

Preface to the 1974 Edition *

Revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during the period of the first World War, the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* were not received until after the Armistice when communication with the Holy Land was restored. Each Tablet, as indicated in the text, was addressed either to the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada as one body, or to five regional areas of North America. In view of the fact that these Tablets designated the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada as a teaching agency chosen for an international mission, later editions were published under the title *America’s Spiritual Mission*.

The most notable responses made to these Tablets were the unique services of Martha Root in Latin America, Europe and the Orient, by Mr and Mrs Hyde Dunn in Australia, and by Mrs. H. Emogene Hoagg and Marion Jack in Alaska. The great services of Alma Knobloch in Germany and Fanny Knobloch in South Africa were rendered before the Tablets had been revealed.

From 1922 until 1936 the North American Bahá’ís were immersed in an effort to develop the institutions of the Administrative Order. It was in 1937 that the Guardian conferred upon America the mission of the first Seven-Year Plan, followed by the Second Seven-Year Plan in 1946. The Ten-Year World Crusade inaugurated in 1953 established an intercontinental teaching plan involving all the existing National Spiritual Assemblies of East and West. The Guardian had also made it clear that the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* constituted the Charter which conferred upon him the authority and obligation to establish these teaching plans.

While the American Bahá’ís have been endowed with primacy in the work of the World Crusade, the restrictive title *America’s Spiritual Mission* is no longer appropriate for the Master’s Tablets, and therefore beginning with this edition the original title is resumed.

—Horace Holley

* See details at bahai-library.com/marks_banani_divine_plan

Foreword to 1977 edition

In several letters and in *God Passes By* Shoghi Effendi has left us moving accounts of the circumstances in which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá revealed the Tablets of the Divine Plan as well as profound insights into the continuously emerging significance of these Tablets which he has characterized as the “mandate”¹ and the supreme “Charter for the teaching”.² A perusal of such passages from the writings of Shoghi Effendi leaves no doubt that the Tablets of the Divine Plan were a direct consequence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s visit to America and a final link in the chain of love and care which bound Him to the friends on this continent. It is entirely appropriate and enormously helpful, therefore, to preface this edition of *Tablets of the Divine Plan* with the words of the beloved Guardian:

The seeds which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ceaseless activities so lavishly scattered had endowed the United States and Canada, nay the entire continent, with potentialities such as it had never known in its history. On the small band of His trained and beloved disciples, and through them on their descendants, He, through that visit, had bequeathed a priceless heritage—a heritage which carried with it the sacred and primary obligation to arise and carry on in that fertile field the work He had so gloriously initiated. We can dimly picture to ourselves the wishes that must have welled from His eager heart as he bade His last farewell to that promising country. An inscrutable Wisdom, we can well imagine Him remark to His disciples on the eve of His departure, has, in His infinite bounty singled out your native land for the execution of a mighty purpose. Through the agency of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant I, as the ploughman, have been called upon since the beginning of my ministry to turn up and break its ground. The mighty confirmations that have, in the opening days of your career, rained upon you have prepared and invigorated its soil. The tribulations you subsequently were made to suffer have driven deep furrows into the field which my hands had prepared. The seeds with which I have been entrusted I have now scattered far and wide before you. Under your loving care, by your ceaseless exertions, every one of these seeds must germinate, every one must yield its destined fruit. A winter of unprecedented severity will soon be upon you. Its storm clouds are fast gathering on the horizon. Tempestuous winds will assail you from every side. The Light of the Covenant will be obscured through my departure. These mighty blasts, this wintry desolation, shall however pass away. The dormant seed will burst into fresh activity. It shall put forth its buds, shall reveal, in mighty institutions, its leaves and blossoms. The vernal showers which the tender mercies of my heavenly Father will cause to descend upon you will enable this tender plant to spread out its branches to regions far beyond the confines of your native land. And finally the steadily mounting sun of His Revelation, shining in its meridian splendor, will enable this mighty Tree of His Faith to yield, in the fullness of time and on your soil, its golden fruit.

¹ “... His mandate embodied in the Tablets of the Divine Plan.” Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 255.

² “... the Tablets of the Divine Plan ... are the Charter for the teaching of the Faith.” From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 29 September 1977, *Lights of Guidance*, no. 1628, p. 488 (1994).

The implications of such a parting message could not long remain unrevealed to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s initiated disciples. No sooner had He concluded His long and arduous journey across the American and European continents than the tremendous happenings to which He had alluded began to be made manifest. A conflict, such as He had predicted, severed for a time all means of communication with those on whom He had come to place such implicit trust and from whom He was expecting so much in return. The wintry desolation, with all its havoc and carnage, pursued during four years its relentless course, while He, repairing to the quiet solitude of His residence in the close neighborhood of Bahá’u’lláh’s hallowed shrine, continued to communicate His thoughts and wishes to those whom He had left behind and on whom He had conferred the unique tokens of His favor. In the immortal Tablets which, in the long hours of His communion with His dearly beloved friends He was moved to reveal, He unfolded to their eyes His conception of their spiritual destiny, His Plan for the mission He wished them to undertake. The seeds His hands had sown He was now watering with that same care, that same love and patience, which had characterized His previous endeavors whilst He was laboring in their midst.³

In *God Passes By* Shoghi Effendi tells us that during the Great War ‘Abdu’l-Bahá felt acutely the virtual stoppage of all communication with most of [the] Bahá’í centers throughout the world. Agony filled His soul at the spectacle of human slaughter precipitated through humanity’s failure to respond to the summons He had issued, or to heed the warnings He had given. Surely sorrow upon sorrow was added to the burden of trials and vicissitudes which He, since His boyhood, had borne so heroically for the sake, and in the service, of His Father’s Cause.

And yet during these somber days, the darkness of which was reminiscent of the tribulations endured during the most dangerous period of His incarceration in the prison-fortress of ‘Akká, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, whilst in the precincts of His Father’s Shrine, or when dwelling in the House He occupied in ‘Akká, or under the shadow of the Báb’s sepulcher on Mt. Carmel, was moved to confer once again, and for the last time in His life, on the community of His American followers a signal mark of His special favor by investing them, on the eve of the termination of His earthly ministry, through the revelation of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, with a world mission, whose full implications even now, after the lapse of a quarter of a century, still remain undisclosed, and whose unfoldment thus far, though as yet in its initial stages, has so greatly enriched the spiritual as well as the administrative annals of the first Bahá’í century.⁴

The first eight of these Tablets were penned between March 26 and April 22, 1916. History records this period as one of awesome bloodletting in Europe. It is truly breathtaking to contemplate the devising of the Divine Strategy for the redemption of the planet in the midst of the din and destruction of the old order. The transforming vision of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spreads before us the plans for the spiritual conquest of the globe. The final six Tablets were revealed between February 2 and March 8, 1917, barely a month before the entry of the

³ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 86–7.

⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 304–5.

United States into the war. Of the first group, five Tablets had actually reached America and been published in the September 8, 1916, issue of *Star of the West*.⁵ After that all communication with the Holy Land was severed, and the remainder of the Tablets were kept in a vault under the Shrine of the Báb on Mt. Carmel for the duration of the war. They were dispatched to America at the end of the war where they were unveiled in befitting ceremonies during the “Convention of the Covenant” held at Hotel McAlpin in New York City on April 26–30, 1919.

Although exemplary individuals like the Dunns and Martha Root had given immediate response to the call of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for “*souls who will illumine this dark universe and quicken to life this dead world*”,⁶ the full implementation of the Plan began in 1937 when Shoghi Effendi conferred on the North American Bahá’í community the mission of the First Seven Year Plan—“The first stage of that enterprise, which had been held in abeyance, for well-nigh twenty years, while the administrative institutions of the Faith were slowly taking shape and were being perfected.”⁷

The spiritual conquest of the Western Hemisphere—completed by 1944, the centennial of the birth of our Faith—was not the only fruit of that First Seven Year Plan. It served as a working model of the systematic process by which the beloved Guardian was guiding the Bahá’í world toward the realization of the Master’s vision. Regional plans of pioneering were entrusted to the friends in the East even before the end of the Second World War.

The Second Seven Year Plan spanning the years 1946–1953 gave the valiant North American Bahá’í community the task of the spiritual revitalization of Europe, ravaged once more by the devastation and desolation of war.

The grand stage in the unfolding realization of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Divine Plan was ushered in by the beloved Guardian in 1953, the eve of the hundredth anniversary of Bahá’u’lláh’s prophetic revelations in the Síyáh-Chál of Tīhrán, with the inception of the Ten Year Crusade. Although several national Bahá’í communities had already undertaken pioneering plans of their own before 1953, now for the first time the entire Bahá’í world was given a share in the fulfillment of the goals of the Master’s Plan by being woven into one mighty Crusade for planting the banner of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh on the entire planet.

The Nine and the Five Year Plans (1964–1973; 1974–1979) of the Universal House of Justice may be seen as the successive steps in the inexorable and triumphant march of the armies of Bahá’u’lláh to the call sounded in the Tablets of the Divine Plan.* During all these momentous accomplishments, and the epochs yet to come, the loving voice of the Master heard so movingly in the prayers which accompany these Tablets, shall remain as our source of inspiration and confirmation.

Amin Banani
October 1976

⁵ *Star of the West*, VII:10, pp. 87–91.

⁶ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, p. 80.

⁷ Shoghi Effendi, *This Decisive Hour*, pp. 117–8.

* The Seven Year Plan (1979–1986), the Six Year Plan (1986–1992), and the Three Year Plan (1993–1996) continue the process.—Ed.

Foreword to 1993 edition ⁸

During the sixteen years since last impression of *Tablets of the Divine Plan* the Bahá'í international community has undergone [a] dramatic transformation. Notable external indices of growth include the completion of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice; the dedication of Bahá'í Houses of Worship in India and Samoa; the inauguration of radio stations in Ecuador, Peru, the United States, Bolivia, Panama, and Liberia; the rapid expansion of the Faith in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union following the collapse of the iron curtain; and the enrolment of large numbers of people, with some countries enlisting many thousands and others hundreds of thousands, bringing the Faith's worldwide membership to at least five million in 1993.

Internally, the capacity of the Bahá'í community to implement the Bahá'í teachings in daily life has enlarged substantially. Bahá'ís have increasingly become involved in the promotion of world peace, environmental causes, literacy, the work of the United Nations and its agencies, and projects designed to improve social and economic conditions. Bahá'í youth in growing numbers have participated in periods of extended service, and Bahá'í scholarship has emerged as a force contributing to a fuller understanding of the Bahá'í teachings. All betoken a greater ability of Bahá'ís to apply their religious beliefs to the world around them.

As always in the advancement of the Cause of God, victory and crisis are locked in close embrace. In 1979 the Islamic revolution in Írán engulfed the mother community of the Bahá'í world in a firestorm of persecution. The execution of hundreds of Bahá'ís, many of whom occupied key positions of service at both local and national levels; the demolition of the House of the Báb in Shiráz; the seizure of holy places, properties, bank accounts, and pension funds; the dismissal of many Bahá'ís from their jobs; and the banning of Bahá'í administrative institutions were elements of a systematic campaign aimed at eradicating the Bahá'í community. However, the pressure of world opinion, aroused by the efforts of Bahá'ís throughout the world, induced a relaxation of overt persecution, although the Bahá'í Faith in Írán continues to be outlawed and its members denied basic human rights.

Indeed, the crisis into which the Bahá'í community was thrown in 1979 proved an impetus to the victories that have marked the last fifteen years of growth. While presenting the case of the Iranian Bahá'ís to the United Nations, heads of state, parliaments, the media, and the public, Bahá'ís rose to a higher plane of organization and dedication. Deeply moved by the plight of their fellow believers, they widened the scope of their efforts and channelled their energies into actions worthy of the sacrifices of the Iranian Bahá'í community. Correspondingly, worldwide recognition of the Faith reached a new level.

From a broader vantage point the victories of the Bahá'í community over the past sixteen years may be seen as further unfoldments of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan. Revealed to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada in 1916 and 1917, these remarkable documents elaborate on the call sounded by the Báb to the "peoples of the West" to "issue forth" from

⁸ *From Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, New Delhi, India. 2000.

their ‘cities’ and aid His Cause”⁹ and on intimations made by Bahá’u’lláh to the glorious destiny America would attain in the future and to the “‘signs of His dominion’”¹⁰ that would appear in the West. In the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* ‘Abdu’l-Bahá fashions in broad outline a master plan for the spiritual regeneration of the world and entrusts its execution to the Bahá’ís of North America, whom He urges to arise to propagate the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh throughout the planet and thereby set in motion the redemptive forces released by Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation.

The task of implementing the Divine Plan fell to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s grandson, Shoghi Effendi, whom ‘Abdu’l-Bahá appointed Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith in His Will and Testament. Shoghi Effendi envisioned the Divine Plan as a “laborious and tremendously long process” involving the establishment of the Bahá’í Administrative Order “in all the newly opened sovereign states, dependencies and islands of the planet, as well as in all the remaining territories of the globe”¹¹ The process began in 1921 with a “period of incubation”¹² during which Shoghi Effendi introduced principles of Bahá’í administration and established an initial contingent of local and national spiritual assemblies. In 1937 he formally launched the Divine Plan with the first in a series of plans designed to carry out its provisions to progressively fuller degrees, a pattern the Universal House of Justice continues today.

Shoghi Effendi saw the Divine Plan as consisting of epochs and stages. The first stage of its first epoch began with a Seven Year Plan (1937–1944) assigned to the Bahá’ís of North America. The second stage comprised another Seven Year Plan (1946–1953) undertaken by Bahá’ís of the United States and plans of varying duration pursued by the Bahá’ís of the British Isles; of Canada; of Central America; of South America; of Australia and New Zealand; of India, Pakistani, and Burma; of Germany and Austria; of Írán; of ‘Iráq; and of Egypt and the Sudan. The third and final stage of the first epoch was the Ten Year Crusade (1953–1963), which Bahá’ís throughout the world pursued in a common undertaking. The second epoch of the Divine Plan began in 1964 under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice and consists of stages marked by the Nine year Plan (1964–1973), the Five Year Plan (1974–1979), the Seven Year Plan (1979–1986), the Six Year Plan (1986–1992), and the Three Year Plan (1993–1996).

The Divine Plan will continue to evolve throughout the Formative Age and into what Shoghi Effendi called the “vast reaches of time stretching into the Golden ... Age ...”,¹³ the third and crowning age of the Bahá’í Dispensation. The Golden Age will witness the flowering of a world civilization that is “the offspring and primary purpose”¹⁴ of the Most Great Peace—the Kingdom of God on earth—the establishment of which is the object of Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation.

⁹ Shoghi Effendi, *This Decisive Hour*, p. 116.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World: 1950–1957*, p. 153.

¹² Shoghi Effendi, *This Decisive Hour*, p. 73.

¹³ Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America 1947–1957*, p. 114.

¹⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America 1947–1957*, p. 7.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, together with His Will and Testament, constitute the greatest legacy He left to posterity and thus occupy a pre-eminent position among Bahá’í sacred scriptures. As we move farther and further away from their date of revelation, we witness with amazement the transforming effects that these documents exert in the world and return with fresh and eager eyes to glean from their lines the manifold meanings that hold the key to the world’s salvation.

Geoffrey W. Marks

Publisher's foreword to 1993 edition

Five of the fourteen Tablets in *Tablets of the Divine Plan* were published in *Star of the West* on September 8, 1916, before World War I severed communications between the United States and Palestine. After World War I all fourteen Tablets, which were translated by Ahmad Sohrab, were shared with the Bahá'í convention in New York City and published in a small volume together with comments made on the occasion by Ahmad Sohrab. The cover bore the title *Unveiling of the Divine Plan*, and the title page, the words *Tablets, Instructions and Words of Explanation Revealed by Abdul Baha Abbas for the Assemblies and Meetings of the Bahá'is of the United States and Canada*.

In 1936 the Bahá'í Publishing Committee brought out a small volume containing only the Tablets of the Divine Plan and bearing the title *America's Spiritual Mission*. It was reprinted in 1948.

In 1959 the Tablets were reissued under the title *Tablets of the Divine Plan* and were subsequently reprinted seven times, with corrections being made to the prayers in 1971 at the request of the Universal House of Justice.

In 1977 a new edition was published, printing the Tablets in chronological order and including information from the Tablets on when and where they were revealed. Many passages translated by Shoghi Effendi replaced earlier translations.

The 1993 edition, the first one to be made available in a pocket-size format, is designed to make the book available to more readers. At the request of the Universal House of Justice, a number of changes have been made to ensure accuracy and consistency: Several passages translated by Shoghi Effendi replace earlier translations; one passage and a few words have been retranslated to correct errors; direct quotations and paraphrases from the Qur'án and the Bible have been clarified; punctuation, capitalization, and lowercasing have been made consistent; several typographical errors have been eliminated; and footnotes are provided for verses from and allusions to the Qur'án and the Bible.

To facilitate references to any edition of *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, the Tablets and all the paragraphs in the Tablets have been given numbers. This numbering system, first adopted by Bahá'í Verlag in its 1987 edition of *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, will, as it is adopted by publishers world-wide, enable readers to locate and refer to passages in virtually any edition. The paragraph numbers in Tablets 6 and 8 differ by one number from those used in the German edition of *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, for the word "Supplication", which is part of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's text, is given a separate paragraph number in the U.S. edition.