

# On the Nature of Bahá'í Communities

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## Abstract

Some personal reflections on the development of Bahá'í communities in urban societies, especially the relationship between the individual believer and the local community, and that between the local community and the institutions of the Faith, in the context of achieving a significant advance in the process of entry by troops, which is the major focus of the forthcoming Four Year Plan.

## Introduction

In a couple of weeks' time, the Universal House of Justice will launch a global plan of expansion and consolidation to end four years later at Ridvan 2000. In a message, dated 31 December 1996 addressed to the Bahá'ís of the World, announcing its decision, the Universal House of Justice summarized the basic requisites in the activity and development of the individual believer, the local community, and the institutions for achieving "a significant advance in the process of entry by troops".<sup>1</sup>

Some three years ago, the House of Justice in its Ridvan message brought to the attention of the Bahá'ís of the world the critical need for a massive expansion of the Bahá'í community in the years immediately ahead.<sup>2</sup> Clear signs of "the growing receptivity of the world to Bahá'u'lláh's Message" reinforces the House's conviction that "entry by troops will

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<sup>1</sup> Message of the Universal House of Justice dated 31 December 1995 to the Bahá'ís of the World.

<sup>2</sup> Message of the Universal House of Justice dated Ridvan 150 to the Bahá'ís of the World.

soon become an established pattern for the growth of the Faith in country after country".<sup>3</sup> To assist the National Spiritual Assemblies and all the friends to understand, welcome, initiate and sustain this process, the Universal House of Justice enclosed a compilation and a covering statement, prepared by the Research Department, entitled "Promoting Entry by Troops".<sup>4</sup>

I don't think I understood it then. But I am beginning to understand it now. I have been reflecting a fair bit on the development of Bahá'í communities; and, quite naturally, the development of urban Bahá'í communities is closest to my heart. I have started examining the whole panorama of the development of the Bahá'í Faith since its inception. It is interesting to note that major developments in the Faith during the time of Baha'u'llah took place in the great cities of the world then - Tihran, Baghdad, Constantinople, Adrianople and Akka.

I begin to appreciate that we are participants in a "vast, majestic process that was set in motion at the dawn of the Adamic cycle", some six thousand years ago, "with the planting, in the soil of the divine will, of the tree of divine revelation."<sup>5</sup>

### A Vast, Majestic Process

Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, in his second message, dated May 4, 1953, to the All-American Intercontinental Conference, described, in vivid, flowing metaphorical language, and in his usual concise manner, this vast, majestic process that has already passed through "certain stages and must needs pass through others ere it attains its final consummation."

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<sup>3</sup> Message of the Universal House of Justice dated 9 November 1993 to all National Spiritual Assemblies.

<sup>4</sup> Statement and Compilation on "Promoting Entry by Troops" prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice dated October 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Shoghi Effendi. Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-1957. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971, pp. 153-155.

He wrote, "The first part of this process was the slow and steady growth of this tree of divine revelation, successively putting forth its branches, shoots and off-shoots, and revealing its leaves, buds and blossoms, as a direct consequence of the light and warmth imparted to it by a series of progressive dispensations associated with Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad and other Prophets, and of the vernal showers of blood shed by countless martyrs in their path."

"The second part of this process was the fruition of this tree, 'that belongeth neither to the East nor to the West,' when the Bab appeared as the perfect fruit and declared His mission in the Year Sixty (1844) in the city of Shiraz."

"The third part was the grinding of this sacred seed, of infinite preciousness and potency, in the mill of adversity, causing it to yield its oil, six years later, in the city of Tabriz (1850)."

"The fourth part was the ignition of this oil by the hand of Providence in the depths and amidst the darkness of the Siyah-Chal of Tihiran a hundred years ago (1853)."

"The fifth, was the clothing of that flickering light, which had scarcely penetrated the adjoining territory of Iraq, in the lamp of revelation, after an eclipse lasting no less than ten years, in the city of Baghdad (1863)."

"The sixth, was the spread of the radiance of that light, shining with added brilliancy in its crystal globe in Adrianople (1867), and later on in the fortress town of Akka (1868-1892), to thirteen countries in the Asiatic and African continents."

"The seventh was its projection, from the Most Great Prison, in the course of the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Center of the Covenant (1892-1921), across the seas and the shedding of its illumination upon twenty sovereign states and dependencies in the American, the European, and the Australian continents."

"The eighth part of that process was the diffusion of that same light in the course of the first, and the opening years of the second, epoch of the

Formative Age of the Faith (1921-1953), over ninety-four sovereign states, dependencies and islands of the planet, as a result of the prosecution of a series of national plans, initiated by eleven national spiritual assemblies throughout the Bahá'í world, utilizing the agencies of a newly emerged, divinely appointed Administrative Order, and which has now culminated in the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh's Mission (1953)."

The ninth part of this process was the "further diffusion of that same light over one hundred and thirty-one additional territories and islands in both the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, through the operation of a decade-long world spiritual crusade whose termination" coincided with the Most Great Jubilee commemorating the centenary of the declaration of Baha'u'llah in Baghdad (1963).

And since 1963, the Bahá'í world community, led by the Universal House of Justice, has initiated the tenth part of this mighty process which must witness "the penetration of that light, in the course of numerous crusades and of successive epochs of both the Formative and Golden Ages of the Faith, into all the remaining territories of the globe through the erection of the entire machinery of Bahá'u'lláh's Administrative Order in all territories, both East and West, the stage at which the light of God's triumphant Faith shining in all its power and glory will have suffused and enveloped the entire planet."

### **Beginning the Tenth Part**

As a member of the Bahá'í world community, entering into the tenth part of this majestic process, I appreciate that the steadily evolving Faith of Baha'u'llah will have to go through "stages of obscurity, of repression, of emancipation and of recognition — stages one or another of which Bahá'í national communities in various parts of the world now find themselves in — to the stage of establishment, the stage at which the Faith of Baha'u'llah will be recognized by the civil authorities as the state religion, similar to that which Christianity entered in the years following the death of the Emperor Constantine, a stage which must later be followed by the emergence of the Bahá'í state itself, functioning, in all religious and civil

matters, in strict accordance with the laws and ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy, the Mother-Book of the Bahá'í Revelation, a stage which, in the fullness of time, will culminate in the establishment of the World Bahá'í Commonwealth, functioning in the plenitude of its powers, and which will signalize the long-awaited advent of the Christ-promised Kingdom of God on earth — the Kingdom of Baha'u'llah — mirroring however faintly upon this humble handful of dust the glories of the Abhá Kingdom.”

“This final and crowning stage in the evolution of the plan wrought by God Himself for humanity will, in turn, prove to be the signal for the birth of a world civilisation, incomparable in its range, its character and potency, in the history of mankind — a civilisation which posterity will, with one voice, acclaim as the fairest fruit of the Golden Age of the Dispensation of Baha'u'llah, and whose rich harvest will be garnered during future dispensations destined to succeed one another in the course of the five thousand century Bahá'í Cycle.”<sup>6</sup>

I also appreciate that the speed at which we travel this road is not totally in our control, and that the detailed itinerary has yet to be worked out, but I think we can already visualise a road map with clear milestones leading to the establishment of the Bahá'í Faith.

### A Road Map to Establishment

It is evident the road to final consummation, in the Golden Age of the Faith, through the raising of the standard of the Most Great Peace, nay, even to the stage of establishment — the stage at which the Faith of Baha'u'llah will be recognized by the civil authorities as the state religion — will be long, tortuous, and narrow. The stages that the Faith will have to go through — of obscurity, of repression, of emancipation and of recognition — prior to reaching the stage of establishment will, however, probably take place during our life time or during our children's life time. As the Universal House of Justice has pointed out in the preamble to the

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<sup>6</sup> Shoghi Effendi. *Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-1957*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971, pp. 155-156.

Four Year Plan, "there are divine deadlines to be met"<sup>7</sup>, and one particular deadline, as discussed below, is dead ahead.

In fact, Shoghi Effendi had stated that Bahá'í national communities in various parts of the world were already finding themselves in one of these stages or another. Clearly, the Bahá'í national community of Iran is undergoing the stage of repression, foreshadowing the trials that will soon challenge the Bahá'í world community.

Nevertheless, the Guardian has assured us that emancipation, however slow the process, of the "valiant sufferers from the galling fetters of an antiquated religious orthodoxy" will take place, that "such an emancipation, which cannot be confined to Bahá'u'lláh's native land, will, in varying measure, have its repercussions in Islamic countries, or may be even preceded by a similar phenomenon in neighbouring territories, hastening and adding fresh impetus to the bursting of the bonds that fetter the freedom of the followers of God's infant Faith."

"Such an emancipation will, in its turn, pave the way for the recognition of that Faith as an independent religion established on a basis of absolute equality with its sister religions, enjoying the unqualified protection of the civil authorities for its followers and its institutions, and fully empowered, in all matters related to personal status, to apply without reservations the laws and ordinances ordained in the Most Holy Book."<sup>8</sup>

In its message of Ridvan 1984 to the Bahá'ís of the World, the Universal House of Justice declared that the Bahá'í world community has emerged from obscurity.<sup>9</sup> We must now act in unison with the forces unleashed by the Almighty to propel the Bahá'í world community safely through the next stage of its development.

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<sup>7</sup> See note 1 of this paper

<sup>8</sup> Shoghi Effendi. *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America, 1947-1957*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970, p. 141.

<sup>9</sup> Message of the Universal House of Justice dated Ridvan 1984 to the Bahá'ís of the World.

## **Dynamic of Crisis and Victory**

Shoghi Effendi, in his message of Ridvan 1956 to the delegates of the Annual Bahá'í Conventions, while impelled to share with them his feelings of joy, of pride and of thankfulness following the triumphant termination of the second phase of the World Spiritual Crusade, warned the friends that the "repercussions have spread so far as to alarm a not inconsiderable element among the traditional and redoubtable adversaries of its courageous and consecrated prosecutors. Indeed as it has forged ahead, it has raised up new enemies intent on obstructing its forward march and on defeating its purpose." The Guardian, however, went on to say that "premonitory signs can already be discerned in far-off regions heralding the approach of the day when troops will flock to its standard, fulfilling the predictions uttered long ago by the Supreme Captain ('Abdu'l-Bahá) of its forces."

In the words of the Universal House of Justice, "this dynamic interplay of the processes of crisis and victory characterizes the development of the Faith."<sup>10</sup> In its statement on "Promoting Entry by Troops", the House of Justice quoted the words of Shoghi Effendi that the record of the tumultuous history of the Faith demonstrates "the supreme truth that with every fresh outbreak of hostility to the Faith, whether from within or from without, a corresponding measure of outpouring grace, sustaining its defenders and confounding its adversaries, has been providentially released, communicating a fresh impulse to the onward march of the Faith, while this impetus, in its turn, would, through its manifestations, provoke fresh hostility in quarters heretofore unaware of its challenging implications."<sup>11</sup>

## **Organic Growth**

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<sup>10</sup> See note 4 of this paper

<sup>11</sup> Letter dated 31 June 1952, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly. Cited in Statement and Compilation on "Promoting Entry by Troops" prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice dated October 1995.

That "the growth of the Faith proceeds in an organic, evolutionary manner", that "it advances in vast surges, precipitated by the alternation of crisis and victory"<sup>4</sup>, which means its rate of growth is not necessarily uniform, is evident from Shoghi Effendi's delineation of the vast, majestic process at work in the world of humanity, as described above, and from his elucidation of how the Cause of God spread, in a letter dated 18 February 1932, written on his behalf to an individual believer, in which he likened the "state when only isolated souls are awakened "as the "beginning of spring" when "only the few, exceptionally favoured seeds will sprout" and "the quickening of whole groups and nations" as when "the season gets in its full sway, and the atmosphere gets permeated with the warmth of true springtime" and "masses of flowers will begin to appear, and a whole hillside suddenly blooms."

In his book, "On the Shoulders of Giants", Craig Loehle, recognising that the growth of the Faith is organic, draws lessons from biology to throw light on the processes affecting the spread of the Cause of God.

### **Putting Down Deep Roots**

Citing the case of the longleaf pine, a tall majestic pine found in the American southeast, which is the longest lived of the southern pines, found growing on sandy soils where fire is frequent due to drought conditions, Loehle described a growth strategy exhibited by this tree which is indicative of the process that the Bahá'í Faith is going through right now.

He explained, "To cope with fire, the longleaf has developed a unique evolutionary response. When a seed germinates, the seedling produces a thick bundle of needles at ground level. Instead of getting taller each year as most trees do, the seedling gets thicker around each year but stays right at ground level, producing a thicker and thicker cluster of needles. This is called the grass stage."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Craig Loehle. *On the Shoulders of Giants*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1994, pp. 131-132.

“While in the grass stage, it is quite resistant to fire. The growing tip of the tree is close to the ground where temperatures are lowest during a fire and it is further protected by the thick cluster of green needles. When the seedling is sufficiently robust and has deep enough roots, it suddenly shoots up at the rate of three to six feet in height per year. In just a few years it is tall enough and has thick enough bark to survive most brush fires.”

“The Bahá'í Faith may be said to have been in the grass stage until recently: putting down deep roots while protected by the leafy green shelter of obscurity.”

During the period of quiet growth, the Faith has put down deep roots in the hearts of the believers through deepening, supplemented by the extensive body of publications and translations of the Holy Writings (at last count in 1993, the number of publishing trusts stands at 29 and the number of languages into which Bahá'u'lláh's writings have been translated at 802) and in the soils of the earth in the form of Assemblies (165 National Assemblies and 20,435 Local Assemblies) and appointed institutions (72 Counsellors and 846 Auxiliary Board Members), of Houses of Worship (7), of schools (178 academic and 488 tutorial) and radio stations (7), and of social and economic projects (1344).<sup>13</sup>

Having emerged from obscurity in 1984, we have left the safety of the grass stage and are vulnerable to the fires that rage around us. And like the longleaf pine, rapid growth is essential at this stage in the life of the Bahá'í community in order that we pass through it safely.

I can, therefore, understand why the Universal House of Justice in its in its Ridvan message of 1993 “drew the attention of the Bahá'í world to the critical need for a massive expansion of the Bahá'í community in the years immediately ahead.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *The Bahá'í World, 1992-93: An International Record*. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre Publications, 1993.

<sup>14</sup> See note 2 of this paper

As Loehle so aptly remarked, "To falter leaves us in a very vulnerable position. We become vulnerable to attack because we are noticed but have small numbers. We become vulnerable when our credibility is questioned as the outside world begins to expect us to put Bahá'u'lláh's teachings into practice in the life of society, even though we may not be financially or administratively ready to do so."<sup>15</sup>

### Spreading Worldwide

With another analogy drawn from biology — this time an agricultural weed studied in the farm fields of South Carolina — Loehle described another process at work in the spread of the Faith.

He explained, "The weed was found to grow in numbers slowly within individual fields but to spread to distant fields as seeds riding on agricultural equipment. Upon entering a new field it would very gradually increase in that field, being apparently rare there for a long time but providing seeds to be carried to further fields. A computer model of the spatial spread of this pest led to interesting conclusions. As the weed spread in this island-hopping manner, the populations in the newly colonized fields would be very low and easy to overlook. It would go unnoticed until suddenly, after a few years, it would have occupied most fields in an entire county and overrun them. This is because each isolated population was growing exponentially but starting from very small numbers. Because the population was scattered, the numbers appeared smaller than they actually were and the true rate of growth was not evident. This type of exponential growth, based on constant dispersal to outlying areas, is exactly what we see in the progress of the Bahá'í Faith as a consequence of the plans of Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Craig Loehle. *On the Shoulders of Giants*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1994, pp. 132-133.

<sup>16</sup> Craig Loehle. *On the Shoulders of Giants*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1994, pp. 133-134.

I am reminded of the directives from Shoghi Effendi in the last year of his earthly life to the friends in both India <sup>17</sup> and North America <sup>18</sup> to establish a Spiritual Assembly on a firm and enduring basis with a nucleus of about fifteen Bahá'ís in the community so that the other believers are free to disperse and teach elsewhere, and that they should consider it their duty to do so.

In fact, this same process, as directed by the Universal House of Justice, is at work in the microcosm of the virgin territory of mainland China, which called for the establishment of four hundred localities throughout the mainland and with hundred and fifty of these localities populated by fifteen local believers in the space of a few short years and under the protection of obscurity. At last count, there are already two hundred and ninety localities throughout mainland China, and thirty-five of these localities have fifteen or more local believers.

Shoghi Effendi, in a letter dated 30 June 1952 written on his behalf to a National Spiritual Assembly, has affirmed that "as the Cause spread all over the world its rate of acceleration increases, too ..." and reassured us, if we were wondering whether it is worth the enormous effort, and the expenditure of our limited resources, to establish the Faith in remote parts of the world, that "new centres in Africa, in some mysterious way, have spiritual repercussions which aid in forming new centres everywhere." <sup>19</sup>

### **The Bahá'í Community Today**

When the Guardian launched the World Spiritual Crusade in 1953 the Faith was still in the stage of obscurity. The crusade paved "the way for,

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<sup>17</sup> Shoghi Effendi. *Messages of Shoghi Effendi to the Indian Subcontinent, 1923-1957*. Compiled and Edited by Iran Furutan Muhajir. New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995, p. 414.

<sup>18</sup> Shoghi Effendi. *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America, 1947-1957*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970, p. 128.

<sup>19</sup> Letter dated 30 June 1952 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly. Cited in Statement and Compilation on "Promoting Entry by Troops" prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice dated October 1995.

and constitute the prelude to, the initiation of the laborious and tremendously long process of establishing in the course of subsequent crusades in all the newly opened sovereign states, dependencies and islands of the planet, as well as in the remaining territories of the globe, the framework of the Administrative Order of the Faith, with its attendant agencies, and of eventually erecting in these territories still more pillars to share in sustaining the weight and in broadening the foundation of the Universal House of Justice.”<sup>20</sup>

Twelve National Spiritual Assemblies were entrusted with the execution of the crusade. By the end of the crusade in 1963, fifty-six National Spiritual Assemblies were established to elect the first Universal House of Justice. And by Ridvan 1996, the pillars of the Universal House of Justice will have totaled a hundred and seventy-nine.

According to *The Bahá'í World, 1992-1993*, the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies have risen from 3,555 in 1963 to 20,435 in 1993, and the number of localities where Bahá'ís reside stands at 120,046. Altogether, it is estimated that at least 2,112 different ethnic and tribal backgrounds are represented in the Bahá'í community. With its diffusion to 205 countries, the Bahá'í Faith, according to *Encyclopedia Britannica, 1992*, is now the second most wide-spread of the world's religions, exceeded only by Christianity. The membership of the Bahá'í world community has also increased dramatically from an estimated 408,000 in 1963 to over 5 million today.<sup>21</sup>

### **Rapid Growth**

Such deep roots and worldwide spread are the necessary conditions within the Faith for rapid growth. The Bahá'í world community is ready. Therefore, I welcome this process.

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<sup>20</sup> Shoghi Effendi. *Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-1957*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971, p. 152.

<sup>21</sup> See note 11 of this paper

Shoghi Effendi, in his directive dated July 18, 1953, during the opening year of the crusade, stressed that the "twofold task of extension and consolidation must be supplemented by continuous and strenuous efforts to increase speedily not only the number of the avowed followers of the Faith .... but also to swell the ranks of its active supporters who will consecrate their time, resources and energy to the effectual spread of its teachings and the multiplication of its administrative institutions."<sup>22</sup>

This equally vital task — which is one that primarily concerns and challenges each single individual believer whatever his rank, capacity or origin — is that of "winning to the Faith fresh recruits to the slowly yet steadily advancing army of the Lord of Hosts".<sup>23</sup>

"Such a steady flow of reinforcements is absolutely vital and is of extreme urgency, for nothing short of the vitalizing influx of new blood that will reanimate the world Bahá'í community can safeguard the prizes which, at so great a sacrifice involving the expenditure of so much time, effort and treasure, are now being won in virgin territories by Bahá'u'lláh's valiant Knights, whose privilege is to constitute the spearhead of the onrushing battalions which, in diverse theaters and in circumstances often adverse and extremely challenging, are vying with each other for the spiritual conquest of the unsundered territories and islands on the surface of the globe."<sup>24</sup>

## **ENTRY BY TROOPS**

"This flow, moreover, will presage and hasten the advent of the day which, as prophesied by Abdu'l-Baha, will witness the entry by troops of peoples of divers nations and races into the Bahá'í world — a day which, viewed in its proper perspective, will be the prelude to that long awaited hour when a mass conversion on the part of these same nations and races,

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<sup>22</sup> Shoghi Effendi. *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America, 1947-1957*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970, pp. 116-117.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p117

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

and as a direct result of a chain of events, momentous and possibly catastrophic in nature, and which cannot as yet be even dimly visualized, will suddenly revolutionize the fortunes of the Faith, derange the equilibrium of the world, and reinforce a thousandfold the numerical strength as well as the material power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.”<sup>25</sup>

The steady flow of new active believers to the Bahá'í community will hasten the advent of entry by troops. It is also clear what it is that must continually concern and challenge me, the individual believer, regardless of my rank, capacity or origin.

### Conditions Outside the Faith

As the House of Justice has so succinctly pointed out, “the Four Year Plan’s aim at accelerating the process of entry by troops identifies a necessity” not only “at this stage in the progress of the Cause” but “in the state of human society”.<sup>26</sup>

“Our work is intended not only to increase the size and consolidate the foundations of our community, but more particularly to exert a positive influence on the affairs of the entire human race.”

Viewed in this light, I should not only welcome this process, I should embrace it whole-heartedly. Since the beginning of the human race, how many can claim to have the opportunity, and certainly not due to any merit on my part, to do something that will have a positive influence on the whole of mankind.

So what are the conditions outside the Faith?

Seeing the trees of materialism growing ever taller in Singapore and the trees of spirituality barely discernible above the ground, it is difficult to

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<sup>25</sup> Shoghi Effendi. *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America, 1947-1957*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970, p. 117.

<sup>26</sup> See note 1 of this paper

imagine that the forest of the world is facing imminent devastation. It is at times like this that I open the book, "Citadel of Faith", turn to page 124, and again read the passage "America Passing Through Crisis".<sup>27</sup>

## World Peril

Addressed to the American Bahá'í community on July 28, 1954, some nine years after the Second World War, and at a time when the North American continent was incomparable in material wealth and power, Shoghi Effendi warned that "the crass materialism, which lays excessive and ever-increasing emphasis on material well-being, forgetful of those things of the spirit on which alone a sure and stable foundation can be laid for human society ... is the chief factor in precipitating the dire ordeals and world-shaking crises that must necessarily involve the burning of cities and the spread of terror and consternation in the hearts of men. Indeed a foretaste of the devastation which this consuming fire will wreak upon the world, and with which it will lay waste the cities of the nations participating in this tragic world-engulfing contest, has been afforded by the last World War (Second World War), marking the second stage in the global havoc which humanity, forgetful of its God and heedless of the clear warnings uttered by His appointed Messenger for this day, must, alas, inevitably experience. It was this same all-pervasive, pernicious materialism against which the voice of the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant (Abdu'l-Baha) was raised, with pathetic persistence, from platform and pulpit, in His addresses to the heedless multitudes, which, on the morrow of His fateful visit to both Europe and America (1912-1913), found themselves suddenly swept into the vortex of a tempest which in its range and severity was unsurpassed in the world's history (First World War)."

I was born after the Second World War. But from what I have heard from my late mother, and from what I have read in the books and seen in the movies, it was a time of extreme difficulties and great devastation. It boggles the mind to imagine what it would be like if the Second World

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<sup>27</sup> Shoghi Effendi. *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America, 1947-1957*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970, pp. 124-127.

War was only a “foretaste of the devastation which this consuming fire will wreak upon the world, and with which it will lay waste the cities of the nations participating in this tragic world-engulfing contest.”

The Guardian went on to state that “the American nation ... stands, indeed, from whichever angle one observes its immediate fortunes, in grave peril. The woes and tribulations which threaten it are partly avoidable, but mostly inevitable and God-sent, for by reason of them a government and people ... will find itself purged of its anachronistic conceptions, and prepared to play a preponderating role, as foretold by Abdu'l-Baha, in the hoisting of the standard of the Lesser Peace, in the unification of mankind, and in the establishment of a world federal government on this planet. These same fiery tribulations will not only firmly weld the American nation to its sister nations in both hemispheres, but will through their cleansing effect, purge it thoroughly of the accumulated dross which ingrained racial prejudice, rampant materialism, widespread ungodliness and moral laxity have combined, in the course of successive generations, to produce, and which have prevented her thus far from assuming the role of world spiritual leadership forecast by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's unerring pen (in case we wonder whether He might have missed something) — a role which she is bound to fulfill through travail and sorrow.

### Lesser Peace

Abdu'l-Baha in one of His Tablets, known as the Tablet of Seven Candles, declared that the “fifth candle is the unity of nations — a unity which in this century will be securely established, causing all peoples of the world to regard themselves as citizens of one common fatherland.”<sup>28</sup> This is that particular divine deadline.

Of course, we are not privy to the exact timing nor the exact nature of the catastrophe that will visit humanity. But the American nation, after passing through “fiery tribulations”, will find itself “prepared to play a preponderating role in hoisting the standard of the Lesser Peace”, and the

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<sup>28</sup> Shoghi Effendi. *The World Order of Baha'u'llah: Selected Letters*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991, p. 39.

political unification of the world, in which all nations will be “forced” into, will take place in this century.<sup>29</sup>

In case I vainly imagine somehow the island of Singapore might be spared these tribulations, I wisely recall Shoghi Effendi’s warning of “the devastation which this consuming fire will wreak upon the world, and with which it will lay waste the cities of the nations participating in this tragic world-engulfing contest.”<sup>30</sup> In any case, I cannot help but note that the end of the century is just outside the duration of the Four Year Plan by 8 months. We are living in interesting times.

It is not difficult, however, to imagine “after mankind has suffered, ... that the people will enter the Cause of God in troops.” In a letter dated 5 October 1953, written on his behalf to an individual believer, Shoghi Effendi told the believer that “the Bahá’ís see this new condition which will take place, as one on a mountain top sees the first glimpses of the dawn, before others are aware of it; and it is toward this that the Bahá’ís must work.”<sup>31</sup>

And the Universal House of Justice, seated high on the Mountain of God, sees “the growing receptivity of the peoples of the world to Bahá’u’lláh’s Message” and is convinced that “entry by troops will soon become an established pattern for the growth of the Faith in country after country.”<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion

It is clear to me that my role in the Four Year Plan is to contribute towards hastening the process of entry by troops, for I know “the longer

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<sup>29</sup> Kathy Lee. *Prelude to the Lesser Peace*. New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1989, p. 86.

<sup>30</sup> See note 20 of this paper

<sup>31</sup> Letter dated 5 October 1953 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer. Cited in Statement and Compilation on “Promoting Entry by Troops” prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice dated October 1995.

<sup>32</sup> See note 1 of this paper

the Divine Physician is withheld from healing the ills of the world, the more severe will be the crises, and the more terrible the sufferings of the patient.”<sup>33</sup>

In the next few months, soon after the launching of the Four Year Plan, I will have to do my part to initiate and sustain the process of Entry by Troops. I will be analysing the approaches to be adopted and the lines of action that I will take, which will form the second part of my report, “On The Nature of Bahá'í Communities.”

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<sup>33</sup> Helen Hornby. *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference*. New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, p. 89.