

# The Aghṣán

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The Arabic word **Aghṣán** ن اغصا (sing. Ghuṣn غصن, dual Ghusnan) meaning “Branches”, has been quoted and discussed by many scholars and well-known writers and Institutions at different levels. The main reason was the very important issue of Succession in the Guardianship and the future Bahá’í Administration without a Guardian.

The Bahá’í Community, after the passing of Shoghi Effendi, had a difficult time understanding the succession to the Guardianship. His passing was devastating; however, the legal decision that the succession was ended, alleviated many, particularly those of Catholic background, by reasons not far to find. Others had their faith shaken and became inactive. A very small number followed Remey the Spurious Aghṣán, ending with a kind of aberration with Pepe Remey Aghṣán, a non-Bahá’í.

Both, Wikipedia and Bahaipedia have this definition: “**Aghṣán** (‘Branches’), as a term in literature of the Bahá’í Faith referring to male descendants of Bahá’u’lláh. It has particular implications not only for the disposition of endowments but also for the succession of authority following the passing of Bahá’u’lláh and of his son ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.” Many others define this term as ‘the male blood descendants of Baha’u’llah” or “male line descendants.” This is the most common understanding.

‘Alí Nakhjavání, the well-known Bahá’í scholar said: “As to the question of using two alternatives for the future House of Justice, considering what happened to the **Aghṣán**, all of whom broke the Covenant during Shoghi Effendi’s lifetime, I tend to agree with you that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s purpose was to protect Shoghi Effendi. During Shoghi Effendi’s ministry, there were seven Aghṣán, all grandsons of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: two of them were his own brothers and five of them were male first cousins.”

The sons mentioned by Nakhjavání were: Ḥusayn and Riáz, and the first cousins: Ruhí, Suhayl, Fu’ád, Muníb and Ḥasan; all of them from the **female** line (daughters of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá).

The **Sons (Aghṣán)** of Bahá’u’lláh, at the time of His ascension, were:

By Navváb:

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, (His **sons died** in infancy)

By Fátimih,

Mírzá Muḥammad ‘Alí (had **three sons**: Músa, Shu‘a and Amín)

Badí’u’lláh (had **one son**: Ṣaláh)

Ziyá'u'lláh (had **no sons**)

By Gawhar

(**No sons**)

The only **Aghşán** here, are the three sons of **Mírzá Muḥammad ‘Alí** (the “Arch breaker of the Divine Covenant”) and the son of **Badí’u’lláh** (the” Chief Lieutenant” of the former).

Only two **Ghusnan** are mentioned in the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd: **Ghuşn-i-A‘zám** [the Most Mighty Branch, ‘**Abdu'l-Bahá**] and **Ghuşn-i-Akbar** [the Most Great Branch, **Mírzá Muḥammad ‘Alí**]

The other **Aghşán** were **Mírzá Ziyá’u’lláh**, **Mírzá Mihdí** (**Ghuşn-i-Aṭhar** “the Purest Branch”), and **Mírzá Badí’u’lláh**.

When ‘Abdu'l-Bahá removed **Mírzá Muḥammad ‘Alí** from the succession, due to his opposition to Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant and other atrocities against the Cause, He replaced him with Shoghi Effendi, with all his potential powers, the title of Branch included. He was named **Ghuşn-i-Mumtáz** (The Chosen Branch). Mumtáz also means, choicest or distinguished.

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The laymen did not have much to say on this issue; however, they could use (without knowing it) the Principle of Parsimony, according to which an explanation of a thing or event is made with **the fewest possible assumptions**. Also used as Occam’s Razor premise: **"the simplest explanation is usually the best one."**

It is clear and evident, that the term **Aghşán**, as used by Baha’u’llah, refers to **His Sons only**, according to the translations of Shoghi Effendi and others, for example:

-Gleanings, p. 244: ” ...Some have proclaimed their allegiance to one of **My Branches (Sons)**,...”

-ESW, p.93: “...Thou hast admonished one of **Thy Branches (Sons)**”

-Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 239: “...in particular, the **Aghşán (His sons)** to ponder...”

-Ḥaydar-‘Alí in Taherzadeh, *Covenant*, p.171: “Neither should I address them to any single **Ghuşn (Branch)**, instead they should be addressed to the **Aghşán (Branches)**.”

-Idem, p. 76: “It is impossible for the One True God to entrust **the guardianship** of His Cause to two individuals at the same time... Apart from all this, who is it in this world of being that can claim to rival the Master on any level.”

With the premise expressed above, some texts on the subject will be presented, using notes in brackets and in bold print. A pertinent note is added after each paragraph.

The basis of any discussion on the subject are, of course, God’s Most Holy Book and His Testament, and then, the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá.

# KITÁB-I-AQDAS

## Aqdas, v.121

*When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, **turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed** [ `Abdu'l-Bahá], **Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.***

## Aqdas, v. 174

*O people of the world! When the Mystic Dove will have winged its flight from its Sanctuary of Praise and sought its far-off goal, its hidden habitation, **refer ye whatsoever ye understand not in the Book to Him Who hath branched from this mighty Stock.***

Verse 121 refers to **leadership** and verse 174 to **Interpretation**.

Muhammad-Alí accepted the first verse as referred to `Abdu'l-Bahá, since it is quoted in the Aqdas, but that the second one refers to both; an impossibility to have one leader and two interpreters. The obsessed one against the Faith, Rev. Miller in his Azalí tract “The Bahá’í Faith”, contends that Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí would have been a much better Interpreter. A crucial point is that verse 174 refers to one person, HIM not to them.

## Aqdas, v. 42

*Endowments dedicated to charity revert to God, the Revealer of Signs. None hath the right to dispose of them without leave from Him Who is the Dawning-place of Revelation [**Baha’u’llah**]. After Him, this authority shall pass to [**My Sons**], and after them to [**a**] House of Justice – should it be established in the world {**by then**} – that they may use these endowments for the benefit of the Places which have been exalted in this Cause, and for whatsoever hath been enjoined upon them by Him who is the God of might and power. Otherwise, the endowments shall revert to the people of Baha who speak not except by His leave and judge save in accordance with what God hath decreed in this Tablet –, they are the Champions [**Custodians**] of victory betwixt heaven and earth – that they may use them in the manner that hath been laid down in the Book by God, the Mighty, the Bountiful.*

There was no need to explain that the end of the Guardianship was anticipated in the Aqdas, since the end was already established in the same Most Holy Book.

The term Champions has also been translated as: Custodians, Protectors, and Guardians. When the Hands of the Cause appointed nine of them to serve at the Holy Land, they called them Custodians, something that the believers understood as: “the people of Bahá who speak not except by His leave...”

# KITÁB-I-‘AHD

*(Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 220)*

*The Will of the divine Testator is this: It is incumbent upon the Aghṣán, the Afnán and My Kindred to turn, one and all, their faces towards the **Most Mighty Branch**. Consider that which We have revealed in Our Most Holy Book: `When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.' The object of this sacred verse is none other except the **Most Mighty Branch** [‘Abdu’l-Bahá]. Thus have We graciously revealed unto you Our potent Will, and I am verily the Gracious, the All-Powerful.\*\*\* Verily God hath ordained the station of the Greater Branch [Muhammad Ali] to be beneath that of the **Most Great Branch** [Abdu’l-Bahá]. He is in truth the Ordainer, the All-Wise. We have chosen ‘the Greater’ after ‘the Most Great’, as decreed by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed. \*\*\**

[‘Abdu’l-Baha] in brackets is referred to the **Most Mighty Branch** in one place and the **Most Great Branch** in another. It seems that the last verse \*\*\* could be better read as:

*\*\*\*Verily God hath ordained the station of the **Most Great Branch** [Muhammad-Ali] to be beneath that of the **Most Mighty Branch** [‘Abdu’l-Bahá]. He is in truth the Ordainer, the All-Wise. We have chosen **the Akbar** [Most Great] after the A‘zám [Most Mighty], as decreed by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.\*\*\**

Since both titles are superlatives, it will be better to use the Most Mighty for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá always, and the Most Great for Muḥammad-Alí, instead of the Most Great and the Greater. Since this is a matter of Arabic grammarians, it would be even better to have only the transliteration, A‘zám and Akbar.

## **The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’**

*In short, O ye beloved of the Lord! The Center of Sedition, **Mírzá Muḥammad ‘Alí**, in accordance with the decisive words of God and by reason of his boundless transgression... **hath grievously fallen and been cut off from the Holy Tree...***

These words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá constitute the most powerful declaration made by Him ever, the expulsion of Muḥammad ‘Alí, the one that would succeed Him, who was designated by the Manifestation in His Testament. Muḥammad ‘Alí, the Arch breaker of Baha’u’llah’s Covenant is not mentioned in The Most Holy Book; had he been mentioned in it, the problem would have been more complicated. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had to name another Guardian in his place, to conform with the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd. The selection of Shoghi Effendi – the youthful Branch, proved really a God given mandate.

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*O my loving friends! After the passing away of this wronged one [‘Abdu’l-Bahá], it is incumbent upon the Aghṣán (Branches), the Afnán (Twigs) of the Sacred Lote-Tree, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God and the loved ones of the Abhá Beauty to turn unto **Shoghi Effendi--the youthful branch** ...-- as **he** is the sign of God, the chosen branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God, **he** unto whom all the Aghṣán, the Afnán, the Hands of the Cause of God and His loved ones must turn. **He** is the Interpreter of the Word of God and **after him will succeed the first-born of his lineal descendants.***

This paragraph shows that **only his lineal descendants** could succeed him. Regarding the Guardianship, He only refers to the **youthful branch**, and always use **he** or **him**, never they or them. Linear descendants preclude anyone to claim Guardianship, (at least for one thousand years) and this includes any descendant of Baha'u'llah.

When Husayn Rabbani was expelled from the Faith for his association with Covenant Breakers and, among other matters, 'demeaned himself marrying a low-born Christian girl in Europe;' an explanation was requested regarding the terms applied. In the answer, a lapsus calami occurred when one of the secretaries called Husayn Rabbani an aghsan and afnan, from whom much more was expected. Certainly, he was an afnan, related to the Bab, seven cousins removed.

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*O ye beloved of the Lord! It is incumbent upon the Guardian of the Cause of God to appoint in his own lifetime him that shall become his successor, ... Thus, **should the first-born** of the Guardian of the Cause of God not manifest in himself the truth of the words "The child is the secret essence of its sire," that is, should he not inherit of the spiritual within him (the Guardian of the Cause of God) and his glorious lineage not be matched with a goodly character, then must he, (the Guardian of the Cause of God) choose another **Son [a younger son to succeed him]**.*

*For he [Shoghi Effendi] is, after [the guardianship of] `Abdu'l-Bahá, the Guardian of the Cause of God, (\*) the Afán, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause and the beloved of the Lord must obey **him** and turn unto **him**. He that obeyeth **him** not, hath not obeyed God; he that turneth away from **him**, hath turned away from God and he that denies **him**, hath denied the True One.*

(\*) Note that, the **Aghsán** are not mentioned.

There was no possibility to elect any "branch", unless one considers the sons of Muhammad-'Alí and Badí'u'lláh, the worst enemies of the Religion of God. 'Abdu'l-Baha to protect Shoghi Effendi and to avoid Muhammad Ali and his allies to have their own successor, wrote about a succession to maintain them at bay.

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*It is incumbent upon the **Aghsán [Sons of Baha'u'llah]**, the Afán of the Sacred Lote-Tree, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God and the loved ones of the Abhá Beauty to turn unto **Shoghi Effendi—the youthful branch** branched from the two hallowed and sacred Lote-Trees...*

Shoghi Effendi is referred to, several times, as "the youthful branch", as opposed to anyone that will claim to be a branch.

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*The mighty stronghold shall remain impregnable and safe through **obedience to him [Shoghi Effendi]** who is the Guardian of the Cause of God. It is incumbent upon **the members of the House of Justice**, upon all the **Aghsán**, the Afán, the Hands of the Cause of God to **show their obedience, submissiveness, and subordination unto the Guardian** of the Cause of God, to turn unto **him** and be lowly before **him**. He that opposeth **him** hath opposed the True One, ...*

If the members of the House of Justice must **show their obedience, submissiveness, and subordination unto the Guardian**, there is not much room to work independently. The House of Justice instituted by God must be completely independent, although always considering the thoughts and feelings of the people. The appointed Guardian is Shoghi Effendi – **the youthful branch**, no other.

Hájí Mírzá Taqí Afnán, the cousin of the Báb, received a letter from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, commanding him to arrange for the election of the Universal House of Justice should the threats against Him materialize. He was also informed that a Testament exists.

Without a plenipotentiary Guardian, an election of the Universal House of Justice at that time, would have been elected, with more probability, consisting of the most influential and well-known believers. It would have been astonishing to see one of the sessions; Sohrab fighting Remy, Ávárih adding wood to the fire and pressing to be the President, Dreyfus trying to translate, Níkú backing Ávárih, Khayru’lláh trying to have his share; a pandemonium in the mare magnum and the Faith sunk in it. Thanks God we had Shoghi Effendi if that case would have happened.

Had Shoghi Effendi considered that the Succession to the guardianship was of paramount importance, he had the duty, without any objection, to have another wife; something legal and moral.

There is no room to for adducing Bada’, a term that ‘denotes a change of a divine decision or ruling in response to the emergence of new circumstances.’ This only happens during the life of Major Manifestations, a time during which They can do whatsoever They please.

Shoghi Effendi fulfilled all his duties and beyond them. He did not appoint any successor, to be consistent with the Kitab-i-Aqdas and the Kitab-i-Ahd. With one stroke of his pen, he defeated all the internal enemies of the Faith and prepared the believers to do the same with the external ones. He wrapped up Shi‘a Imams “the superstition of the past.” He did not translate the Most Holy Book in its entirety, since the legal part, he considered a duty of the Universal House of Justice. He was the very person that fulfilled the Biblical prophecy of the 1335 years (Daniel 12:12)

To-day’s reality proves, without any doubt, that God’s purpose, was completely clear regarding the future of the Bahá’í World Order, with His People governing themselves under His guide.

It could be, no doubt, some concern to treat ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi in the same footing, when referring to both as Guardians, because both were Leaders and Interpreters of the Cause, which they are. However, the following quotation of Shoghi Efendi about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, shows that He is much more than that: ‘Abdu’l-Baha “One Who, though essentially human and holding a station radically and fundamentally different from that occupied by Bahá'u'lláh and His Forerunner, could still claim to be the perfect Exemplar of His Faith, to be endowed with super-human knowledge, and to be regarded as the stainless mirror reflecting His light...” (*God Passes By*, p. 241)