

(16 December 1934, to George Townshend)

* Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh



D. THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Including letters written on its behalf

Part I — Translation Goals

68. Publications

Every National Spiritual Assembly should have a well conceived plan for the provision and dissemination of a balanced supply of Bahá'í literature for the believers and for the teaching work. In translation and publication, priority should be given to the Sacred Texts* and the writings of Shoghi Effendi, for without access to the life-giving waters of the Holy Word, how are the believers to deepen in their understanding of the Teachings and convey them accurately to others?

(Elucidation of Seven Year Plan Goals, Naw-Rúz 1979)

*The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

69. Five specific tasks face the Bahá'í world as it enters this second phase of the Plan:

...

The third is acceleration of the provision of Bahá'í literature, particularly its translation and publication in those languages in which, as yet, none has been published or the supply is inadequate.

(Ridván 1966)

70. A world-wide increase in the translation, production, distribution and use of Bahá'í literature

- * Foster the use of Bahá'í literature, especially in local languages, supplemented as need be by tape recordings and visual aids.

- * Improve the distribution of Bahá'í literature by taking specific steps, such as the establishment of regional depots where necessary, and the education of Local Spiritual Assemblies in the responsibilities to acquaint the friends with Bahá'í literature and ensure its easy availability.

- * Produce greater supplies of Bahá'í literature in accordance with well-thought-out plans of translation, production and distribution.

- * Produce, where required for translations into vernacular languages, simplified versions of the Sacred Scriptures, the writings of the Guardian and the statements of the Universal House of Justice.

- * Establish Bahá'í lending libraries.

(25 February 1986, The Major Objectives of the Six Year Plan: The Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assemblies)

Part II — Indigenous Languages & Peoples

71. Equally important is the right of the members of indigenous populations to learn, speak, write and communicate in their native tongue, if they so wish, in addition to the official language of the country in which they reside, for language is the expression of the spirit of a people and the vehicle of its cohesive and inspiring traditions. Facility in one's native language in addition to the official language of one's country can produce an enrichment of the heritage of the entire people and can act as a stabilizing influence in society, while the cultural oppression which seeks to obliterate minority languages can have a deracinating and demoralizing effect that will be very difficult to correct. Furthermore, Bahá'ís advocate the development or adoption of an international auxiliary language by which all the peoples of all countries and cultural backgrounds will be able to communicate.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, 25 July 1995)

72. You ask what is the purpose and wisdom of the translation of the Bahá'í Writings, and what is the philosophy behind it.

As you know, one of the principles of the Bahá'í Faith is for a single language to be adopted as the universal auxiliary language of mankind, to be taught in the schools of all the nations. When that time comes, the need for so many translations will be greatly reduced, since there will be one common medium of communication for all who dwell on earth. Alas, however, it will take some time yet for the governments of the world to adopt such a far-reaching and fundamental measure.

In the meantime it is essential for the Bahá'ís to convey the Word of God to all the peoples of the

world, as quickly and as completely as possible. For this, translation is essential. The Writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are, as you know, in Arabic and Persian, as are those of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Who also wrote some Tablets in Turkish. Shoghi Effendi, for his part, wrote many of his most important works in English. To expect the Japanese Bahá'ís to learn Arabic, Persian and English sufficiently well to really understand the Bahá'í literature in those three tongues would be too great a demand. Fortunately, there is already a wealth of the Arabic and Persian Writings translated into English, but even if the friends' command of English is sufficiently good for them to fully comprehend such Writings, there is an important emotional and psychological advantage to their being able to read the Word of God in their own mother-tongue.

Thus we engage in translating the Writings into even tribal languages which have quite a small number of native speakers.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, 14 December 1992)

73. As to Counsellor ...'s question in his letter of January 22, it may be pointed out to him that the translation and recording of some of the Holy Writings into native dialects not only helps the teaching work and pays honour to the native languages, but also provides the way to achieve an objective established by the Master and the beloved

Guardian. Both 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi often encouraged the friends to memorize passages from the Writings and such a practice acquires added importance in areas where there is a shortage of printed literature or a high degree of illiteracy. Consequently, availability of passages from the Holy Writings in native dialects is an important aspect of a successful deepening programme.

(From a memorandum of the Universal House of Justice to the International Teaching Centre, 19 February 1975)

74. Ensure the availability and wide dissemination of Bahá'í publications such as selections from the Holy Writings and basic Bahá'í literature in major local languages.

(From letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Botswana, January 1981)

75. The Universal House of Justice was happy to learn from your letter . . . that you plan to write an introductory book about the Faith from an African perspective and commends you most warmly on your initiative. A book of this nature will be of inestimable value to the teaching work, initially in areas of the African continent where English is spoken, and possibly it will be of interest elsewhere in the world.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, 8 June 1988)

Part III — Importance & Nature of Translation Work

76. It will be essential that Holy Writings and institute materials are prioritized for translation and a suitable structure for following the work of teams of translators is put in place. Attention will need to be given to raising the capacity of selected individuals to carry out this work, ensuring that the spiritual concepts contained in the Writings are, to the extent possible, rendered into the local language with clarity. No doubt, part of the effort will include establishing a lexicon of standard translations of words and phrases frequently found in Bahá'í texts. As experience is gained in this sphere of action, you may wish to also revise previously translated works.

(From a letter dated 29 November 2015 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

77. Translation is, indeed, a very difficult art, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained that, ideally, all translations of the Sacred Texts should be made by competent committees, rather than by individuals. At the present time, unfortunately, there is seldom in any country a large enough number of sufficiently skilled persons who can be called upon to constitute such committees, and the institutions of the Faith

have to rely on the services of such individuals as they can find with adequate time and skill to undertake the arduous work of translation.

The Writings of the Faith are not in the nature of scientific treatises. One must remember that the Manifestation of God is using the inadequate instrument of human language to convey truths and guidance which can raise mankind high above its present level of development and understanding. He makes extensive use, therefore, of metaphor and simile, and often approaches a subject from several different points of view so that its various facets and implications can be better understood. It would not be possible, therefore, to compile a list of meanings for specific symbols, expressions and words, since they may vary in their implication from passage to passage.

The translation of a passage can seldom be an entirely faithful rendering of the original—one just has to strive to make it as faithful and befitting as possible. At the present time many of the translations of the Writings fall far below the desirable standard, especially in those languages spoken by a relatively small number of Bahá'ís, but time and an increase in the number of Bahá'ís who have a profound understanding of the Teachings as well as an exemplary command of the languages concerned will enable new and improved translations to be produced. For the time being we must do what we can with what we have.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, 8 September 1985)

78. Translation of the Sacred Text is indeed a vital matter, and as you yourself point out, the Guardian's translations are not simply literal, academic translations, but contain an element of exposition of the original Text, an exposition greatly amplified for the Bahá'í community and posterity by the great volume of Shoghi Effendi's other writings on the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh and the implications of His Revelation.

(2 June 1982, to an individual believer)

79. It must be remembered that Shoghi Effendi's translations carry with them a large measure of interpretation of the intent and purpose of the Author of the text he set about to translate—an

interpretation which he, as Interpreter of the Sacred Text, could alone authoritatively provide.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 27 February 1989)

80. The matter of translation is a major problem. As you yourself know only too well, to convey exactly the meaning and flavour of a passage from one language to another is often impossible and one can but labour to approach as near as possible to the unattainable perfection. Even our Beloved Guardian, whose skill in this art amounted to genius, characterized his translation of the "Kitáb-i-Íqán" as "one more attempt to introduce to the West, in language however inadequate, this book of unsurpassed pre-eminence among the writings of the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation: and he expressed the hope "that it may assist others in their efforts to approach what must always be regarded as the unattainable goal—a befitting rendering of Bahá'u'lláh's matchless utterance."

The difficulty of translation increases when two languages express the thoughts and metaphors of widely differing cultures; thus, it is infinitely more difficult for a European to conceive the thought patterns expressed in Arabic or Persian than to understand a passage written in English. Moreover, the Beloved Guardian was not only a translator but the inspired Interpreter of the Holy Writings; thus, where a passage in Persian or Arabic could give rise to two different expressions in English he would know which one to convey. Similarly he would be much better equipped than an average translator to know which metaphor to employ in English to express a Persian metaphor which might be meaningless in literal translation.

Thus, in general, speakers of other European tongues will obtain a more accurate translation by following the Guardian's English translation than by attempting at this stage in Bahá'í history to translate directly from the original.

This does not mean, however, that the translators should not also check their translations with the original texts if they are familiar with Persian or Arabic. There may be many instances where the exact meaning of the English text is unclear to them and this can be made evident by comparison with the original.

You mention the goal of the Nine Year Plan

concerning the collation of texts. This refers only to the gathering and correlation of the original writings and not to revisions of translations. The works already well translated into English or written in that language by the beloved Guardian are quite sufficient for the present time. Of course in other languages there are many goals for translation and publication of literature. In time of course, old translations into English such as those of Tablets and talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá will have to be revised, but we feel this is not as urgent as many other tasks.

(From a letter dated 8 December 1964 written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

81. Although it appreciates your desire to make the Writings more accessible, the Universal House of Justice does not feel that it would be justified for your pamphlet to appear without the use of diacritical markings; nor would it be appropriate for you to change the form of word endings to make the style accord with modern usage. There are several reasons for this.

You should be aware that the system adopted by the Guardian is such that anyone familiar with the original languages (e.g., Arabic or Persian) can immediately tell exactly which word has been transliterated. Moreover, by adopting a style somewhat removed from everyday discourse, it was possible for Shoghi Effendi to capture something of the allusive, poetic, and highly metaphorical nature of the original languages without its seeming ridiculous. In any case, although the language may appear archaic at first glance—because of the word endings, obsolete contractions and other incidental features—in actuality the language of the Bahá'í Writings is indeed far closer to everyday English than the authorized version of the Bible which millions of English-speaking Christians are able to read with understanding even though many of the English words in the Bible have disappeared from the language or have taken on completely different meanings.

In your second letter, you have stated that the term “self-subsisting”, which Bahá'u'lláh often uses to characterize God, “means nothing” in the English language. It is likely that this term signifies in some way a basic concept of the Faith; namely, that creation is an emanation from God, without Whose continuing bounty and grace it would cease to exist.

The term thus underscores the immense contrast between our reality, which is related to the contingent world, and His reality which is independent of any cause and which entirely transcends the world of being. Indeed, the point is that He is the Cause of being itself. There is a way to deduce such a meaning, however, solely from the common meaning of the words. According to its primary dictionary definition, “to subsist” means to have existence, to persist or continue. The addition of “self” makes it reflexive. Knowing just these two things, can we not then say that if God is self-subsisting it means that there is nothing other than Himself upon which He depends for His continuing existence? In other words, He exists in and of Himself without being dependent on any other cause: He has no creator and there is nothing prior to Him.

A few comments may serve to provide a perspective in which to view the issues you have raised. First, it is essential to recall that, as we are told in the Writings, the comprehension of the Sacred Writings is not dependent upon scholarship or learning. This should encourage every believer, no matter what his attainments, to delve into the Revelation with determination and confidence. In the Book of Certitude, Bahá'u'lláh says:

“The understanding of His words and the comprehension of the utterances of the Birds of Heaven are in no wise dependent upon human learning. They depend solely upon purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit.”

But, in addition to needing the proper spirit, it requires concentration and meditation to unravel the meanings which lie enshrined in the Revealed Word. Nowadays, however, the lives of most people are busy and crowded with distractions, so it requires great discipline to devote the time, attention and care necessary to study the Teachings in the way they deserve. Deepening is like a skill or art which must be acquired through effort. And, just as there are millions of Christians who would not trade the King James Version of the Holy Bible, once one has caught the flavour of the English translations done by Shoghi Effendi—or done in the style he developed—the beauty and power of expression become appealing and inspiring. One comes to fall in love with that style.

The questions you have asked touch on matters, such as the theory of translation, which have occupied thinkers for generations and about which much ink has flowed. They cannot be adequately addressed within the scope of a brief letter. You are, therefore, urged to take up these issues with knowledgeable believers, or you may ask your Local Spiritual Assembly to appoint someone to assist you in working through these questions.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, 21 January 1993)

82. Translation is indeed a difficult issue, and it is for this reason that the official version of the messages and letters of the Universal House of Justice are sent in the original English. Any translation offered is unofficial and simply intended

as an assistance to those who might wish to avail themselves of it, and National Spiritual Assemblies are free to make their own translation in accordance with local language needs. This also applies to the statement on Bahá'u'lláh which the House of Justice requested you to translate into Chinese.

(7 August 1991, to an individual,)

83. As you know, at this stage all works by Bahá'ís which refer to the Faith, such as books, pamphlets, articles and translations, must be approved by the Spiritual Assembly before publication. The Guardian has stated that the purpose of review is to: 'provide in general for a dignified and accurate presentation of all Bahá'í literature and its distribution to the public'.

(11 January 1988, to an individual believer)

Part IV — Style

84. Language used by Shoghi Effendi in his English writings:

As Mr. ... may be aware, the House of Justice makes clear that the English translations of the Guardian represent a high standard in their nearness to the style and spirit of the original Texts, a standard towards which all translators of the Sacred Writings are encouraged to strive.

(From a memorandum of the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 13 October 1998)

85. We realise that translation is a very difficult task and that however good a translation is there are always differences of opinion, both as to accuracy and style. However, in translating Bahá'í Scripture it is important to remember that the style in the original is an exalted one and this aspect should not be lost when it is translated into other languages. It can be noted, for example, that when the beloved Guardian was making his translations into English he used a style that is far from being that of modern English usage but is admirably suited to the richness and imagery of the original.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 12 August 1973)

86. A translation should of course be as true as possible to the original while being in the best possible style of the language into which it is being translated. However, you should realize that it will not be possible to translate the Tablets adequately into easy, modern Dutch. Many of the original Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá are written in very exalted and poetic Persian and Arabic and therefore a similar flavour should be attempted in the language into which it is translated. You will see, for example, that in translating the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh into English the beloved Guardian has created a very beautiful and poetic style in English using many words which might be considered archaic and are reminiscent of the English used by the translators of the King James Version of the Bible.

As you point out, a literal translation is often a bad one because it can produce a phraseology of imagery that would convey the wrong impression; thus, a translator is at times compelled to convey the meaning of the original by means of a form of words suited to the language. However, a person translating the Bahá'í Writings must always bear in mind that he or she is dealing with the Word of God, and, when striving to convey the meaning of the original, he should exert his utmost to make his

rendering both faithful and befitting.

(From a letter dated 29 October 1973 written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

87. With regard to your question about the style of English used in the translation of Bahá'í prayers, we are asked to point out that finding an adequate style in English for expressing beautifully the poetic, metaphorical and allusive style of many of the Bahá'í Scriptures is not easy. The Persian and Arabic of the Bahá'í Writings are themselves considerably different from the current styles and usages in those languages. Shoghi Effendi's solution of using a slightly archaic form of English, which is somewhat equivalent to the use in the original languages, makes possible the use of images and metaphors that might seem strange if expressed in modern English.

Furthermore, styles of writing are changing comparatively rapidly. If it were already found necessary to use a style different from that used for translations fifty years ago, one can estimate that a further change would be called for fifty years hence. One merely has to consider the large number of new translations of the Bible that have appeared, and are still appearing, and yet many English-speaking Christians prefer to continue using the Authorized Version in spite of its proven inaccuracies. Holy Scriptures have a profound meaning for their readers, and to change the familiar words too often can be gravely disturbing.

Books of Scripture themselves mould the language in which they are written. The House of Justice believes that if translators strive to render the words of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá into English in a way that reproduces as accurately as possible the meaning of the originals, that is as beautiful as possible, and that harmonizes closely with the style used by Shoghi Effendi, these Writings themselves will have a far-reaching effect on the ability of Bahá'ís, and especially Bahá'í children and youth, to use the English language effectively for thought and for expression.

(From a letter dated 3 February 1988 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

88. Translation is a very difficult art—an art in which absolute perfection is unattainable. However good a translation, there will always be those who

would have preferred it otherwise, for taste, which is undefinable, plays such large part in such judgements.

(From a letter dated 20 September 1982 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

89. Translation is always a notoriously difficult process because, apart altogether from the matter of accuracy, individuals tend to have strong personal preferences for one style or another. You will find that where translations already exist believers will have formed many emotional attachments to the forms of words used. In the case of prayers for example, they may have committed many of them to memory. It is thus unwise to repeatedly change translations and therefore we advise you to do so only when the translations are really poor and there are obvious errors, and to concentrate your efforts on obtaining translations of the great volume of Bahá'í literature which has not yet been made available in

(From a letter dated 7 October 1973 written by the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

90. A word should be said about the style of language in which the Kitáb-i-Aqdas has been rendered into English. Bahá'u'lláh enjoyed a superb mastery of Arabic, and preferred to use it in those Tablets and other Writings where its precision of meaning was particularly appropriate to the exposition of basic principle. Beyond the choice of language itself, however, the style employed is of an exalted and emotive character, immensely compelling, particularly to those familiar with the great literary tradition out of which it arose. In taking up his task of translation, Shoghi Effendi faced the challenge of finding an English style which would not only faithfully convey the exactness of the text's meaning, but would also evoke in the reader the spirit of meditative reverence which is a distinguishing feature of response to the original. The form of expression he selected, reminiscent of the style used by the seventeenth-century translators of the Bible, captures the elevated mode of Bahá'u'lláh's Arabic, while remaining accessible to the contemporary reader. His translations, moreover, are illumined by his uniquely inspired

understanding of the purport and implications of the originals.

Although both Arabic and English are languages with rich vocabularies and varied modes of expression, their forms differ widely from one another. The Arabic of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is marked by intense concentration and terseness of expression. It is a characteristic of this style that if a connotation is obvious it should not be explicitly stated. This presents a problem for a reader whose cultural, religious and literary background is entirely different from that of Arabic. A literal translation of a passage which is clear in the Arabic could be obscure in English. It therefore becomes necessary to include in the English translation of such passages that element of the Arabic sentence which is obviously implicit in the original. At the same time, it is vital to avoid extrapolating this process to the point where it would add unjustifiably to the original or limit its meaning. Striking the right balance between beauty and clarity of expression on the one hand, and literalness on the other, is one of the major issues with which the translators have had to grapple and which has caused repeated reconsideration of the rendering of certain passages. Another major issue is the legal implication of certain Arabic terms which have a range of meanings different from those of similar terms in English.

Sacred Scripture clearly requires especial care and faithfulness in translation. This is supremely important in the case of a Book of Laws, where it is vital that the reader not be misled or drawn into fruitless disputation. As had been foreseen, the translation of the Most Holy Book has been a work of the utmost difficulty, requiring consultation with

experts in many lands. Since some one third of the text had already been translated by Shoghi Effendi, it was necessary to strive for three qualities in the translation of the remaining passages: accuracy of meaning, beauty of English, and conformity of style with that used by Shoghi Effendi.

We are now satisfied that the translation has reached a point where it represents an acceptable rendering of the original. Nevertheless, it will undoubtedly give rise to questions and suggestions which may shed further light on its content. We are profoundly grateful for the assiduous and meticulous labours of the members of the Committees whom we commissioned to prepare and review this translation of the Aqdas and to compose the annotations. We are confident that this first authorized English edition of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas will enable its readers to obtain at least an inkling of the splendour of the Mother Book of the Bahá'í Dispensation.

Our world has entered the dark heart of an age of fundamental change beyond anything in all of its tumultuous history. Its peoples, of whatever race, nation, or religion, are being challenged to subordinate all lesser loyalties and limiting identities to their oneness as citizens of a single planetary homeland. In Bahá'u'lláh's words: "The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established." May the publication of this translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas lend a fresh impulse to the realization of this universal vision, opening vistas of a worldwide regeneration.

(The Universal House of Justice, Introduction: The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, pp. 9-11)

Part V — Strategies

91. Of course the most fundamental requirement for the attainment of a good translation is the availability of the translator who has not only a thorough understanding of the original language, but also is able to write in clear and beautiful French, so that he can re-express in French not only the true meaning of the original, but can clothe it in language which appropriately reproduces in the French idiom the beauty of style of the original. While a literal

translation is almost inevitably a bad translation, the translator must guard against departing from or adding to the meaning of the original even though he may have to use a phrase to translate a word, or reduce a phrase in the original to one word in the French, or recast the order of a sentence, or replace a metaphor which would be meaningless if translated literally by an equivalent one which conveys the same meaning. In translating Shoghi Effendi's

writings in particular, you may find that many of his long sentences, which are perfectly clear in English, are impossible in French and must be divided into shorter ones.

If there is no French-speaking Bahá'í with the requisite command of both languages, or if such friends are over-burdened, you may most certainly employ non-Bahá'í translators. Here, however, you may face another problem, that of the translator's understanding the Bahá'í teachings which underlie the words. It would be essential for you to have such translations carefully checked by knowledgeable Bahá'ís, who can raise with the translator any passages which they feel convey the wrong meaning.

When you are having any of the Sacred Texts translated on the basis of authorized English translations, you should involve in the work one or more Bahá'ís who are fluent in French and are also familiar with the original Arabic or Persian. Thus, when the translator finds he is unable to grasp the exact meaning of the English words, his understanding can be illuminated by reference to the original texts.

(From a letter dated 2 December 1988 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to Maison d'Éditions Bahá'ies)

92. While the translation of a passage can seldom be an entirely faithful rendering of the original, a translator must strive to make it as true and befitting as possible. Sometimes a word in its particular context contains connotations that cannot be found in only one word in the target language, and so the single word has to be translated by a phrase. Thus, in the passage you quote from the Hidden Words, Shoghi Effendi has translated “Ay Bivafáyán” as “O ye that are foolish, yet have a name to be wise!” This, however, is very different from the translator's amending or adding to the translation in ways that depart from or distort the meaning of the original text.

(From a letter dated 14 February 2005 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

93. The Universal House of Justice has received your letter about the translation of various words and synonyms, and has asked us to convey the following.

In most languages each word has a range of meanings and also a penumbra of connotations. Certain of these overlap, giving rise to synonyms which are interchangeable in some contexts but not in others. It is seldom that there is an exact correspondence between the range of meanings and connotations of a word in one language and those of its nearest equivalent in another language. This lack of correspondence is particularly evident between the words of languages used in widely separate parts of the world or in very different cultures.

The House of Justice feels, therefore, that to construct a rigid list of Dutch words which are always used to translate certain other English words would not only be unnecessary but definitely misleading. As the beloved Guardian pointed out, the word “Bahá” signifies at once the “Glory”, the “Splendour” and the “Light” of God; there is no single word in English which can express all these. Thus, as you have noted, it is translated as “Glory” in the use “Bahá'u'lláh”, while in the list of the months, where “Jalál”, the second month, is translated “Glory”, “Bahá” is translated “Splendour”. All translations are, to some degree, inadequate.

Those who are entrusted with the task of translating the Sacred Writings from the original into English should study the original very closely, and then attempt to express as accurately and as beautifully as possible in English that which the original conveys. To do this they frequently have to use various different synonyms in English to give the best translation of the same Arabic or Persian word when it appears in different contexts. Conversely, they may have to use the same English word in different contexts to translate various different words in the original. In doing this they attempt to follow the example set by Shoghi Effendi in his magnificent translations.

The House of Justice suggests that, although your committee should, of course, follow the instruction of the Guardian to make your translations into Dutch from the English translations rather than from the original Persian or Arabic, you may find it helpful to consult Persian believers who are well-versed in Dutch and who could check with the original Texts for you. This could help you to make the correct choice of word in Dutch when the English wording seems ambiguous.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Translation and Revision Committee,

BAHÁ'Í TRANSLATION WORK: THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

31 May 1981)

94. The Universal House of Justice, in response to your letter of 20 April concerning translations into French or Creole using simpler words than the original text, has requested us to send the following three quotations. These make it clear that a quotation in English may be rendered into simple English in order to facilitate its translation into another language or dialect. However, it is not permissible to publish simplifications and paraphrased extracts of Bahá'í Writings as Bahá'í Scripture.

'We have noticed a tendency in a number of countries to attempt to translate Bahá'í literature into the current, easy, everyday language of the country. This, however, should not be an overriding consideration. Many of the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá are in exalted and highly poetic language in the original Persian and Arabic and you will see, for example, that when translating Bahá'u'lláh's Writings into English the beloved Guardian did not use present-day colloquial English but evolved a highly poetic and beautiful style, using numbers of archaic expressions reminiscent of the translations of the Bible.'

(From a letter dated 7 October 1973 written by the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

'Obviously teaching literature and books about the Faith can be written in simple English. However, we feel that when the Sacred Writings are published the standard English translation should be used, but there would be no objection to printing alongside it the translation into simple English which should be described as a paraphrase of the Holy Word. Thus, for the people of . . . who have difficulty in comprehending standard English, the simple English version would be in the nature of an explanation of the Writings which they could understand. In the case of teaching literature in which quotations from the Writings appear, these could either be paraphrased or a simple English version could be used with the standard version printed as a footnote. This method

would also provide a means whereby the people of . . . could improve their knowledge and understanding of the English language.'

(From a letter dated 20 September 1973 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

'It is, of course, permissible to translate Bahá'í Writings into other languages and dialects of languages. It is also possible to simplify or paraphrase the Bahá'í Writings in order to facilitate their translation into languages and dialects having small vocabularies. However, it is not permissible to publish simplifications and paraphrases of Bahá'í Writings as Bahá'í Scripture.'

(From a letter dated 13 March 1969 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the Spiritual Assembly of Guadeloupe, May 13, 1986)

95. Your letter of 9 May concerning the translation of Bahá'í literature into Georgian has been received and we have been instructed to reply as follows.

You have asked whether Bahá'í literature should be translated from English or Russian. In principle, the desirable course is to translate from English, as the English translations have been made by the Guardian or authorized by the Bahá'í World Centre. If this is not practical at the moment, then provisional translations can be made from Russian until such time as proper translations from English can be prepared. Such a solution is far better than waiting and being without Bahá'í literature in the native tongue of your region.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 23 May 1995)

96. The point is well taken that it would unduly delay fundamental Bahá'í teachings being published in a number of languages if we were to await the availability of Bahá'ís competent to make the translations. Summaries, commentaries and simple re-statements of the Guardian's writings, provided the text itself is not attributed to the Guardian, are

to be encouraged.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Hands of the Cause of God in the Holy Land, 13 August 1972)

97. The National Spiritual Assembly which undertake the translation, usually through a committee of Bahá'í translators, is the body which "authorizes" the translation, if it is approved. In some instances, if there are no Bahá'í translators available, there is no objection, in principle, to employing non-Bahá'ís for this purpose. It is usual for the National Spiritual Assembly to appoint a Reviewing Committee, or establish some means of providing review of the completed translation. You will note from the enclosed memorandum that, with the exceptions enumerated therein, new translations of the Sacred Text into languages other than English must be made from the Guardian's English translation where it exists; and when no such translation exists, advice should be sought from the Universal House of Justice. In the case of Spanish, to avoid duplication of effort and to achieve the highest standard of accuracy, the National Assembly concerned should feel free to consult EBILA and/or the National Spiritual Assembly of Spain, and indeed the House of Justice encourages the closest co-operation between all administrative bodies and publishing trusts responsible for the production of literature in Spanish.

Regarding the transliteration of Persian and Arabic words the House of Justice requests that the method adopted by the beloved Guardian, and which is described in the various volumes of 'The Bahá'í World', be followed, as it permits all languages which use the Roman alphabet to transliterate such terms in the same way throughout the Bahá'í world.
(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama, July 16, 1979)

98. Translations

As regards English, the beloved Guardian's translations are obviously the most authentic and should be used. If, for some particular reason, a Bahá'í author, when quoting a passage of the Sacred Text which has been rendered into English by the Guardian, wishes to use a translation other than that

made by the beloved Guardian, his request may be referred to the Universal House of Justice. Passages from the Sacred Text not translated by Shoghi Effendi, but already in English and published with approval, may be used. If an author wishes to make his own translation of a passage not already translated by Shoghi Effendi, the new translation may be submitted to the Universal House of Justice for approval.

With the exception of certain oriental languages such as Turkish, Arabic and Urdu, which are related to the original Persian or Arabic, new translations of the Sacred Text into languages other than English must be made from the Guardian's English translation where it exists. When there is no translation into English by Shoghi Effendi of a particular passage, the National Spiritual Assembly concerned should seek the advice of the Universal House of Justice. When translations already exist, which are not made from the Guardian's English text, but have been published and approved, they may be used.

(Memorandum on Bahá'í Publishing, prepared by the Research Department of The Universal House of Justice, 3 November 1996)

99. The Universal House of Justice has requested us to advise you to base your translations on current editions of all the books referred to, if translation is involved. In each instance you should consult the original publisher and obtain a copy of the latest printing or edition to ensure that all approved corrections are embodied in your translation.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Taiwan, May 22, 1984)

100. You may find it useful . . . as you carry out your translation work, to compile a list of terms and their translation. Such a listing should not be applied rigidly, as it is seldom that there is an exact correspondence between the range of meanings and connotations of a word in one language and those of its nearest equivalent in another language. Moreover, there should be no attempt to impose consistency upon passages in Shoghi Effendi's writings that differ slightly, as the Guardian often translated the same term in a number of different

ways.

(From a letter dated 1 July 2014 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

Part VI — Specific Terms & Passages

101. The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter of 29 December 2008, asking why such terms as “Alláh-u-Abhá” and “Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá” are used by Bahá’ís rather than being translated into their native tongues, and has asked us to respond as follows.

The House of Justice on another occasion has clarified that the Greatest Name is to be used in its original language for the recitation of “Alláh-u-Abhá” 95 times a day, as well as for its use in the Long Obligatory Prayer and the Prayer for the Dead. It has also clarified that to translate words such as “Alláh-u-Abhá”, “Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá”, “Mashriqu’l-Adhkár” and “Hazíratu’l-Quds” into one’s native language is not acceptable. One exception to this is the alternative use of the words “Right of God” or their equivalent into other languages while the term “Huqúqu’lláh” gradually becomes a part of Bahá’í vocabulary.

In general, one should bear in mind that all translations are, to some degree, inadequate. For instance, the beloved Guardian has pointed out in *God Passes By* that the word “Bahá” signifies at once the “Glory”, the “Splendour” and the “Light” of God; there is no single word in English which can express all these. It is, of course, desirable that there be no loss of meaning through translation; thus, it is preferable that certain terms directly related to the Manifestation of God remain in their original form.
(From a letter dated 22 February 2009 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

102. You ask how to render the word “nightingale”, and similar words that refer to places, plants, birds, stones and other objects for which there are no words in Malagasy. You wish to know whether they should be rendered in the language from which you are making the translation (e.g. English or French) or in the original language of revelation. You mention

that up to now you have been translating “nightingale” by the Malagasy word “railovy” which is the name of the bird with the most beautiful voice among all the birds in Madagascar.

Such decisions should be made by a competent committee you should appoint to establish a glossary for the translation of terms into Malagasy. In this particular case, “railovy” would seem to be a very suitable choice. However, you should consider all aspects of the matter. In most instances in the Bahá’í Scriptures, the word “nightingale” is not used literally; it is a metaphor. Hence the specific zoological significance of the word is not of primary importance. For example, in some instances where the original word is “varqa” (which means “dove”) Shoghi Effendi has translated it as “nightingale”; in others he has used “dove”.

The nightingale not only has a beautiful song, but it tends to sing at night, when other birds are quiet, and the solitariness of its song enhances its poignancy and beauty. Over the years various stories and symbolisms have arisen in different cultures. For example it is often conceived that the nightingale is so enamoured of the beauty of the rose that it sings for the rose, even though the thorns pierce its breast. No doubt it would be impossible to translate all such elements of the metaphor into a similar word in Malagasy, so the translators must just do the best they can.

If, in another case, you find that there is no word at all in Malagasy which is suitable, you would be free to use the original Arabic or Persian word with an appropriate footnote, or, if French is sufficiently familiar to the people of Madagascar, a French word.

(From a letter dated 13 October 1994 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Madagascar)

103. You mention that there are no capital letters in Japanese; this is also the case in Persian and Arabic. It is permissible to use the proper noun in place of the personal pronoun if this is the accepted good standard in the Japanese language, as you say is done in translations of the Bible. The Guardian was always in favour of seeking the most expert advice in such problems and you would do well to present these technical literary problems to some professor of the Japanese language or some well-known and established translators.

(14 March 1977, to a translation and review committee of a National Spiritual Assembly)

104. Moreover, it is observable in some of the Guardian's translations of passages in which Bahá'u'lláh refers to Himself, that Shoghi Effendi has capitalized the pronouns when they indicate the Manifestation in His relationship to mankind, but has made them lower case when the passage is contrasting the Manifestation with the Godhead.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a Publishing Trust, 27 March 1989)

105. In contrast to many European languages, in Persian, personal pronouns are never capitalized. 'Abdu'l-Bahá followed this established rule and did not capitalize the pronouns that referred to Him. . . . It is interesting to note that when 'Abdu'l-Bahá signed His name in English, He used a combination of upper and lower case letters. He, typically, wrote "abdul Baha abbas"—the reference to Bahá'u'lláh being the only word He capitalized.

On the same principal it is the policy of the Universal House of Justice when approving translations of Tablets written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, generally to have "me" and "my" and "mine" in lower case, following the example given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the writing of His own name in Roman letters. Pronouns used in referring to 'Abdu'l-Bahá by someone else, however, are normally capitalized. This policy can be seen in "Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá".

(From a memorandum of the Research Department, 23 May 1991, attached to a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, 20 June 1991)

106. With reference to the final question in this letter, the word "Qayyum" has been used both in the Qur'án and in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh as one of the attributes of God and, in such a context, Shoghi Effendi in his translations has rendered the word "Qayyum" as "Self-subsisting", "Self-existent" and "the All-compelling".

. . . the Báb has used the term "Qayyum" in several of His Works as a reference to Bahá'u'lláh, and, in fact, Bahá'u'lláh, in His "Kitáb-i Badi" (pp. 113-116) has quoted the Báb's references which will no doubt be of interest to you.

(15 September 1983, to an individual believer)

107. In Arabic, there are several words for prayer. The word "salát", which appears here in the original, refers to a particular category of prayers, the recitation of which at specific times of the day is enjoined on the believers. To differentiate this category of prayers from other kinds, the word has been translated as "obligatory prayer".

The word "amín", translated in this paragraph as "reliable individual" and "trustee", conveys in Arabic a wide range of meanings connected principally with the idea of trustworthiness, but signifying also such qualities as reliability, loyalty, faithfulness, uprightness, honesty, and so forth. Used in legal parlance "amin" denotes, among other things, a trustee, guarantor, custodian, guardian, and keeper.

This is the first of several passages referring to the importance of refinement and cleanliness. The original Arabic word "latáfah", rendered here as "refinement", has a wide range of meanings with both spiritual and physical implications, such as elegance, gracefulness, cleanliness, civility, politeness, gentleness, delicacy and graciousness, as well as being subtle, refined, sanctified and pure. In accordance with the context of the various passages where it occurs in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, it has been translated either as "refinement" or "cleanliness".

The word here translated as "Constantinople" is, in the original, "Ar-Rúm" or "Rome". This term has generally been used in the Middle East to designate Constantinople and the Eastern Roman Empire, then the city of Byzantium and its empire, and later the Ottoman Empire.

Sadratu'l-Muntahá: Literally “the furthestmost Lote-Tree”, translated by Shoghi Effendi as “the Tree beyond which there is no passing”.

The word here translated “Vicegerency” is, in the original Arabic, “viláyat”, which has a range of meanings including “vicegerency”, “guardianship”, “protectorship” and “successorship”.

Shoghi Effendi, in letters written on his behalf, has explained the significance of the “letters B and E”. They constitute the word “Be”, which, he states, “means the creative Power of God Who through His command causes all things to come into being” and “the power of the Manifestation of God, His great spiritual creative force”.

The imperative “Be” in the original Arabic is the word “kun”, consisting of the two letters “káf” and “nún”. They have been translated by Shoghi Effendi in the above manner. This word has been used in the Qur’án as God’s bidding calling creation into being.

(The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: Notes, pp. 166, 187, 199, 217, 220, 244, 247)

108. *Questions concerning the Xhosa translation of the “Hidden Words”*

In an email dated 8 December 1996, Dr. . . . , writing on behalf of the National Translation Committee of the Bahá’ís of South Africa, has forwarded a number of questions to the Research Department concerning the Xhosa translation of the Hidden Words, with which that Committee is currently occupied. In response, the Research Department provides the following brief observations.

With regard to the word “O” used in Bahá’í prayers, and in the opening of each of the Hidden Words, this represents respectively the particles “ya” (in Arabic), and “ay” (in Persian), which are exclusively vocative in function.

With regard to the last Hidden Word in Arabic, the Arabic text cannot support a construction of the English translation which would take the “that” clause as standing in apposition to the foregoing pronoun “this;” “that” here is a conjunction signifying “so that,” and introducing a purpose clause.

The most plausible construction of the passage

is that the pronoun “this” in the last sentence refers specifically to “that crimson ink that hath been shed in My path” (rather than to the act of writing); and that the possessive adjective “its” refers also to this same antecedent.

(Memorandum of the Research Department to The Universal House of Justice, 6 January 1997)

109. Your letter of 27 August 1995, regarding the use of the word “Whose” in a specified passage in the Table of Ahmad*, was received at the Bahá’í World Centre and referred to the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice for further study. That Department has now completed its work, and we have been asked to convey to you the results of that study.

It is clear from the original Arabic that the word “Whose” in the sentence which you indicated in your letter refers to the commands of ‘Alí, that is, the Báb.

(2 October 1995 to two individual believers)

* “And that the One Whom He hath sent forth by the name of ‘Alí was the true One from God, to Whose commands we are all conforming.”

110. *“Whoso hath remained faithful to the Covenant hath been steadfast in his adherence to trustworthiness, whilst those who have repudiated it have erred grievously.”* (Compilation on Trustworthiness)

An examination of the original Arabic shows the same grammatical ambiguity as to the referent of the pronoun, and so the meaning must be deduced from the context. In regards to translating the passage into Setswana and whether the word “it” refers to “the Covenant” or to “trustworthiness”, the Research Department suggests that the passage is contrasting the trustworthiness of those who have “remained faithful” to the Covenant with the trustworthiness of those who have “repudiated it”, and that the most likely referent of the pronoun is therefore to “the Covenant”.

(Letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of Botswana, 3 March 2009, in response to a query from their Translation Task Force)

111. In his email message of 14 December 2002, Mr. . . . , a believer from Uganda, explains that he is in the process of translating the long Obligatory Prayer. To this end, he seeks assistance in understanding several phrases in this prayer, which appear in the following passages. . . .

“ . . . the city of Thy nearness”

The Research Department has not, to date, been able to find an authoritative interpretation of this passage or the particular phrase in the long Obligatory Prayer. It is interesting to note, however, that the image of the city appears frequently in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh.¹ It is used, for example, to symbolize a place of security and peace, the end point of a long and arduous journey, the result of a spiritual quest, the presence of the Manifestation of God, and the like. It is suggested that rather than representing a particular physical location, the “city of Thy nearness” might be considered as a reference to the condition of being near to the Beloved.

“ . . . this evanescent soul”

Mr . . . notes that according to his understanding “the soul is meant to be immortal”. The original Arabic text of the prayer was examined, and it appears that the word translated as “soul” does not constitute a reference to man’s spiritual reality. Rather the word “soul” is used to convey the sense of “man”, “a being”, or “a person”. In fact the “Concise Oxford Dictionary” gives one of the meanings of soul as “person”.

“Greater is God than every great one!”

Mr. . . . wishes to know whether God is great in terms of “age”, “eminence” or “size as in big”, and he asks how best to translate this phrase. As mentioned earlier, the Research Department has not been able to locate an authoritative interpretation of this statement in the long Obligatory Prayer. It would appear, however, that the greatness of God does not constitute a reference to some material condition, such as “age” or “size”, but rather to His majesty and power. As to an appropriate translation

of the phrase in question, it is suggested that Mr. . . . Mmight find it helpful to examine the kinds of general statements about God, which appear in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. We provide, below, three examples:

To every discerning and illumined heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress. Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His fathomless mystery.

(“The Kitáb-i-Íqán” (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993), page 98)

Regard thou the one true God as One Who is apart from, and immeasurably exalted above, all created things. The whole universe reflecteth His glory, while He is Himself independent of, and transcendeth His creatures. This is the true meaning of Divine unity. He Who is the Eternal Truth is the one Power Who exerciseth undisputed sovereignty over the world of being, Whose image is reflected in the mirror of the entire creation. All existence is dependent upon Him, and from Him is derived the source of the sustenance of all things. This is what is meant by Divine unity; this is its fundamental principle.

(“Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh”, section LXXXIV, paragraph 1)

Immeasurably exalted is His Essence above the descriptions of His creatures. He, alone, occupieth the Seat of transcendent majesty, of supreme and inaccessible glory. The birds of men’s hearts, however high they soar, can never hope to attain the heights of His unknowable Essence. It is He Who hath called into being the whole of creation, Who hath caused every created thing to spring forth at His behest. Shall, then, the thing that was born by virtue of the word which His Pen hath revealed, and which the finger of His Will hath directed, be regarded as partner with Him, or an embodiment of His Self? Far be it from His glory that human pen or tongue should hint at

¹ See for example, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993), pages 197–199; *Gems of Divine Mysteries* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2002), various references.

His mystery, or that human heart conceive His Essence. All else besides Him stand poor and desolate at His door, all are powerless before the greatness of his might, all are but slaves in His Kingdom. He is rich enough to dispense with all creatures.

(“Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh”, section XCIV, paragraph 3)

From a Memorandum of the Research Department, 6 February 2003, prepared for the Universal House of Justice in answer to some questions posed by an individual believer.

112. The Research Department has studied the email message of 2 December 2002 from Mr. . . . to the Bahá’í World Centre. Mr. . . . states that he is translating some of the Sacred Writings into Luganda including, if we understand correctly, prayers and Bahá’u’lláh’s Hidden Words. His questions concern the meanings of certain terms and phrases for the purpose of rendering them in a befitting manner in Luganda. His queries and our responses follow below. . . .

1. Translation of “wine” or “choicest wine”

Mr. . . . states that he finds it difficult to translate “wine” or “choicest wine” into Luganda without making it sound like it is “beer or alcohol”, and he has used the word “juice” instead. He asks for guidance.

As he is no doubt aware, the word “wine” as it appears in the Bahá’í Sacred Writings is associated with two different kinds of intoxication, spiritual or physical, depending upon the context in which it is found. He may find it helpful to peruse the discussion of the different uses of “wine” in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.² In note 2, it is clarified that while the consumption of wine and other intoxicants is prohibited, reference is also made in the Writings to the allegorical meaning of “wine”, such as being the cause of spiritual ecstasy.

Based on the foregoing, it seems clear to the

Research Department that the substitution of “juice” for “wine” in translations of the Sacred Writings would not be appropriate. He might find it helpful to check how “wine” is translated in a Luganda Bible since the people may be familiar with it. In addition, should he be concerned that the friends may misunderstand the intention when the word “wine” is employed to convey spiritual meanings, he may wish to provide an explanatory footnote.

2. “The wise are they that speak not unless they obtain a hearing. . . .”

Mr. . . . quotes the phrase above from verse 36 of the Persian Hidden Words. He wonders whether it means that “the wise would not speak until they have listened first, or that the wise will not speak until they have found someone to listen to them”, and asks for clarification.

While the Research Department has not found a direct interpretation of the phrase in question in the Bahá’í Writings, it seems to us that Shoghi Effendi has provided an elucidation indirectly that suggests the second meaning offered by Mr. . . . In a passage from a letter dated 29 April 1925 written on his behalf to an individual, the phrase in question is quoted to help clarify an important principle associated with sharing the teachings with others. We read:

Bahá’u’lláh says that if after two or three meetings with a person you fail to influence him it is better to leave him alone. What we must do is to seek out those who are thirsty and give them to drink, to find those who are hungry and feed them with the bread of life. If people have heard of the teachings for years, but have not become changed in their lives—are still heedless and without enthusiasm or devotion—then let us turn our attention to others who are more ready for the teachings, who when they hear and are convinced are ready to obey and to sacrifice themselves in the path of the Beloved. “The wise are they who speak not unless they obtain a hearing.”

3. Meaning of Sadrat’l-Muntahá in Verse 77 of the Persian Hidden Words

Regarding whether “Sadratu’l-Muntahá” in verse 77 of the Persian Hidden Words refers to God or to

² “The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book” (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1993), pp. 167–168.

Bahá'u'lláh, it seems useful to begin by drawing attention to Shoghi Effendi's clarification of the general theme of this verse. In extract 33 in the attached compilation of references to the Hidden Words cited above, the Guardian suggests that the verse in question might be "construed as an allegorical allusion to the progressiveness of Divine Revelation". Mr. . . . may wish to keep this interpretation in mind when choosing among possible symbolic meanings.

In note 128 in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas,³ the literal translation of Sadratu'l-Muntahá and its symbolic meaning are provided, as follows:

Literally "the furthestmost Lote-Tree", translated by Shoghi Effendi as "the Tree beyond which there is no passing." This is used as a symbol in Islám, for example in the accounts of Muhammad's Night Journey, to mark the point in the heavens beyond which neither men nor angels can pass in their approach to God, and thus to delimit the bounds of divine knowledge as revealed to mankind. Hence it is often used in the Bahá'í Writings to designate the Manifestation of God Himself.

As Mr. . . . may be aware, this term has acquired a rich overlay of spiritual significance, in view of its occurrence in the Qur'án, at 53.14, in the framework of the expression "sidratu'l-muntahá", said to denote "The Lote-tree in the Seventh Heaven; beyond which neither angel nor prophet passes, and which shades the water and Paradise" (Lane).

Concerning the meaning of the term in the verse in question, the Research Department would suggest that (1) the basic meaning of the term is less

important than its symbolic significance; (2) in rendering this symbolic meaning, an attempt should be made to preserve the sense of mystery surrounding the expression (without attempting to define too closely exactly what is being symbolized); and (3) reference might usefully be made to any available translation into Luganda of the Qur'án, verse 53.14.

4. "Dayspring", "Daystar" and "Maid of heaven"

Mr. . . . asks for a "befitting" meaning of these terms. As indicated in the extract from the letter dated 8 September 1985 of the Universal House of Justice quoted above, the meaning of specific symbols varies from passage to passage. However, regarding "Dayspring", the original Arabic word maṭla' has been translated as "Dawning-place" and "Dayspring". Maṭla' literally means "dawn" and "point of ascent".¹ "Daystar" is frequently used in the Writings as a poetic reference to the sun.

Regarding the "Maid of heaven", as he is doubtlessly aware, this symbol appears in many of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings. In "God Passes By", we read that the "Maiden" is "The Most Great Spirit" which revealed itself "to the agonized soul of Bahá'u'lláh",² and the personification of "the Spirit of God within Him".³

(Memorandum of the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 13 February 1993)

¹ Hans Wehr, "A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic" (Ithaca: Spoken Language Services, 1994), page 661.

² "God Passes By" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), page 101.

³ Ibid., page 121.

³ Ibid., pages 219–220.

113. GUIDELINES FOR THE TRANSLATION OF BAHÁ'Í SACRED WRITINGS

1. Translations into languages other than those akin to Persian and Arabic should normally be made from approved English translations rather than from the original Persian and Arabic. In such cases it is an advantage if it is possible for the translator(s) to also check with the original.
2. All new translations into English, and all revisions of earlier translations in that language, must be checked at the World Centre and officially approved before publication.
3. Any believer is free to translate for his own use anything he wishes, but dissemination or publication of such translations is dependent upon their approval by the appropriate National Spiritual Assembly or, in the case of translations into English, by the World Centre.
 - a. If an individual Bahá'í spontaneously makes his own translation of a passage, he may willingly make it available to a Spiritual Assembly, but he cannot be compelled to do so.
 - b. If a translation made spontaneously by an individual is approved and published, he retains the copyright of his translation, unless, of course, he wishes to surrender it.
4. When a Spiritual Assembly wishes to have a translation made it should, if possible, have the task undertaken by a committee rather than by individuals, as explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.
 - a. The members of such a committee need not all be Bahá'ís.
 - b. Translations made by a committee are the property of the Assembly appointing the committee, and not of the members of the committee.
 - c. Except for translations into English, a translation made by a committee does not have to be checked unless the Assembly deems it advisable.
- d. In accordance with the instructions of Shoghi Effendi the name of the committee should appear in the book as the translator, but the names of the members should not so appear.
5. If it is not feasible to form a translation committee, translations must, perforce, be made by individuals.
 - a. When an individual is commissioned by an Assembly to make a translation, the translation becomes the property of the Assembly, not of the individual, even if the work is done without remuneration. It is advisable to have this and other matters agreed in writing before the work is undertaken so that there may be no ground for subsequent misunderstandings.
 - b. A translation made by an individual should, if possible, be checked before being published, and such checking should be done by a committee rather than by an individual, if this is feasible.
 - c. When a translation made by an individual is published, his name may appear as translator if he so wishes.
6. Normally credit for translation should appear on all complete works and compilations that are published, as well as on books that quote translated passages.
 - a. Credit for translation should not appear in the case of passages quoted in communications from Bahá'í institutions, even when these are published.
 - b. Credit for translation need not appear on published leaflets and pamphlets unless it is legally required to do so.

(Ridván 1971, from a memorandum by the Universal House of Justice on Bahá'í publishing addressed to "National Spiritual Assemblies and all those concerned with the production of Bahá'í publications")

114. INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTRE

We wish to express our warmest thanks for the copy of the glossary of frequently found terms from the Writings, prepared by the National Spiritual Assembly of Nigeria, that will have the approved equivalent in local languages . . .

The development of the glossary, a basic element of a comprehensive translation program, is a major step towards the systematization of the translation work. We urge you to collaborate fully with the National Assembly in addressing the long-standing challenge of creating a common vision and understanding of the elements involved in executing a successful program of translation. The collaboration could include broadening knowledge about the nature and purpose of translating Bahá'í Writings, the principles of translation, the complexities of the tasks confronting translators, the methods which can be used to maintain the highest possible standards of excellence, and the style of language used in translating.

A complementary approach would involve

establishing concrete and effective means by which the translation of Bahá'í literature into local languages could be accelerated. We suggest that you explore the development of guidelines for translators. Another course of action would involve the establishment of training programs for translators, possibly as part of an institute program. Such guidelines could be utilized in the courses. We call your attention to the national institute program of Kenya which includes training courses for translators.

(International Teaching Centre to a Counsellor in Africa, 3 February 1997)

115. . . . to foster the movement of more and more peoples towards the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, it is imperative that the need for translation, production, and distribution of literature is addressed.

(International Teaching Centre to all Continental Counsellors, 5 January 2016)

