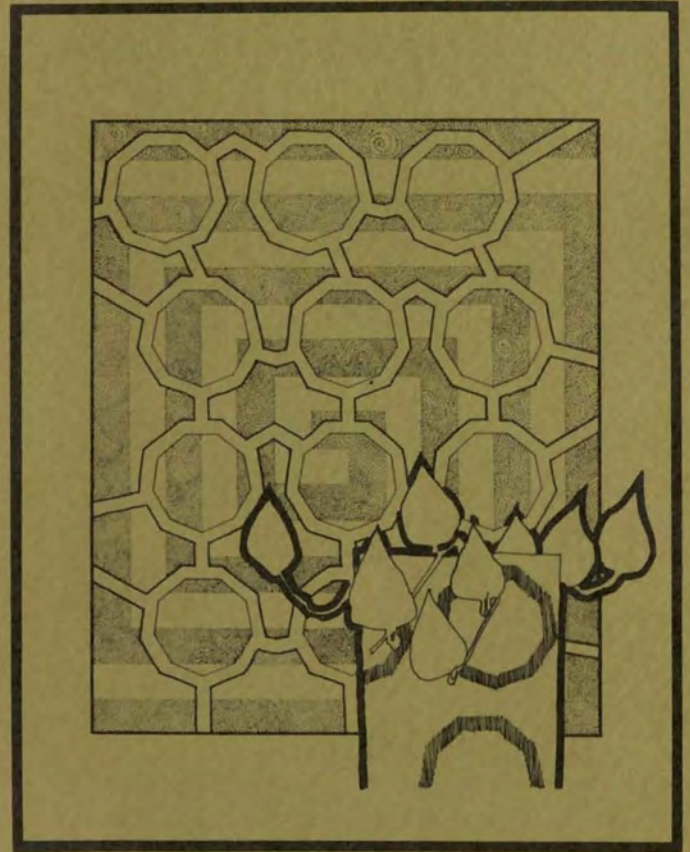


The Power of the Covenant

Part Two



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The Power of the Covenant

The Problem of Covenant-Breaking

Part Two

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The Power of the Covenant

There is a power in this Cause—a mysterious power—far, far, far away from the ken of men and angels; that invisible power is the cause of all these outward activities. It moves the hearts. It rends the mountains. It administers the complicated affairs of the Cause. It inspires the friends. It dashes into a thousand pieces all the forces of opposition. It creates new spiritual worlds. This is the mystery of the Kingdom of Abhá!

The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 70

Know this for a certainty that today, the penetrative power in the arteries of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant. The body of the world will not be moved through any power except through the power of the Covenant. There is no other power like unto this. This Spirit of the Covenant is the real Centre of love and is reflecting its rays to all parts of the globe, which are resuscitating and regenerating man and illuminating the path to the Divine Kingdom.

ibid., p. 71

The first condition is firmness in the Covenant of God. For the power of the Covenant will protect the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh from the doubts of the people of error. It is the fortified fortress of the Cause of God and the firm pillar of the religion of God. Today no power can conserve the oneness of the Bahá'í world save the Covenant of God; otherwise differences like unto a most great tempest will encompass the Bahá'í world. It is evident that the axis of the oneness of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant and nothing else. ... Therefore, in the beginning one must make his steps firm in the Covenant—so that the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh may encircle from all sides, the cohorts of the Supreme Concourse may become the supporters and the helpers, and the exhortations and advices of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, like unto the pictures engraved on stone, may remain permanent and ineffaceable in the tablets of the hearts.

ibid., p. 77

Foreword

On the weekend of July 4 - 8, 1975, the members of all the senior institutions of the Bahá'í Faith in North America gathered at the House of Worship in Wilmette, to participate in a special conference called by the Universal House of Justice. The subject was the responsibility of the Bahá'í community for the protection of the Cause entrusted to us by Bahá'u'lláh. Three Hands of the Cause participated, as did all of the members of the Continental Board of Counsellors and the three National Spiritual Assemblies. All of the Auxiliary Board Members for North America likewise took part.

The conference had originated in an appeal from the Universal House of Justice dated November 26, 1974:

Five months before he passed away, the beloved Guardian ... drew our attention to the fact that from both without and within the Faith evidences of "increasing hostility" and "persistent machinations" were apparent, and that they foreshadowed the "dire contests" predicted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which were destined to "range the Army of light against the forces of darkness, both secular and religious."

The House of Justice went on to say:

The marvellous victories won in the name of Bahá'u'lláh since those words were written, and the triumphs increasingly being achieved by His dedicated and ardent lovers in every land, will no doubt serve to rouse the internal and external enemies of the Faith to fresh attempts to attack the Faith and dampen the enthusiasm of its supporters.

The House of Justice noted some recent evidences that this reaction has already begun in various parts of the world, and enclosed a compilation of excerpts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the beloved Guardian, which explain the principle that the progressive unfoldment of the Faith is bound, by its very nature, to raise up opposition which in turn will accelerate the expansion of the Cause. With this principle in mind, the House of Justice concluded:

We feel strongly that, whatever method is chosen to inform the friends, the time has come for them to clearly grasp the inevitability of the critical contests that lie ahead, to give you (the National Spiritual Assemblies) their full support ... and aid and enable the Faith of God to scale loftier heights, win more signal triumphs, and traverse more vital stages in its predestined course to complete victory and worldwide ascendancy.

On receipt of this letter, Canada's National Assembly began developing a series of publications and regional seminars for the education of the Canadian community in the subject of the protection of the Cause. At this point we received further advice from the House of Justice that they were calling a special conference on the subject for the institutions of the Faith in North America. It was this meeting which assembled at the House of Worship, the weekend of July 4 - 8, and which produced important advances in the unity of the institutions of the Faith on this continent.

During the course of the consultations at Wilmette, our National Assembly had an opportunity to present the outline of the program which we were developing. It consisted essentially of resource material for a series of four weekend institutes to be conducted by the National Assembly for groups of local Spiritual Assemblies. It is this material, modified and expanded as a result of the invaluable discussions at Wilmette, that forms the content of this series of four booklets.

Each booklet introduces one of four different aspects of the subject of the protection of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and provides footnotes which will serve as an index to the Bahá'í texts from which the reference material has been drawn. The themes of the four presentations are:

- I Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant with Mankind.
- II The Problem of Covenant-breaking.
- III The Bahá'í Faith and Its Critics.
- IV Our Covenant with Bahá'u'lláh.

The booklets have been prepared as a stimulus and general

guide to group discussions. Clearly, the material is in no sense a comprehensive presentation of the subject matter concerned: the Cause of God is like an ocean and the truths it contains are limitless. Nor do the booklets represent authoritative statements of Bahá'í belief, apart from the various excerpts from the Scriptures of the Faith and from the commentaries of the Guardian and the guidance of the Universal House of Justice which are quoted.

Rather, the spirit of the discussion which the National Assembly hopes these thoughts will provide in the community is that described by the Universal House of Justice in a statement dealing with one of the central themes touched on in this series:

A clear distinction is made in our Faith between authoritative interpretation and the interpretation or understanding that each individual arrives at for himself from his study of its teachings. While the former is confined to the Guardian, the latter, according to the guidance given to us by the Guardian himself, should by no means be suppressed. In fact such individual interpretation is considered the fruit of man's rational power and conducive to a better understanding of the teachings, provided that no disputes or arguments arise among the friends and the individual himself understands and makes it clear that his views are merely his own. Individual interpretations continually change as one grows in comprehension of the teachings. As Shoghi Effendi wrote: "To deepen in the Cause means to read the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master so thoroughly as to be able to give it to others in its pure form. ... There is no limit to the study of the Cause. The more we read the Writings, the more truths we can find in them, the more we will see that our previous notions were erroneous." (*Well-spring of Guidance*, pp. 88-89)

Faithfully,

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'IS OF CANADA

The Problem of Covenant-Breaking

Introduction

The purpose of this second booklet in the series *The Power of the Covenant* is to discuss one of the most precious and vital aspects of the Bahá'í Faith—the Teachings which provide us with guidance for protection of the Covenant from the attacks of Covenant-breakers.

The Covenant brought by Bahá'u'lláh is unique, having no parallel in recorded history. Likewise, His Teachings on the protection of the Covenant from Covenant-breaking have no parallel in previous religious dispensations. Implementation of these Teachings is vital, so that the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh may speedily accomplish its God-given task of transmuting hate into love, malice into benevolence, and division into unity.

Some salient features of the Covenant are reviewed here briefly, for the sake of completeness. For a more comprehensive treatment of this subject the reader is referred to the first booklet in this series, *Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant with Mankind*. The discussion of Covenant-breaking is set out in question-and-answer form, to focus on the questions which typically are asked when the subject is considered at a Bahá'í gathering.

I The Covenant of Baha'u'llah

Let us begin with a definition of the term *Covenant* and the meaning associated with its usage in the Bahá'í Writings. The Universal House of Justice states:

A Covenant in the religious sense is a binding agreement between God and man, whereby God requires of man certain behaviour in return for which He guarantees certain blessings, or whereby He gives man certain bounties in return for which He takes from those who accept them an undertaking to behave in a certain way.¹

The term *Covenant* is used to refer to two distinct types of agreement set out in Divine Revelation:

There is, for example, the Greater Covenant which every Manifestation of God makes with His followers, promising that in the fullness of time a new Manifestation will be sent, and taking from them the undertaking to accept Him when this occurs. There is also the Lesser Covenant that a Manifestation of God makes with His followers that they will accept His appointed successor after Him. If they do so, the Faith can remain united and pure. If not, the Faith becomes divided and its force spent.²

Within the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh we find reference to both types of Covenant. The Greater Covenant is re-affirmed in countless passages in which Bahá'u'lláh describes the majesty and glory which surrounds the successive appearances of Manifestations of God. While anticipating future Manifestations, Bahá'u'lláh warns us that no Manifestation will appear for less than one thousand years:

Whoso layeth claim to a Revelation direct from God ere the expiration of a full thousand years, such a man is assuredly a lying impostor. ... Should a man appear ere the lapse of a full thousand years—each year consisting of twelve months according to the Qur'án, and of nineteen months of nineteen days each, according to the Bayán—and if such a man reveal to your eyes all the signs of God, unhesitatingly reject him!³

The Lesser Covenant brought by Bahá'u'lláh stands unique, without parallel in the religions of the past. The Universal House of Justice states:

It is a Covenant of this kind that Bahá'u'lláh made with His followers regarding 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and that 'Abdu'l-Bahá perpetuates through the Administrative Order that Bahá'u'lláh had already created. The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, however is unique in religious history because it was made

clearly and explicitly in writing. Therefore, although individuals have broken the Covenant and thus excluded themselves from the community of the Faithful, they have never succeeded in destroying the Covenant itself: it remains inviolable and is the fulfilment of the prophecy that this is the Day that shall not be followed by Night.⁴

This Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh is vital to the fulfilment of the aims of the Faith. Its purposes, explained by the Guardian are "to perpetuate the influence of the Faith, insure its integrity, safeguard it from schism, and stimulate its world-wide expansion."⁵

Both the purpose and the establishment of the Covenant are described by the Universal House of Justice:

To direct and canalize the forces released by His Revelation He instituted His Covenant, whose power has preserved the integrity of His Faith, maintained its unity and stimulated its world-wide expansion throughout the successive ministries of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. It continues to fulfil its life-giving purpose through the agency of the Universal House of Justice whose fundamental object, as one of the twin successors of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is to ensure the continuity of the divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of the Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers, and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings.⁶

Since the Covenant is so very important, it follows directly that preservation of the Covenant is essential. The Teachings emphasize, in many places, the priority to be given to protection of the Faith, and the need for devoted believers to exert every effort for this purpose. In His Will and Testament 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

O ye beloved of the Lord! The greatest of all things is the protection of the True Faith of God, the preservation of His Law, the safeguarding of His Cause and service unto His Word.⁷

O ye beloved of the Lord! Strive with all your heart to shield the Cause of God from the onslaught of the insincere, for souls such as these cause the straight to become crooked and all benevolent efforts to produce contrary results.⁸

A fuller understanding of the Teachings concerning Covenant-breaking is an important means by which an individual Bahá'í can prepare himself for the protection of the Faith and the preservation of the Covenant. In developing such an understanding, the individual should keep continually in mind the purpose of the Covenant, its uniqueness in the span of religious history, and the limitless blessings which it brings to mankind. By this means he can more easily comprehend the necessity for the provisions laid down by the Teachings for protection of the Covenant, the adequacy of these provisions to handle any future attempt to subvert the Covenant, and the impregnability of the Covenant.

For some Bahá'ís, the subject of Covenant-breaking, because of its negative nature, will be one they are reluctant to become involved in considering too closely. Yet such a study is both necessary and beneficial. On the one hand, it provides protection; on the other, it helps us to appreciate more fully the sufferings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá and calls out of our own hearts a greater measure of love and self-sacrifice. 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself encourages such deepening:

Verily, 'Abdu'l-Bahá inhaleth the fragrance of the love of God from every meeting place where the Word of God is uttered, and proofs and arguments set forth, that shed their rays across the world; and where they recount the tribulations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá at the evil hands of those who have violated the Covenant of God.⁹

II The Nature of Covenant Breaking

What is Covenant-breaking?

A very clear definition is provided by the Universal House of Justice:

When a person declares his acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of God he becomes a party to the Covenant and accepts the totality of His Revelation. If he then turns round and attacks Bahá'u'lláh or the Central Institution of the Faith he violates the Covenant. If this happens every

effort is made to help that person to see the illogicality and error of his actions, but if he persists he must, in accordance with the instructions of Bahá'u'lláh Himself, be shunned as a Covenant-breaker.¹⁰

As the above passage indicates, the Covenant is violated when a declared believer attacks Bahá'u'lláh or the Central Institution ordained by Bahá'u'lláh in His Covenant—'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of the Covenant; Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith; or the Universal House of Justice which is now "the Head of the Faith and its supreme institution, to which all must turn."¹¹ The Universal House of Justice also states that:

acceptance of the Master's Will and Testament is basic in the faith of every Bahá'í and is an integral part of the Covenant which the believer undertakes to uphold when he becomes a Bahá'í.¹²

It is important to note that only the Head of the Faith can designate an individual as a Covenant-breaker, and we must be careful to avoid casual or indiscriminate use of this term.

A non-Bahá'í who rejects or ignores the claim of Bahá'u'lláh is not a Covenant-breaker. A Bahá'í who suffers a loss of belief, or who yields to material pressures, and resigns from the Faith is not a Covenant-breaker. A Bahá'í who flagrantly violates one of the Bahá'í laws subject to administrative sanction can experience a loss of administrative rights, but such an individual is not a Covenant-breaker.

How serious is Covenant-breaking?

The severity of its effect on the individual is vividly expressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. "What deviation can be greater than breaking the Covenant of God!"¹³ "... what transgression is more grievous than attempting to destroy the Divine Edifice, breaking the Covenant, erring from the Testament ..." ¹⁴

The Master also pointed out that, if it were not for the power of the Covenant, Covenant-breakers would "utterly destroy the Cause of God, exterminate His Law and render of no account all efforts exerted in the past."¹⁵ He states that:

Were it not for the protecting power of the Covenant to guard the impregnable fort of the Cause of God, there would arise among the Bahá'ís, in one day, a thousand different sects as was the case in former ages.¹⁶

The Universal House of Justice has pointed out that:

The seriousness of Covenant-breaking is that it strikes at the very centre and foundation of the unity of mankind. If God were to allow the instrument to be divided and impaired, how then would His purpose be achieved?¹⁷

Through the power of God the destructive efforts of the Covenant-breakers are defeated, and their endeavours are ultimately brought to naught. While Covenant-breaking has inflicted grief and suffering on the Central Figures of the Faith, and has at times caused a temporary breach in the Bahá'í community, it has been unable to effect an enduring division in the body of the faithful followers of Bahá'u'lláh. The triumph of the Covenant is proclaimed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in these words:

Verily, God effecteth that which He pleaseth; ... naught can obstruct His favour nor oppose His Cause! He doeth with all His Will that which pleaseth Him and He is powerful over all things!¹⁸

What causes Covenant-breaking?

'Abdu'l-Bahá has characterized Covenant-breakers as "the souls that are deprived of the Spirit of God and are lost in passion and self and are seeking leadership."¹⁹

The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, through the Institutions

which it ordains, protects the Faith from the enduring influence of individuals whose passionate desire for leadership impels them to violate that Covenant. The Universal House of Justice describes the Covenant as:

an institution which protects the Cause from individuals who, through the assertion of their own wills, would try to force God's Cause into the paths of their own preference and thus divide the faithful and subvert the world-wide establishment of divine justice.²⁰

The Teachings further indicate that this desire for leadership, and this preference for one's own will rather than the Will of God, is a consequence of the fostering of the lower, or material nature of man. Bahá'u'lláh has issued a sober warning in these words:

Endeavour to your utmost to protect yourselves, because satan appears in different robes and appeals to everyone according to each person's own way, until he becomes like unto him (satan), then he will leave him alone. ... Be informed by these utterances and shun the manifestations of the people of hell. ... The greatest of degradation is to leave the Shadow of God and enter under the shadow of satan.²¹

The meaning of the symbolic terms used in this passage has been clarified by the Universal House of Justice:

The references to *Satan* or *The Evil One* in Bahá'í Scripture are symbolical and do not at all imply the existence of a personal devil. They symbolize the lower nature of man, the selfish promptings of his ego, and so forth. They are also used, sometimes, to symbolize the machinations of Covenant-breakers or the spirit of Covenant-breaking, and this is the sense of the quotation from the Words of Bahá'u'lláh on pages 20 to 22 of Volume XIII of *The Star of the West* ...²²

Thus the promptings of man's lower nature, allowed to

influence an individual without restraint, lead to an atrophy of his spiritual faculties; his lower self rules his behaviour, and his egotistic desires motivate him to seek leadership through violation of the Covenant.

Do Covenant-breakers know what they are doing?

'Abdu'l-Bahá provides an illuminating insight into the condition of mind of a Covenant-breaker. Referring to violators of the Covenant, He states:

These do not doubt the validity of the Covenant, but selfish motives have dragged them to this condition. It is not that they ignore what they do—they are perfectly aware and still they exhibit opposition.²³

From these words it is evident that Covenant-breaking is a non-logical phenomenon having extremely destructive spiritual consequences. Only an insatiable desire for leadership and power, or a desperate obsession with self importance and personal superiority could lead an individual Bahá'í to knowingly violate the Covenant. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá states "they are perfectly aware"; yet this awareness is insufficient to restrain them from their destructive actions.

Covenant-breaking has no parallel in everyday experience. It is foreign to our normal understanding of human behaviour, and differs from the characteristics we usually observe in other human beings or in ourselves. Its rarity challenges our understanding; we must be careful to base our comprehension of it on the Teachings rather than by comparing it to other behaviour patterns we might have observed in daily life. To understand this subject we need to clear our minds of preconceived ideas or prejudices, and approach the Teachings with the authority of the Manifestation and His Holy Text clearly before us.

III

Some Historical Aspects

Has Covenant-breaking occurred in past Dispensations?

No previous Dispensation has embodied a Covenant having provisions as clear and authoritative as those within the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh.

Referring to Christianity, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated:

... divisions were created in the religion of God and it was not known which was pursuing the right pathway because there was no appointed center to

whom Christ referred everyone, no successor whose word was a gateway to truth.²⁴

The Guardian has pointed out:

... the text of the Qur'án ... gives no definite guidance regarding the Law of Succession, the source of all dissensions, the controversies, and schisms which have dismembered and discredited Islám.²⁵

There is no direct parallel to Covenant-breaking in past Dispensations, no evident similarity in religious history. However the spirit of Covenant-breaking is that of betrayal, when a follower of a religion betrays its Founder or its Teachings out of a desire for material gain and power. History demonstrates how shameful has been this betrayal in previous Dispensations, and how destructive it has been in its perversion of the true purpose of religion.

'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to Judas in Tablets wherein the spirit of violation of the Covenant is discussed.

Judas Iscariot was one of the disciples yet he betrayed Christ.²⁶

Iscariot must not be forgotten; the Divine sheep must constantly be guarded against devouring wolves. ...²⁷

Praise be to God, you know with perfect clearness that His Holiness Christ was extremely kind and loving, yet there were people like Judas Iscariot who—by their own deeds—separated themselves from Christ.²⁸

Interpreting prophecies of the New Testament, 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the perfidious behaviour of the Umayyad faction in Islam, which perverted the Teachings of Muhammad to obtain material power and leadership. He describes the Umayyads as having "... dominated the Muḥammadan religion," "... destroyed the third part of the holy and saintly people of the lineage of Muhammad who were like the stars of heaven," "... sought to kill any of Muḥammad's descendants who might be highly esteemed."²⁹

The annals of religious history have long been stained with the mark of betrayal. The Bahá'í Faith has not been immune from such behaviour; the uniqueness of this Dispensation lies in the fact that it is endowed with a Covenant which ensures that Covenant-breaking will not succeed in dividing the community, compromising the purity and integrity of the Teachings, or retarding the dynamic rate of its growth.

Has the Bahá'í Faith been subject to Covenant-breaking on many occasions?

The history of the Bahá'í Faith shows that several attempts have been made to subvert the Covenant. Shoghi Effendi has written:

Manifold, various, and at times extremely perilous, have been the tragic crises which the blind hatred, the unfounded presumption, the incredible folly, the abject perfidy, the vaulting ambition, of the enemy have intermittently engendered within the pale of the Faith. From some of its most powerful and renowned votaries, at the hands of its once trusted and ablest propagators, champions, and administrators, from the ranks of its most revered and highly-placed trustees whether as companions, amanuenses or appointed lieutenants of the Herald of the Faith, of its Author, and of the Center of His Covenant, from even those who were numbered among the kindred of the Manifestation, not excluding the brother, the sons and daughters of Bahá'u'lláh, and the nominee of the Báb Himself, a Faith, of such tender age, and enshrining so priceless a promise, has sustained blows as dire and treacherous as any recorded in the world's religious history.³⁰

The strength of the Covenant is clearly evident from the fact that it has successfully withstood these attacks, and that it has emerged triumphant from these crises.

What form did it take in the time of Bahá'u'lláh?

The principal Covenant-breaker during this period was Mírzá Yahyá, described by the Guardian as "the Arch-breaker of the Covenant of the Báb."³¹ Nominated by the Báb "as a figure-head pending the manifestation of the Promised One,"³² he claimed to be the successor of the Báb, and later claimed to be a Manifestation of God, when he became aware of the claim of Bahá'u'lláh.

His attacks upon Bahá'u'lláh included poisoning, which produced a serious illness with severe pains and high fever; he poisoned the well providing water for the family of Bahá'u'lláh; he attempted to organize assassination of Bahá'u'lláh; he maliciously spread defamatory untruths in Constantinople concerning Bahá'u'lláh; and his behaviour played a significant role in provoking the Ottoman Turkish government to exile Bahá'u'lláh to 'Akká.

The Guardian tells us that Mírzá Yahyá "lived long enough to witness ... every hope he had so maliciously conceived reduced to naught."³³ He was unable to divide the Bahá'í community, and no trace remains of the small band of followers with which he surrounded himself. In later years, his eldest son approached 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "expressed repentance, prayed for forgiveness,"³⁴ and was accepted back into the Faith.

Despite the ultimate failure of Mírzá Yahyá's attack, he did succeed in causing great suffering to Bahá'u'lláh. The Guardian tells us that his attack "brought incalculable sorrow to Bahá'u'lláh, visibly aged Him, and inflicted, through its repercussions, the heaviest blow ever sustained by Him in His lifetime."³⁵

Was 'Abdu'l-Bahá subjected to attack from Covenant-breakers?

Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí, "a half-brother of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, ... holding a rank second to none except Him Who had been

appointed as the Center of that Covenant,"³⁶ was "the arch-breaker of the Covenant"³⁷ of Bahá'u'lláh. The Guardian explains that:

The true ground of this crisis was the burning, the uncontrollable, the soul-festering jealousy which the admitted pre-eminence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in rank, power, ability, knowledge and virtue, above all the other members of His Father's family, had aroused not only in Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí, the arch-breaker of the Covenant, but in some of his closest relatives as well.³⁸

He subjected 'Abdu'l-Bahá to abuse and to malicious unfounded accusations of perverting the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and of depriving members of His family of their monetary allowances; he himself forged passages of the Holy Writings to distort their meaning into that which suited his own ends; he launched a conspiracy for the murder of 'Abdu'l-Bahá; and, his "incessant intrigues and monstrous misrepresentations"³⁹ resulted in renewal of the imprisonment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Initially, Muhammad-'Alí appeared to enjoy a measure of success. He

succeeded in ranging on his side almost the entire family of Bahá'u'lláh, as well as a considerable number of those who had formed his immediate entourage.⁴⁰

His attack subjected the Cause "to one of the most grievous ordeals experienced in the course of an entire century,"⁴¹ while "'Abdu'l-Bahá's grief over so tragic a development ... left its traces upon Him till the end of His days."⁴²

With the passage of time, it became increasingly clear that Muhammad-'Alí was doomed to total failure. He

was condemned to witness, in a growing measure ... the frustration of his evil designs, the evaporation of all his hopes, the exposition of his true motives and the complete extinction of his erstwhile honor and glory.⁴³

Eventually he passed away, "his hopes shattered, his plottings frustrated, the society of his fellow-conspirators extinguished."⁴⁴

Another Covenant-breaker who emerged during the Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was Ibráhím-i-Khayru'lláh, a Syrian doctor who joined the Faith in Cairo. He came to Chicago in 1894, and began teaching the Faith there and in other cities. His teaching success inflamed his egotistic nature and he plunged into the abyss of Covenant-breaking. Collaborating with the Covenant-breakers associated with Muhammad-'Alí, Khayru'lláh wrote denunciatory publications attacking the Master. He "met his death soon after he had uttered these denunciations, utterly abandoned and despised by the entire body of the members"⁴⁵ of the Bahá'í community.

Did the Guardian experience attacks from Covenant-breakers?

Several attempts were made to overthrow the provisions of the Covenant during the Ministry of Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Faith. Only some of the principal figures are mentioned here.

Aḥmad Sohrab, a former secretary of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, impelled by ambition and a sense of self-importance, attacked the Administrative Order at great length, "striving to deface 'Abdu'l-Bahá's noble handiwork and corrupt its administrative principles."⁴⁶ His efforts were "completely frustrated."⁴⁷

Avarih, who had been a very active Bahá'í teacher, fell victim to his ambitions and violated the Covenant, attacking the Guardian in ten volumes of books. Described by the Guardian as "condemned by posterity as being the most shameless, vicious, relentless apostate in the annals of the Faith,"⁴⁸ he found himself unable either to gather a following around him or to disrupt the Bahá'í community.

Ruth White, an American Bahá'í, disputed the authen-

ticity of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. She "had the ulterior motive of trying to discredit an administration which she personally opposed."⁴⁹ Despite strenuous efforts she was "powerless to produce the slightest breach in the ranks of ... valiant upholders"⁵⁰ of the Faith. In recent years Hermann Zimmer, a Covenant-breaker from Germany has unsuccessfully attempted to revive the assertions of Mrs. White, throughout widespread circulation of a book entitled *A Fraudulent Testament Devalues the Bahá'í Religion into Political Shogism*. In view of this renewed attack, it is appropriate to examine in greater detail the errors inherent in the contentions of Mrs. White and Mr. Zimmer.

The Universal House of Justice has dealt with this topic very clearly in the following passage of a letter written to believers in Europe:

Mrs. White contended that the Will should be examined from three different angles: firstly, from the spiritual point of view, whether it agreed with the teaching and intent of 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His lifetime; secondly, from the literary point of view, whether it is written in the style of 'Abdu'l-Bahá; and thirdly, whether the handwriting could be proved to be that of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.⁵¹

Taking up the first point, the spiritual character of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Supreme Body stated:

The first aspect has been open to the scrutiny of all the Bahá'ís ever since the Will was published, and it is abundantly clear to all those who are familiar with the Writings of both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá that the Will is entirely in harmony with the other Writings of the Bahá'í Revelation ... specifically with respect to the appointment of a personal successor to 'Abdu'l-Bahá ... this was alluded to by the Master several times before His passing.⁵²

Hand of the Cause 'Alí Akbar Furútan, in a commentary

written at the request of the House of Justice and distributed by that body, has amplified this point, writing:

.. the provisions of the Document are fully confirmed and substantiated by scores of historical evidences, some of which are given below by way of example.

(a) In 1902 an American believer wrote to the Master saying that according to the prophecies in the Bible (Isaiah 11:6) when His ministry came to an end "a little child shall lead them" and she asked the Master if that child existed and was living then. In answer to this question 'Abdu'l-Bahá revealed the following Tablet: "O Maidservant of God!"

"Verily, that child is born and is alive and from him will appear wondrous things that thou wilt hear of in the future. Thou shalt behold him endowed with the most perfect appearance, supreme capacity, absolute perfection, consummate power and unsurpassed might. His face will shine with a radiance that illumines all the horizons of the world; therefore forget this not as long as thou dost live inasmuch as ages and centuries will bear traces of him.

Upon thee be greetings and praise
'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbás"

(b) Long before 'Abdu'l-Bahá passed away three friends from Persia asked Him about His successor. In answer He wrote:

"... Know verily that this is a well-guarded secret. It is even as a gem concealed within its shell. That it will be revealed is predestined. The time will come when its light will appear, when its evidences will be made manifest, and its secrets unravelled."

(c) Dr. Yunis Khán, who for years acted as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's secretary and interpreter, writes in his book *My Reminiscences of the Nine Years*

in 'Akká that one day in 'Akká he said to 'Abdu'l-Bahá that according to what was heard the Master had said that the one who was to appear after Him had already been born. After a pause 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, "Yes, this is true." In reply to a further question, He replied: "The triumph of the Cause of God is in his hands."

- (d) Towards the end of His life 'Abdu'l-Bahá instructed the Spiritual Assembly of Tihrán to register the deeds of all Bahá'í-owned real estate and properties in Persia in the name of "Mírzá Shoghi Rabbani who is the son of Mírzá Hádí Shírází" and "is in London".
- (e) The following is the gist of the reminiscences of a German woman doctor, named Dr. J. Fallscheer, who lived in Haifa in the days of the Master and occasionally attended the ladies of His household. A part of her reminiscences appears in the German Bahá'í magazine *Sonne der Wahrheit*. Having referred to Shoghi Effendi as "My future Elisha", 'Abdu'l-Bahá said to her: "Bahá'u'lláh, the Great Perfection—blessed be His words—in the past, the present and forever—chose this insignificant one to be His successor, not because I was the first born, but because His inner eye had already discerned on my brow the seal of God."

Before His ascension into eternal Light the blessed Manifestation reminded me that I too—irrespective of primogeniture or age—must observe among my sons and grandsons whom God would indicate for His office. My sons passed to eternity in their tenderest years, in my line, among my relatives, only little Shoghi has the shadow of a great calling in the depths of his eyes."⁵³

Thus far, we have considered only the first of the three points raised by Mrs. White. Her second point, relating to the literary style of the Will of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is discussed by the Universal House of Justice:

The second aspect, the literary style of the Will, can only be properly judged by one who is familiar with the Persian language because most of the Master's Tablets that are published in English are in early translations that leave great room for improvement. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had a very characteristic, inimitable style and there is no doubt at all in the minds of the Persian Bahá'ís (who, until the time of Shoghi Effendi's passing, composed the majority of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh) that the Will and Testament is written in that style.⁵⁴

Mr. Furútan also comments on this point, stating:

One of the distinguishing features of the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá with which the Persian friends are perfectly familiar is His unique style and mode of expression which is characteristic of Him and Him alone. This familiarity of the friends with His style also made them fully confident that the whole text of the divine Charter was undoubtedly inscribed by the same untiring Pen from which such an enormous volume of writings had, for no less than twenty-nine years, unceasingly streamed.⁵⁵

The third, and final, contention of Mrs. White was concerning the handwriting of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. On this point also, the Universal House of Justice has provided clear guidance, stating:

Thirdly, as regards the handwriting of the Will, you should know that Shoghi Effendi sent out photostatic copies of the Will not only to National Spiritual Assemblies, but also for distribution among individual believers in Persia. You should also remember that the members of the Master's family, including his half-brother, Muhammad-

'Alí, who is so strongly condemned in the Will, as well as the thousands of Persian believers who had received or studied Tablets from Him, were thoroughly familiar with the handwriting of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the Will is so obviously in that handwriting that no one who was this qualified to judge—even those who could profit by claiming that the Will was invalid—has even questioned its authenticity. Even believers who became bitter enemies of Shoghi Effendi after the passing of the Master, ... did not question the validity of the Will. The only challenge came from Mrs. White, an American ignorant of Persian, who had the ulterior motive of trying to discredit an administration which she personally opposed. The handwriting expert whose opinion she quoted in support of her argument was also a westerner and himself stated that he could not give a final opinion without seeing the writing in the original.

Mrs. White went as far as appealing to the civil authorities of Palestine to take legal action in the matter, a request which the British Authorities curtly refused. When, several months later, Badi'u'lláh, the brother and lieutenant of the deceased arch-breaker of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant, approached these same authorities claiming the right to oppose the projected transfer of the remains of the Mother and Brother of 'Abdu'l-Bahá from 'Akká to Haifa, they categorically upheld the authority of Shoghi Effendi as the Successor of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the basis of their scrutiny of the Will and Testament, the validity of which Badi'u'lláh did not dispute.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will was written in three parts at three different times in His life. All three parts are in His handwriting and are signed by Him. All three, comprising twelve pages in all, were in an envelope under lock and key in His safe when He died. The face of the envelope was addressed to

Shoghi Effendi in the Master's handwriting and signed by Him. On the back it bears three more signatures of 'Abdu'l-Bahá across the flap where it was stuck down. Shoghi Effendi was in England when the Master died and therefore His Will was taken from His safe at that time by some members of His family and opened to see if He had given any instructions about His burial.⁵⁶

Throughout the length and breadth of the entire Bahá'í world the only person who ever denounced the Will as a forged document was an American woman named Mrs. White. She was entirely unfamiliar with the Persian language and script and her misguided effort, apart from causing the defection of some early believers in Germany, failed altogether in its purpose.⁵⁷

This disposes of the three points constituting the basis of Mrs. White's attack on the Covenant, recently restated by Hermann Zimmer. The refutation of this attack has been set out here in considerable detail, because of its contemporary relevance. It also serves to illustrate the non-logical character of Covenant-breaking attacks, in contrast with the clarity and compelling logic of the guidance by the Universal House of Justice.

Did the relatives of the Guardian remain faithful to the Covenant?

Some of the closest relatives of the Guardian became infected with the spirit of Covenant-breaking, resulting in "dishonorable alliances ... first with Covenant-breakers and now with external enemies of the Faith."⁵⁸ Their attacks on the Guardian brought great suffering to him, and led him to lament the "marked, tragic decline in character and spiritual condition grandchildren 'Abdu'l-Bahá."⁵⁹

The Guardian also commented that, "Time alone will reveal extent of havoc wreaked by this virus of violation injected, fostered over two decades in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's family.'"60

Have Covenant-breakers attacked the Faith since the passing of the Guardian?

The most notable instance of Covenant-breaking in the years since the passing of Shoghi Effendi in 1957 has been the deplorable attempt of Mason Remey, who had occupied the rank of Hand of the Cause of God, to usurp the Guardianship. This attack was launched despite the fact that the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá specifies that the appointment of a further Guardian by Shoghi Effendi could only be from either "the first-born of the Guardian" or from "another branch."⁶¹

The Hands of the Cause in the Holy Land have explained the significance of the term *branch*.

The word 'Ghosn' (plural 'Aghsán') is an Arabic word, meaning branch.

Bahá'u'lláh used this word specifically to designate His own male descendants. It does not apply to any other category of people. He gave the title to 'Abdu'l-Bahá of 'The Most Great Branch'. His second son, Muhammad-'Alí, was known as 'The Greater Branch'; his third son, Mírzá Mihdí, 'The Purest Branch', etc. The Guardian himself is designated in the Master's Will as 'The Chosen Branch'.

All the male relatives of the Báb are invariably referred to as 'Afnán', which means 'twigs'.

These two designations are not interchangeable. Over and over in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets these terms 'Aghsán' and 'Afnán' are specifically used in this sense.

For instance, in the 'Tablet of the Branch', the original word is 'Ghosn' (i.e. branch), referring to 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

The ordinary English usage of the word 'branch' has caused a great deal of confusion, whereas there is not a shadow of ambiguity in the Persian and Arabic texts. ...

It should likewise be pointed out that neither in Persian nor Arabic are there ever any capital letters, so that it is impossible to deduce any arguments from a capitalization or lack of capitalization in the English texts.⁶²

Following the passing of Shoghi Effendi in November, 1957, the Hands of the Cause of God met in the Holy Land, following which they issued a Proclamation, stating:

the beloved Guardian had left no heir. The Aghsán (branches) one and all are either dead, or have been declared violators of the Covenant by the Guardian for their faithlessness to the Master's Will and Testament and their hostility to him named first Guardian in that sacred document ... no successor to Shoghi Effendi could have been appointed by him.⁶³

This Proclamation was signed by twenty-six Hands of the Cause, including Mason Remey. In 1960, however, Mason Remey claimed to be Guardian. The argument he put forward was that Shoghi Effendi had appointed him as President of an appointed body known as the International Bahá'í Council. The Guardian had indicated that the International Bahá'í Council would later change to an elected Council, and then would be replaced by the elected Universal House of Justice. The Will and Testament states that the Guardian is the *sacred head*, of the Universal House of Justice. Mason Remey asserted that his Presidency of the International Bahá'í Council meant that he would also become 'Chairman' of the Universal House of Justice, and that this would then make him Guardian of the Cause.

The Hands of the Cause very clearly and lucidly demolished this spurious claim, stating:

Without one written word from the Guardian, Mason Remey claims that because he was the President of the International Bahá'í Council and because this body is the embryonic International Institution, it automatically makes him the President of that future body, and hence, Guardian of the Faith.

If the President of the International Bahá'í Council is *ipso facto* the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, then the beloved Guardian himself, Shoghi Effendi, would have had to be the President of this first International Bahá'í Council.

If the presidency of the first International Bahá'í Council, which was not an elected body but appointed by Shoghi Effendi was a permanent thing, why did the beloved Guardian himself call for an elected International Bahá'í Council in the future as part of the evolution of this institution and its eventual efflorescence into the Universal House of Justice?

We have not even an intimation in any writing of Shoghi Effendi that the officers of the first appointed International Bahá'í Council would be carried forward into the elected International Bahá'í Council.

There is nothing to indicate anywhere in the Teachings that the officers of the elected International Bahá'í Council would not be elected according to the pattern of election of every other Bahá'í elected body.

The manner of the election of the Universal House of Justice has been laid down by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself.

There is no possible reason for concluding that

Mason Remey, or any other Council member, would automatically be carried forward into membership in that body.

If the presidency of either an appointed or an elected International Bahá'í Council were synonymous with the presidency of the Universal House of Justice, then it follows the beloved Guardian himself would have assumed this position.⁶⁴

No more than a handful of Bahá'ís were deluded by Mason Remey's claim, and followed him into violation of the Covenant and expulsion from the Faith. During the succeeding years, they failed to make any enduring impression on the unity of the Bahá'í community. As the Bahá'ís went on from victory to victory, completing the Ten Year Crusade, electing the Universal House of Justice, embarking on the Nine Year Plan, enrolling a multitude of seekers from all parts of the world, the disorganized followers of Mason Remey became fragmented by bitter internal dissension and division. The body of the Remey supporters, deprived of the spirit of the Faith, decomposed. Finally Mason Remey passed away, his hopes of usurping the Guardianship totally frustrated. His passing was announced to the Bahá'ís by the Universal House of Justice in this cable:

Charles Mason Remey whose arrogant attempt usurp Guardianship after passing Shoghi Effendi led to his expulsion from ranks faithful has died in Florence Italy in hundredth year of his life buried without religious rites abandoned by erstwhile followers. History pitiable defection by one who had received great honours from both Master and Guardian constitutes yet another example futility all attempts undermine impregnable Covenant Cause Bahá'u'lláh.⁶⁵

IV

General Principles Governing Attacks on the Faith

Is the Faith immune from any damage by attempts to divide it?

No, it is not immune from attacks which aim to cause a division in the Bahá'í community. The Guardian states that "it would be sheer delusion, wholly unreasonable and unwarranted" to imagine that the Cause "should, at all times, be immune to any divergence of opinion, or any defection on the part of its multitudinous followers."⁶⁶

Can such an attempt succeed?

The Guardian describes the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh as "a Covenant designed by Him as the sole refuge against schism, disruption and anarchy."⁶⁷ He states that "the hall-mark of His Faith" and a great proof of its unique power lies in the fact that betrayal

... by those who apostatize their faith or preach heretical doctrines, should have failed ... to split in twain the entire body of the adherents of the Faith, or to create a grave, a permanent and irremediable breach in its organic structure.⁶⁸

Covenant-breaking has never been able to do more than divert groups of individuals from the Cause. As the leaders have died, these temporary associations have dissolved and disappeared. The body of the Cause has remained whole, continuing to expand and to develop new functions and resources.

What happens when the Faith is attacked?

An attack upon the Faith triggers a mighty sequence of events which leads inevitably to the ultimate triumph of the Cause. The Guardian describes this sequence in these terms:

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.⁶⁹

The Guardian then proceeds to disclose a larger vision of the continuing progress of the Faith:

this impetus, in its turn, would through its manifestations, provoke fresh hostility in quarters heretofore unaware of its challenging implications—this increased hostility being accompanied by a still more arresting revelation of Divine Power and

a more abundant effusion of celestial grace, which, by enabling the upholders of that Faith to register still more brilliant victories, would thereby generate issues of still more vital import and raise up still more formidable enemies against a Cause that cannot but, in the end, resolve those issues and crush the resistance of those enemies, through a still more glorious unfoldment of its inherent power.⁷⁰

Is there a rythm to the progress of the Faith?

The continuation of the passage cited above describes the rythmic pulsations which characterize the growth of the Faith:

The resistless march of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, viewed in this light, and propelled by the stimulating influences which the unwisdom of its enemies and the force latent within itself, both engender, resolves itself into a series of rhythmic pulsations, precipitated, on the one hand, through the explosive outbursts of its foes, and the vibrations of Divine Power, on the other, which speed it, with ever-increasing momentum, along that predestined course traced for it by the Hand of the Almighty.⁷¹

How should we regard attacks on the Faith?

Since attacks on the Faith trigger a sequence of events which result in further growth of the Cause, we can well regard such attacks as being ultimately beneficial. The Guardian has written:

As opposition to the Faith, from whatever source it may spring, whatever form it may assume, however violent its outbursts, is admittedly the motive-power that galvanizes on the one hand,

the souls of its valiant defenders, and taps for them, on the other, fresh springs of that Divine and inexhaustible Energy, we who are called upon to represent, defend and promote its interests, should, far from regarding any manifestation of hostility as an evidence of the weakening of the pillars of the Faith, acclaim it as both a God-sent gift and a God-sent opportunity which, if we remain undaunted, we can utilize for the furtherance of His Faith and the routing and complete elimination of its adversaries.⁷²

V

Role of the Individual Bahá'í

What can I do as an individual Bahá'í?

Each one of us, upon becoming a Bahá'í, is enjoined to strive to become firm in the Covenant. 'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasizes:

... in the beginning one must make his steps firm in the Covenant—so that the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh may encircle from all sides, the cohorts of the Supreme Concourse may become the supporters and the helpers, and the exhortations and advices of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, like unto the pictures

engraved on stone, may remain permanent and ineffaceable in the tablets of the hearts.⁷³

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in several places, describes firmness in the Covenant as “the most important affair”⁷⁴ and relates it to obedience to the Head of the Faith.

Firmness in the Covenant means obedience so that no one may say, ‘this is my opinion,’ nay rather he must obey that which proceeds from the Pen and Tongue of the Covenant.⁷⁵

Growth in firmness in the Covenant is an integral part of the process of spiritual development accessible through the Bahá'í Teachings, and is nourished by the spiritual practices set out in the Teachings—prayer and fasting, reading the Holy Texts, the moral and ethical principles, teaching the Faith, participating in Administrative activities, contributing to the Fund, are but the most salient of these practices. In carrying out these practices, one should continually strive for a deeper consciousness and heightened awareness of the authority with which Bahá'u'lláh has endowed his Administrative Institutions.

What about contact with Covenant-breakers?

No aspect of the Bahá'í Teachings is more strongly emphasized than the imperative necessity to avoid contact with Covenant-breakers. Examine the words used by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the passage from His Will and Testament:

one of the greatest and most fundamental principles of the Cause of God is to shun and avoid entirely the Covenant-breakers, for they will utterly destroy the Cause of God, exterminate His Law and render of no account all efforts exerted in the past.⁷⁶

The Guardian has reiterated this need in equally strong terms. “Bahá'u'lláh and the Master in many places and very emphatically have told us to shun entirely all Covenant-breakers.”⁷⁷

What is the reason for this restriction?

The Manifestation of God expresses Divine truth in His Revelation. Quite often this truth is quite novel, and goes beyond the state of knowledge obtained by use of the rational process alone. An example lies in the statements of the Teachings which describe Covenant-breaking as an infectious spiritual condition, directly analogous to the infectious physical diseases with which medical science has become familiar over the past century. In answer to this question from a believer, 'Abdul'l-Bahá wrote:

Thou hadst asked some questions; that why the blessed and spiritual souls, who are firm and steadfast, shun the company of degenerate persons. This is because, that just as bodily diseases ... are contagious, likewise the spiritual diseases are also infectious. If a consumptive should associate with a thousand safe and healthy persons, the safety and health of these thousand persons would not affect the consumptive and would not cure him of his consumption. But when this consumptive associates with those thousand souls, in a short time the disease of consumption will infect a number of those healthy persons. This is a clear and self-evident question.⁷⁸

In another place He stated, "one must protect and safeguard the blessed souls from the breaths and fatal spiritual diseases; otherwise violation, like the plague, will become a contagion and all will perish."⁷⁹ Similar statements are made by the Guardian. Referring to Covenant-breakers, he wrote, "they are afflicted with what we might try and define as a contagious spiritual disease."⁸⁰ He also points out that "Bahá'u'lláh and the Master ... have told us, however, to pray for them."⁸¹

The analogy to infectious physical disease continues to apply. We quarantine an individual afflicted with a contagious physical ailment, but offer prayers for their healing;

in like manner, we do not associate with Covenant-breakers, but our prayers are offered for their healing from the severe spiritual disease.

Does not this Teaching of the Faith restrict my liberty?

All of the Bahá'í laws impose constraints upon the range of behaviour permissible for a Bahá'í, e.g. the commandment of obligatory prayer, the stipulation of a period of fasting, the admonition to avoid intoxicant or narcotic substances, etc. However these constraints do not restrict one's liberty; on the contrary, the purpose of the Bahá'í Teachings is to promote true liberty, through freeing the individual from bondage to his material nature. Bahá'u'lláh has written:

True liberty consisteth in man's submission unto My commandments, little as ye know it. Were men to observe that which We have sent down unto them from the Heaven of Revelation, they would, of a certainty, attain unto perfect liberty.⁸²

Viewed in this light, with the perspective of the Bahá'í Teachings, the commandment to avoid Covenant-breakers is part of the code of behaviour whereby an individual Bahá'í can attain an unprecedented degree of liberty, with its resulting happiness and serenity.

Does not this non-association with Covenant-breakers contradict the purpose of the Bahá'í Faith to promote unity?

The Universal House of Justice has expounded a vital principle which underlies this question.

In attempting to understand the Writings, therefore, one must first realize that there is and can be no real contradiction in them, and in the light of this we can confidently seek the unity of meaning which they contain.⁸³

Applying this principle it becomes clear that the unity which the Bahá'í Faith is progressively establishing in the world is a unity through obedience to Divine Teachings: all other forms of unity are temporary, doomed to collapse. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

We must all turn our faces to the appointed Center in order that the Bahá'í Unity might be preserved; otherwise in one year the Bahá'ís would be divided into a thousand sects.⁸⁴

It is indubitably clear that the pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant.⁸⁵

Thus contact with Covenant-breakers would lead to a spread of violation of the Covenant, with the resultant shattering of the unity of the Bahá'í Faith. Divided, the Bahá'í community would be unable to effect the unity of mankind. This catastrophic sequence of events is avoided through the power of the Covenant, and the Teachings categorically promise that Bahá'í unity will be preserved, growing to embrace the generality of mankind in the Kingdom of God on earth.

Since the Bahá'í Teachings call for independent investigation of truth, should I not investigate the viewpoint of a Covenant-breaker?

Independent investigation of truth is an injunction repeatedly emphasized in the Bahá'í Teachings. It is as a result of this process that a seeker after truth is led to investigate ~~the~~ the claim of the Manifestation of God. Bahá'u'lláh describes the Manifestations as "the Channels of God's immortal utterance, and the Treasuries of the gems of Divine knowledge."⁸⁶

They claim to be Revealers of Divine truth. Acceptance of the Manifestation necessarily includes acceptance of His Revelation as a repository of truth. The believer then embarks upon the exciting and never-ending process of

investigation of the truths contained within the Revelation, armed with an unshakeable faith in the validity of that Revelation.

Although the meaning of the Revelation is limitless, its commandments are clear, and are subject to any requisite additional clarification by the appropriate Administrative Institutions. Those who accept the Manifestation as a Revealer of truth are thus obligated to observe its instructions faithfully. Bahá'u'lláh states:

Whatsoever the Creator commandeth His creatures to observe, the same must they diligently, and with the utmost joy and eagerness, arise and fulfil. They should in no wise allow their fancy to obscure their judgment, neither should they regard their own imaginings as the voice of the Eternal.⁸⁷

The Universal House of Justice has also clarified this issue, stating:

Bahá'ís themselves are commanded by Bahá'u'lláh to investigate truth independently, to "see with" their "own eyes, and not through the eyes of others". Every Bahá'í is at liberty, nay is urged, to freely express his opinion and his understanding of the Teachings, but all this is in a totally different category from that of a Bahá'í who opposes the clear Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.⁸⁸

Would it not be bad manners for me to avoid contact with a Covenant-breaker who approached me, wrote to me or telephoned me?

Good manners, or a refined code of conduct and behaviour, derive originally from the teachings of the Manifestations of God who have raised mankind from the depths of savagery through successive Revelations. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated:

The prophets of God are the first educators. They bestow universal education upon man and cause him to rise from the lowest levels of savagery to

the highest pinnacles of spiritual development.⁸⁹

Thus a believer who is obedient to the Teachings of the Manifestation of God can never legitimately be accused of violating good manners. The Divine Teachings define these forms of behaviour which constitute good manners. In a very real sense, obedience to the Teachings concerning non-association with Covenant-breakers represents the highest form of refined conduct and good manners, since it is in accord with the Will of God for this age.

How can I recognize a Covenant-breaker?

The Covenant-breaking spirit is evident if an enrolled Bahá'í "attacks Bahá'u'lláh or the central Institutions of the Faith."⁹⁰

asserts his own opinion as an authoritative and correct interpretation of the Teachings, and attacks or opposes the very Institutions which Bahá'u'lláh has created to protect His Covenant.⁹¹

If such evidence is found to exist, the matter becomes the concern of the Administrative Institutions, rather than of the individual. Only the House of Justice and the Hands of the Cause can designate an individual as being a Covenant-breaker.

How do Covenant-breakers try to influence Bahá'ís?

A wide variety of approaches are used, having the overall purpose of involving a Bahá'í in extended discussion with a Covenant-breaker, or in detailed consideration of the views of the Covenant-breaker.

How should Covenant-breaker literature be treated?

Great danger is associated with reading material written by

Covenant-breakers, and the strongest warnings are issued against such actions. The Universal House of Justice has written:

... certain believers have the unpleasant duty of having to read such works in the course of their duty to protect the Faith—but the friends are warned, in the strongest terms, of the danger of reading such literature. Unless one is very well informed of the history of the Faith and is deeply confirmed in one's belief, the calumnies and distortions of truth contained in such literature can undermine one's faith.⁹⁴

A devoted believer in the Cause, nourished and enriched by his faith in Bahá'u'lláh, will naturally make every effort to avoid any experience which could undermine his faith, or expose his mind to the spiritually-destructive spirit of Covenant-breaking.

What about material written by an individual before he became a Covenant-breaker?

The question was addressed to the Guardian, in connection with a book on mysticism written by Rúhí Afán, prior to his violation of the Covenant. The response of the Guardian was, "There is no objection to using Rúhí's book on Mysticism."⁹⁵

Caution and wisdom are needed in applying this principle, since Covenant-breaking attitudes may be expressed in a subtle form in material written before an individual has been identified as a Covenant-breaker. Where any uncertainty exists, the Administrative Institutions of the Faith should be consulted.

For example, Covenant-breakers may appeal to the Bahá'í concern for unity as a basis for association with them, or may challenge a Bahá'í to independently investigate truth by listening to their assertions. They may use flattery or ridicule

to either persuade or goad a believer into discussion with them. Conventional good manners may be employed, as when a Covenant-breaker telephones a Bahá'í and launches into a statement of his views, confident that 'good manners' will restrain the Bahá'í from unilaterally terminating the call. A Covenant-breaker may tempt a Bahá'í into discussion by claiming to be on the point of re-entry into the Faith with only one small point in need of clarification by the Bahá'í.

These examples are illustrative only to emphasize the need for vigilance and care. Referring to Covenant-breakers, the Guardian stated:

Facts, actual states, are what count. Probably no group of people in the world have softer tongues, or proclaim more loudly their innocence than those who in their heart of hearts, and by every act, are enemies of the Center of the Covenant.⁹²

Covenant-breakers may adopt the guise of innocence, sincerity, or even piety, in an attempt to ensnare Bahá'ís into their schemes. Such a guise should not obscure the fact that a Covenant-breaker has violated a most important commandment of the Faith, and is in a spiritually diseased condition.

A believer many years ago wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and expressed concern about the Covenant-breakers. 'Abdu'l-Bahá responded:

Thou hast written that in view of the questions of violation thou are perturbed. There is no occasion for perturbation for the Blessed Beauty (Bahá'u'lláh) has closed all doors of error and doubt and has entered with all the friends into a Covenant and a Testament.⁹³

A Bahá'í who clings resolutely to the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, with unquestioning faith and obedience, is assured of the protection of the Covenant, and is beyond the reach of Covenant-breakers.

VI Role of the Institutions

What happens when an individual displays Covenant-breaking characteristics?

When there is some evidence that such a situation exists, the matter is reported to the Institutions of the Faith. If these Institutions feel that the matter requires action on their part, they proceed to carry out their designated functions of protecting the Faith and guarding the welfare of all members of the Bahá'í community.

The thought of reporting such a matter involving another Bahá'í to an Institution of the Faith is not wholly attractive. Why should I do this?

The Teachings point out the great responsibility placed upon every Bahá'í to protect the Faith. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written:

O ye beloved of the Lord! The greatest of all things is the protection of the True Faith of God, the preservation of His Law, the safeguarding of His Cause and service unto His Word.⁹⁶

When a believer is aware of possible violation of the Covenant, his clear responsibility to protect the Faith necessitates bringing the matter to the Institutions of the Faith. The greater the delay, the greater the likelihood of the potential problem becoming more widespread and the possible violation more extensive.

Which Institutions are concerned with protection of the Faith?

The specific function of protecting the Faith is assigned to the Institution of the Hands of the Cause, described by the Guardian as:

Divinely appointed Institution of the Hands of the Cause, invested by virtue of the authority conferred by the Testament of the Center of the Covenant with the twin functions of protecting and propagating the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.⁹⁷

and given by him "the primary obligation to watch over and insure protection to the Bahá'í world community, in close collaboration with ... National Assemblies."⁹⁸

The vital function of the Institution of the Hands of the Cause is restated by the Universal House of Justice:

The institution of the Hands of the Cause of God, charged in the Sacred Texts with the specific duties of protecting and propagating the Faith, has a particularly vital responsibility to discharge.⁹⁹

The Universal House of Justice brought into being "Continental Boards of Counsellors for the protection and propagation of the Faith,"¹⁰⁰ and specifies that "The Auxiliary Boards for Protection and Propagation will henceforth report to the Continental Boards of Counsellors."¹⁰¹ The Universal House of Justice later provided this clarification:

The Hands of the Cause of God, the Counsellors and the members of the Auxiliary Boards fall within the definition of the "learned" given by the beloved Guardian. Thus they are all intimately interrelated and it is not incorrect to refer to the three ranks collectively as one institution.¹⁰²

However these texts should not be misconstrued as implying that only the Institution of the Hands of the Cause has responsibility to protect the Faith. In a most illuminating passage, the Universal House of Justice points out that:

In the Order of Bahá'u'lláh there are certain functions which are reserved to certain institutions, and others which are shared in common, even though they may be more in the special province of one or the other. For example, although the Hands of the Cause of God have the specific functions of protection and propagation, and are specialized for these functions, it is also the duty of the Universal House of Justice and the Spiritual Assemblies to protect and teach the Cause.¹⁰³

The responsibilities of the Spiritual Assemblies to protect the Faith are also affirmed by the Guardian, in this description of their functions:

It is incumbent upon them to be vigilant and cautious, discreet and watchful, and protect at all times the Temple of the Cause from the dart of the mischief-maker and the onslaught of the enemy.¹⁰⁴

He further states that "the whole purpose of the Assemblies is to protect the Faith, the Communities, and the individual Bahá'í as well."¹⁰⁵

Since the function of the protection is shared between

several Institutions, close collaboration and the rapid exchange of information are necessary for the efficient discharge of this responsibility.

Who handles the investigation of possible Covenant-breaking?

The Universal House of Justice has written that:

when a person evinces the Covenant-breaking spirit, the Hands of the Cause and Counsellors, and others who are appointed for the service, do all they can to rid him of it.¹⁰⁶

The Supreme Body indicates the manner in which this action is carried out, by stating, "every effort is made to help that person to see the illogicality and error of his actions."¹⁰⁷ This effort may, under some circumstances, continue over an extended period of time, as the Institutions tenderly and lovingly nurse the individual back to full spiritual health.

Who declares an individual to be a Covenant-breaker?

In accordance with the instructions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, this responsibility rests with the Institution of the Hands of the Cause. The present procedure, defined by the Universal House of Justice is:

Authority for the expulsion and reinstatement of Covenant-breakers remains with the Hands of the Cause of God. All such matters will be investigated locally by the relative Continental Board of Counsellors in consultation with any Hand or Hands who may be in the area. The Continental Board of Counsellors and the Hands concerned will then make their reports to the International Teaching Centre where they will be considered. The decision whether or not to expel or reinstate will be made by the Hands of the Cause residing in the Holy Land who will, as at present, submit their decision to the Universal House of Justice for approval.¹⁰⁸

Can a Covenant-breaker ever re-enter the Faith?

The passage quoted above clearly envisages the reinstatement of Covenant-breakers.

Referring to the Covenant-breakers, the Guardian has written:

These souls are not lost forever. In the Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh says that God will forgive any soul *if he repents*. Most of them don't want to repent, unfortunately.¹⁰⁹

He also laments that:

It is a pity that some of the Western friends, with remarkable naïveté, do not grasp the fact that there is absolutely nothing keeping those who have broken the Covenant, whether Bahá'u'lláh's or the Master's, out of the Cause of God except their *own spiritually sick condition*. If they were sound, instead of diseased, and wanted to enter the service of the Faith, they would apply direct to the Guardian and he would be able to adjudge of their sincerity and, if sincere, would welcome them into the ranks of the faithful.¹¹⁰

Now, the procedure for a Covenant-breaker seeking reinstatement, is to apply directly to the Universal House of Justice.

VII The Future

Will Covenant-breaking attacks on the Faith occur in the future?

In a highly-significant cablegram just a few short months before his passing, the Guardian referred to:

Evidences of increasing hostility without, persistent machinations within, foreshadowing dire contests destined to range the Army of Light against the forces of darkness, both secular and religious, predicted in unequivocal language by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.¹¹¹

Many years earlier, he had likewise stated, “Many and grave may be the obstacles, whether from within or from without, which we shall have to encounter in the days to come.”¹¹²

Thus, in these and other passages, the Guardian anticipates challenges to the advance of the Faith from within the ranks of enrolled believers, as well as from external adversaries. Such attacks from within find their most degenerate form in Covenant-breaking.

Will the Covenant remain inviolate in the future?

Innumerable passages in the Writings of the Faith stress the inviolability of the Covenant. Bahá’u’lláh Himself, in a majestic passage assures us that:

The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation. Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men’s fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure.¹¹³ Similar assurance comes from the pen of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Verily, God effecteth that which He pleaseth; naught can annul His Covenant; naught can obstruct His favor nor oppose His Cause! He doeth with all His Will that which pleaseth Him and He is powerful over all things!¹¹⁴

Armed with the power of the Covenant, the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh will proceed from victory to victory, as it carries out its Divinely-ordained mission to spiritually regenerate the human race, to transmute hatred into love and division into unity. The historical record of revealed religion discloses no parallel to the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh, which remains unique in the annals of mankind. The accomplishments of the Bahá’í community, sheltered within the Ark of the Covenant, will be without precedent, realizing the dreams of our ancestors and fulfilling the prophecies of ancient texts.

With this glorious prospect before us, we close with these words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Take the cup of the Testament in thy hand; leap and dance with ecstasy in the triumphal procession of the Covenant! Lay your confidence in the everlasting bounty, turn to the presence of the generous God; ask assistance from the Kingdom of Abhá; seek confirmation from the Supreme World; turn thy vision to the horizon of eternal wealth; and pray for help from the Source of Mercy!¹¹⁵

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