

# The Covenant

*Its Meaning and Origin  
and Our Attitude Toward It*





# The Covenant

*Its Meaning and Origin  
and Our Attitude Toward It*



Part of a Series on Major Themes of the Creative Word

*"The Word of God may be likened unto a sapling, whose roots have been implanted in the hearts of men. It is incumbent upon you to foster its growth through the living waters of wisdom, of sanctified and holy words, so that its root may become firmly fixed and its branches may spread out as high as the heavens and beyond." —Bahá'u'lláh*



In this series:

*The Word of God*

*The Covenant: Its Meaning and Origin  
and Our Attitude Toward It*

Prepared by the National Teaching Committee  
of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States.

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# The Covenant

*Its Meaning and Origin  
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## Preface

A letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi states: "The principles, administration and fundamentals of the Faith are well known, but the friends need greatly to study the more profound works which would give them spiritual maturity to a greater degree, unify their community life, and enable them to better exemplify the Bahá'í way of living. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

This book is part of a series whose purpose is to draw the reader into a study of the profound concepts found in the Bahá'í Revelation. It is also intended to serve as a bridge leading to expanded study of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi.

The book can be used for individual or group study. Each lesson is divided into a number of possible segments that can be used selectively:

|                      |                                                                                        |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Introduction</b>  | An introduction to the lesson.                                                         |
| <b>Overview</b>      | A general presentation of new information.                                             |
| <b>Explanation</b>   | Details of the "Overview" with quotes and examples.                                    |
| <b>Readings</b>      | Quotations from the writings on the lesson topic.                                      |
| <b>Illustrations</b> | Excerpts on the lesson topic from books by Bahá'ís; usually stories of Bahá'í history. |
| <b>Further Study</b> | Three ways to explore the lesson topic in more depth.                                  |
| <b>Questions</b>     | Questions that review the lesson material.                                             |
| <b>Answers</b>       | Answers to the questions.                                                              |
| <b>Discussion</b>    | Questions for group discussion.                                                        |
| <b>Exercise</b>      | An exercise that explores the topic in more depth.                                     |
| <b>Feedback</b>      | Suggested answers for the exercise.                                                    |

Note in the "Readings" section that some words in the passages from the writings are defined in the margins for your convenience. Words having a specific meaning in a Bahá'í context are underlined and defined with that meaning. Pronunciation of Bahá'í and Islamic terms is also provided.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Importance of Deepening* 45-46



To use this book for individual study, create your own study plan by choosing the sections you want to cover in each lesson. Depending on your personal preference you may wish to skip some of the sections. However, please do not skip the "Readings" section, since this provides a chance to read the Word of God and comments by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice. Use the right margins on each page to make notes and record ideas. You may find it most convenient to study a lesson—or just one lesson segment—with your daily prayers in the morning or evening.

The book can also be used to create a plan for group study. For example, each lesson can be read and discussed section by section. Or, group members can read the lesson on their own, then come together weekly for discussion of the quotations and questions. As a third option, a group leader can summarize the "Overview," "Explanation," and "Illustration" sections in a ten to fifteen minute presentation before the group reads and discusses the quotations.

At the end of the book is an index with references that go beyond the quotations covered in the lessons. The index offers a valuable starting point for an extended study of the Covenant.

Beyond personal and group deepenings, this book can be used as a resource for preparing for firesides, public talks, or seminar work at Bahá'í schools. We hope you find it useful, educational, and uplifting.

National Teaching Committee  
May 1988

# 1

## The Meaning of the Covenant

### Introduction

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The Covenant—an ancient term now endowed with new meaning—stands at the heart of what it means to be a Bahá'í. To understand the Covenant is to understand our place in the unfolding plan of God.

It is “the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh,” the Universal House of Justice states, “which links the past and the future with the progressive stages towards the fulfillment of God’s ancient Promise. . . . Concentration on this theme will enable us all to obtain a deeper appreciation of the meaning and purpose of His Revelation. . . . The questions that such concentrated study should answer will undoubtedly include the meaning of the Bahá'í Covenant, its origin and what should be our attitude towards it.”<sup>1</sup>

In the following lessons we will examine the Covenant through these questions. We will begin in this lesson with the meaning of the Covenant.

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<sup>1</sup> Ridván 1987 message

## Overview

A study of the Covenant is a study of the relationship between God and humanity. This relationship is established from the very moment of creation.

On one side of the relationship is God, an all-powerful Creator, Who, out of His love, brought humanity into being for a purpose.

On the other side of the relationship is humanity. Each human being has a great spiritual purpose—to know God and reflect the attributes<sup>2</sup> of God that are implanted within each soul.

God is infinite and can never limit Himself to humanity's level. Human beings are finite, unable by themselves to reach God.

Between God and humanity is the Covenant—an instrument of union provided by God which rescues us from the “misery of remoteness” from Him.<sup>3</sup> The Covenant is the means by which we learn God's will and, in exchange for steadfastness and obedience, receive His bounties and blessings to help us achieve the purpose for which we were created.

## Explanation

“A Covenant in the religious sense,” the Universal House of Justice states, “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 understanding to behave in a certain way.”<sup>4</sup>

## The Relationship Between God and Humanity

<sup>2</sup> “Attributes” or “names” of God refer to such qualities as sight, wisdom, justice, etc. In *Some Answered Questions*, page 148, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains: “we speak of the names and attributes of the Divine Reality, and we praise Him by attributing to Him sight, hearing, power, life and knowledge. We affirm these names and attributes, not to prove the perfections of God, but to deny that He is capable of imperfections. . . . It is not that we can comprehend His knowledge, His sight, His power and life, for it is beyond our comprehension. . . .” Human beings reflect the attributes of God just as a mirror is capable of reflecting light. To say that we are made in the image of God means that each person has the ability to reflect the names and attributes of God (see *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 69-70, 403-04).

<sup>3</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 71

<sup>4</sup> *The Covenant*, intro.



Look at the example of a tree. It begins its existence in the form of a seed. Its purpose is to yield fruit. God has established a set of natural laws in which the tree takes part so that it can achieve its purpose. He gives capacity and blessings to the tree—the sun gives light, the soil offers nutrients, and the rain provides water. The tree uses these blessings to grow from a seed to a tree that yields fruit. This relationship defines God’s “covenant” with the tree.

A similar relationship exists between God and humanity. Our Covenant with God, however, centers around our spiritual, rather than our material, reality. And, unlike a tree that must obey the laws of nature, human beings have a free will. We can choose to accept or reject our part of the spiritual Covenant with God.

There is another aspect of the meaning of the Covenant given in the Bahá’í Writings. The Covenant is described as an “instrument” created to “direct” and “canalize”<sup>5</sup> (that is, to channel) the bounties and blessings of divine Revelation. We can understand this by again thinking of a tree. Rain spreads the blessing of water randomly. To direct water to a tree that needs it, a farmer makes an irrigation channel. The Covenant is a channel for directing the flow of God’s blessings to individuals who do their part in the Covenant.

God’s will is the expression of what He wants us to do. He communicates His will to us through the Covenant by sending His Messengers and His Holy Books. “Whatsoever hath been revealed in His Tablets is but a reflection of His Will.”<sup>6</sup>

God’s purpose for us is what He wants us to be. We achieve His purpose by following His will. For an individual, this purpose is to “reflect the glory of the names and attributes of God.”<sup>7</sup> For society, it is to “ensure the peace and tranquillity of mankind,”<sup>8</sup> ultimately leading to the building of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Through the instrument of the Covenant we recognize the source of God’s will, strive to hold firm to His wishes, and receive the blessings that flow through the channel of the Covenant. We are thereby assisted to accomplish His purpose for ourselves and for society.

## The Instrument of God’s Will and Purpose

5 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 237

6 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 338

7 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 262

8 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 80

1. "Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him—a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation. . . . Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. . . ."

"These energies with which the Day Star of Divine bounty and Source of heavenly guidance hath endowed the reality of man lie, however, latent within him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp. The radiance of these energies may be obscured by worldly desires even as the light of the sun can be concealed beneath the dust and dross which cover the mirror. Neither the candle nor the lamp can be lighted through their own unaided efforts, nor can it ever be possible for the mirror to free itself from its dross. . . ."

"And since there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation . . . He hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. . . . These Essences of Detachment, these resplendent Realities are the channels of God's all-pervasive grace. . . . They are commissioned to use the inspiration of Their words, the effusions of Their infallible grace and the sanctifying breeze of Their Revelation for the cleansing of every longing heart and receptive spirit from the dross and dust of earthly cares and limitations. Then, and only then, will the Trust of God, latent in the reality of man, emerge. . . ."

" . . . Through the Teachings of this Day Star of Truth every man will advance and develop until he attaineth the station at which he can manifest all the potential forces with which his inmost true self hath been endowed."

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 65-68

2. "How often hath the human heart, which is the recipient of the light of God and the seat of the revelation of the All-Merciful, erred from Him Who is the Source of that light and the Well Spring of that revelation. It is the waywardness of the heart that removeth it far from God, and condemneth it to remoteness from Him. Those hearts, however, that are aware of His presence, are close to Him, and are to be regarded as having drawn nigh unto His throne." —*Gleanings* 186

## The Relationship Between God and Humanity

*unconstrained*: not held back, not restricted

*sovereign*: supreme, chief

*generating*: bringing into existence; producing

*recipient*: someone or something that receives

*latent*: present but not apparent; not developed or active

*obscured*: darkened, dimmed

*dross*: worthless matter

*intercourse*: communication

*dispensation*: a period of history beginning with the appearance of a Manifestation of God and ending with the coming of the next Manifestation

*resplendent*: shining brilliantly; splendid

*manifest*: evident

*commissioned*: appointed to accomplish a task

*effusions*: acts of pouring forth freely; expressions that are not restricted

*infallible*: free from error

*sanctifying*: making holy or sacred

*erred*: broke an accepted standard of conduct; strayed

*waywardness*: disobedience; stubbornness

3. "I implore Thee, O my Lord, by Thine Ark, through which the potency of Thy will was manifested and the energizing influences of Thy purpose were revealed. . . ." —Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations* 271

4. "... Whatever pertaineth to [the Manifestation], all His acts and doings, whatever He ordaineth or forbiddeth, should be considered ... as identical with the Will of God Himself." —Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 167

5. "Thou didst bring mankind into being to know Thee and to serve Thy Cause, that their station might thereby be uplifted by virtue of the things Thou hast revealed in Thy Scriptures." —*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 111

6. "... 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 ... 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." —'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan* 49

7. "God created in us a divine holy spirit—the human spirit with its intellectual powers which are above the powers of nature. . . . This power gives man effectual control over nature. He is enabled to discover reality and bring invisible things into the courts of the visible. Thus he is enabled to render effective the will of God and give it material station.... This is that which should be used for the acquisition and manifestation of the bounties of God, that ye may establish the Kingdom of God among men and attain to happiness in both worlds, the visible and the invisible." —'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Divine Art of Living* 17

8. "[Bahá'u'lláh's] reason for putting on the heavy iron chains . . . was to lead every soul on earth to concord, to fellow-feeling, to oneness; to make known amongst all peoples the sign of the singleness of God, so that at last the primal oneness deposited at the heart of all created things would bear its destined fruit. . . ."

"... Let us turn our eyes away from empty fantasies of this world's divergent forms, and serve instead this pre-eminent purpose, this grand design." —*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 263

9. "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 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 Kingdom."

—'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Power of the Covenant*, Vol. II, intro.

## The Instrument of God's Will and Purpose

Ark: symbol used in the Bahá'í writings to indicate the Covenant or some aspect of the Covenant such as the Faith of God, His laws, or Bahá'u'lláh's new World Order

Manifestation of God: a Messenger of God through Whom God's perfections and attributes are expressed; examples include Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and others

encircle: surround

effectual: having the ability to produce a desired effect

acquisition: act of obtaining through one's own efforts

concord: harmony, agreement

primal: first, original; chief

divergent: differing

pre-eminent: superior to all others

penetrative: piercing, able to reach deeply into

resuscitating: bringing back to life

regenerating: filling with new life or power

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 81.

“... All living things in this world are subject to the laws of nature. The Creator has so arranged life on this planet that the sun pours its energies upon all created things, the earth supplies the food, and the elements make their contribution. And so, God gives life. This is the part He plays.

“... The fish lives in the water, while a bird soars in the air. Both live in accordance with the laws which nature dictates to them. For on this physical level, the reaction of all created things to God’s outpourings of energy is involuntary. Each creature is bound by the laws of nature and cannot deviate a hair’s breadth from them. But the essential point is that the creature’s response is in harmony with the vivifying forces of life which are released by nature.

“It is the same spiritually. The response of man to God’s Revelation ought to be that of harmony with His Teachings. But man, although physically an animal, is not spiritually subject to the laws of nature. Instead he is bound by the laws of the Covenant of God with Him. . . . In the same way that God provides the life-giving energies for the physical world, and the creatures respond to these, the same Creator releases spiritual forces for the development and progress of the soul of man, and the individual must play his part. But unlike the physical world, the response of man to God’s bounties is voluntary. Man has free will, whereas other created things are devoid of this faculty.

“The mere act of creation brings into being the Covenant. . . . God on His part creates man in His own image which is the act of bestowing upon him His attributes. He provides him with his physical needs in this life and sends His Messengers to throw light upon his path so that he may draw near to Him.

“... The most natural course, which can alone bring about harmony between the two sides of the Covenant, is for man to obey the precepts laid down by God. To rebel against them is to live in conflict with the laws of creation and to cut oneself away from the good. To believe in God but to think that this Covenant does not exist and that the Creator has not laid down any laws in the spiritual domains of His creation is tantamount to attributing incompetence to Him.”

—Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*, Vol. III, 288-89

*involuntary: not controlled by the will*

*deviate: vary or differ*

*vivifying: giving life to*

*devoid: without; completely lacking*

*faculty: special ability or skill*

*attributes: qualities, characteristics*

*precepts: rules of conduct*

*tantamount: the same as*

*attributing: considering a quality belongs to*

*incompetence: inability*



“The Covenant of God with man is similar to the terms which a school headmaster lays down for the pupils. The moment a child walks into a school for the first time, he, without knowing it, enters into a covenant with the headmaster. Again, this covenant has two sides. The headmaster provides the child with all his educational needs. He appoints teachers to teach him and draws up the programme. The part that the child has to play is to learn every lesson he is taught and follow every instruction he is given. Only in this way can he acquire knowledge and become mature with wisdom and understanding. When the child is ready to receive a higher level of education, the headmaster delegates a new teacher to teach him more.

“The terms of this covenant are drawn up by the headmaster alone, and the child has no say in it. Its author is strong, knowledgeable and wise, but the child, the other party to the covenant, is weak, unlettered and immature. Most arrangements made by the strong for the weak are against the interests of, and are designed to exploit, the latter. But not so in this case, because the motive of the headmaster in drawing up such a contract between himself and the child is pure. His intention is to educate the child and endow him with good qualities and perfections. If the pupil plays his part well and follows the instructions of his master, this covenant becomes the greatest blessing in his life.”

—Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. III, 289-90

## Further Study

Select one of the passages from the “Readings” section.

|                                    |                                                         |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| What does the passage mean to you? | What are the implications of the passage for your life? |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|

List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 81 and additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

*The Covenant*, by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

A compilation of extracts from the Bahá'í writings.

## Personal Reflection

## Remaining Questions

## Additional Reading

## Questions

1. (Circle all that apply.) Regarding the relationship between God and humanity:
  - a. we can choose to be separated from God
  - b. God's will is expressed through His Manifestations
  - c. God and humanity directly interact
  - d. the Covenant directs God's blessings
  
2. (Circle all that apply.) God's purpose for humanity is:
  - a. unknowable
  - b. accomplished by doing God's will
  - c. to establish the unity of humanity
  - d. for each person to know and love Him
  
3. (Circle all that apply.) The Covenant is:
  - a. a mutual agreement between God and humanity
  - b. that we should know and love God
  - c. binding upon us whether we wish it or not
  - d. the means by which we learn God's will
  
4. Describe, in one sentence, the relationship between the Covenant and God's will and purpose:

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## Answers

The following are suggested answers. Depending on your understanding of the quotes, you may have different answers. Consider the suggested answers a starting point for thought and discussion.

1. **a, b, and d.** Regarding “a,” see quote #2, page 8; for “b,” see quote #5, page 9; and for “d,” see page 7. Regarding “c,” God and humanity do not directly interact, that is why we have the instrument of the Covenant; see pages 6 and 8.
2. **b, c, and d.** Regarding “b,” see page 7; for “c,” see page 7 and #6 and #7 on page 9; and for “d,” see page 7. Regarding “a,” we know God’s purpose through the words of His Manifestations.
3. **c and d.** For “c,” see pages 7, 10 and 11; for “d,” see page 7 and #4 on page 9. Regarding “a,” God alone sets the boundaries of the Covenant; humanity has no choice but to abide by it. Therefore it cannot be considered a “mutual” agreement. Regarding “b,” this defines God’s purpose for humanity, not His Covenant; however, you may consider this correct because it describes what humanity’s part in the Covenant is.
4. The Covenant is the instrument created by God through which the powers of His will are directed and channeled to accomplish His purpose. See pages 7 and 9.

## Discussion

Why is there a need for a Covenant?

Quotation #1 on page 8 does not mention the word “covenant.” Explain the meaning of this quotation in relation to the Covenant.

What is God’s purpose for humanity? What is the relationship between that purpose and God’s will? What is the role of the Covenant in this relationship?

How could you explain the Covenant to someone who claims there is no Covenant between God and humanity? (That is, to someone who believes there is no relationship requiring humanity to act in a certain way to receive divine blessings.)

# 2

## The Covenant of God

### Introduction

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There are two general types of religious covenant. Both serve as instruments through which the will of God flows to humanity. Each brings spiritual blessings to us when we arise to do our part. With the help of this divine assistance we can achieve our God-given purpose.

The first type of covenant is the Covenant of God.<sup>1</sup> It concerns the series of divine Educators, the Manifestations of God, that are sent by God with teachings to guide humanity. This lesson will examine the meaning of the Covenant of God as described in the Bahá'í Writings.

The second type of covenant is the appointment by the Manifestation of a successor—someone or some institution that serves as a channel for divine guidance until the coming of the next Manifestation. The meaning and origin of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant is covered in lessons 3 and 4.

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<sup>1</sup> Referred to in different ways in Bahá'í literature, such as the Covenant and Testament of God (*Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 147), the greater Covenant (*The Covenant*, intro.), the general Covenant (*The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 137), and the Eternal Covenant (*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 227). There are cases where 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses the term "Covenant of God" in a general sense when He seems to be referring to what is described in lesson 3 as the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. For example, see *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, page 6, and *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, page 215.



## Overview

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“Contemplate with thine inward eye the chain of successive Revelations that hath linked the Manifestation of Adam with that of the Báb,” Bahá’u’lláh writes. “I testify before God that each one of these Manifestations hath been sent down through the operation of the Divine Will and Purpose. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

The Manifestations carry forward God’s Covenant with humanity. They are the channels provided by God to insure the flow of divine will (what God wants us to do) to accomplish the divine purpose (what God wants us to achieve). Our part is to recognize God’s Manifestation and obey His teachings.

There have always been Manifestations sent by God. They will continue to be sent in the future. As part of God’s Covenant each Manifestation makes a covenant with His followers to accept the next Manifestation Who will come after Him.

For thousands of years until the coming of the Báb the Manifestations have prepared humanity for a time of fulfillment. That is, They have prepared us for a time when God’s purpose would be realized in the building of the Kingdom of God on earth. This is referred to in the Holy Books as the Everlasting Covenant.

## Explanation

Using the example of a school, we can think of the Everlasting Covenant as the promise of graduation after a series of grades.

- The Manifestations are like teachers of different grades in one school. The principal gives a fixed assignment to each teacher. The teacher fits the lessons to the grade level and understanding of the children. The students are supposed to obey the teacher and learn what is presented.

God makes a covenant with humanity through each Manifestation. He gives each of Them a specific mission and a “predestined revelation.”<sup>3</sup> The Manifestations limit Their teachings to our ability to understand.<sup>4</sup> We need to accept the Manifestation and obey His teachings.<sup>5</sup>

- The teacher prepares the children for the next grade and teacher.

The Manifestation of God makes a covenant with His people to accept the next Manifestation.

- The aim of the teacher at each level is to do his or her part to prepare the students for graduation. When students leave school they pass from childhood to maturity.

The series of Manifestations up to the Báb has prepared us for a time of fulfillment—the building of the Kingdom of God on earth. Bahá'u'lláh states: “In this most mighty Revelation all the Dispensations of the past have attained their highest and final consummation.”<sup>6</sup> This represents the coming of age of humanity.

After graduation a person continues to learn. So, also, the Covenant of God continues beyond Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. “It should be borne in mind that, great as is the power manifested by this Revelation and however vast the range of the Dispensation its Author has inaugurated, it emphatically repudiates the claim to be regarded as the final revelation of God's will and purpose for mankind.”<sup>7</sup>

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3 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 52

4 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 77

5 See lesson 6 for a more information on our responsibility to the Covenant

6 *Gleanings* 244

7 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 115

1. "God hath sent down His Messengers to succeed to Moses and Jesus, and He will continue to do so till 'the end that hath no end'; so that His grace may, from the heaven of Divine bounty, be continually vouchsafed to mankind."

—Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 116

2. "[There is a] general Covenant which, as inculcated by the Bahá'í teaching, God Himself invariably establishes with mankind when He inaugurates a new Dispensation."

—Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 137

3. "Be ye assured, moreover, that the works and acts of each and every one of these Manifestations of God, nay whatever pertaineth unto them, and whatsoever they may manifest in the future, are all ordained by God, and are a reflection of His Will and Purpose. Whoso maketh the slightest possible difference between their persons, their words, their messages, their acts and manners, hath indeed disbelieved in God, hath repudiated His signs, and betrayed the Cause of His Messengers."

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 59-60

4. "The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and attain His Presence. . . . Whoso hath recognized the Day Spring of Divine guidance and entered His holy court hath drawn nigh unto God and attained His Presence, a Presence which is the real Paradise, and of which the loftiest mansions of heaven are but a symbol. . . . Whoso hath failed to recognize Him will have condemned himself to the misery of remoteness, a remoteness which is naught but utter nothingness and the essence of the nethermost fire. Such will be his fate, though to outward seeming he may occupy the earth's loftiest seats and be established upon its most exalted throne."

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 70-71

5. "God's purpose in sending His Prophets unto men is twofold. The first is to liberate the children of men from the darkness of ignorance, and guide them to the light of true understanding. The second is to ensure the peace and tranquillity of mankind, and provide all the means by which they can be established."—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 79-80

6. "The beginning of all things is the knowledge of God, and the end of all things is strict observance of whatsoever hath been sent down from the empyrean of the Divine Will that pervadeth all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth."

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 5

## The Succession of Manifestations

vouchsafed: granted; given

inculcated: taught or impressed by urging forcefully or repeating frequently

invariably: in an unchanging way

inaugurates: makes a formal beginning of

pertains: refers or relates to

ordained: decreed, given orders for; destined by fate or Providence

repudiated: refused to accept as binding or having authority; rejected

betrayed: failed to be true or faithful to

essence: highest or final nature of a thing

nethermost: lowest

liberate: free

tranquillity: peacefulness; calmness

empyrean: true and highest heavenly paradise

pervade: to spread throughout

## Obedience and the Covenant of God

7. "This is that which hath descended from the realm of glory, uttered by the tongue of power and might, and revealed unto the Prophets of old. We have taken the inner essence thereof and clothed it in the garment of brevity, as a token of grace unto the righteous, that they may stand faithful unto the Covenant of God, may fulfill in their lives His trust, and in the realm of the spirit obtain the gem of Divine virtue." —Bahá'u'lláh, introduction, *The Hidden Words* 3

*descended: came down; came from a higher to a lower level*

8. "Recite ye the verses of God every morning and evening. Whoso reciteth them not hath truly failed to fulfill his pledge to the Covenant of God and His Testament and whoso in this day turneth away therefrom, hath indeed turned away from God since time immemorial." —Bahá'u'lláh, *Spiritual Foundations* 1

*realm: kingdom; area of one's rule or authority*

*brevity: shortness; much meaning put into few words*

*immemorial: extending beyond the reach of memory or records*

9. "O army of God! Through the protection and help vouchsafed by the Blessed Beauty . . . ye must conduct yourselves in such manner that ye may stand out distinguished and brilliant as the sun among other souls. Should any one of you enter a city, he should become a centre of attraction by reason of his sincerity, his faithfulness and love, his honesty and fidelity, his truthfulness and loving-kindness towards all the peoples of the world, so that the people of that city may cry out and say: 'This man is unquestionably a Bahá'í, for his manners, his behaviour, his conduct, his morals, his nature, and disposition reflect the attributes of the Bahá'ís.' Not until ye attain this station can ye be said to have been faithful to the Covenant and Testament of God. For He hath, through irrefutable Texts, entered into a binding Covenant with us all, requiring us to act in accordance with His sacred instructions and counsels."

*fidelity: faithfulness, loyalty*

*disposition: mood or attitude; tendency to behave in a certain way*

*irrefutable: not subject to argument or challenge*

—Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá 71

10. "O My servants! There shineth nothing else in Mine heart except the unfading light of the Morn of Divine guidance, and out of My mouth proceedeth naught but the essence of truth, which the Lord your God hath revealed. Follow not, therefore, your earthly desires, and violate not the Covenant of God, nor break your pledge to Him. With firm determination, with the whole affection of your heart, and with the full force of your words, turn ye unto Him, and walk not in the ways of the foolish. The world is but a show, vain and empty, a mere nothing, bearing the semblance of reality. Set not your affections upon it. Break not the bond that uniteth you with your Creator, and be not of those that have erred and strayed from His ways."

*violate: break; do harm to something sacred, desecrate*

*vain: having no real value; useless*

*semblance: outward appearance; false or deceptive image*

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 328

11. "The Lord of the universe hath never raised up a prophet nor hath He sent down a Book unless He hath established His covenant with all men, calling for their acceptance of the next Revelation and of the next Book; inasmuch as the outpourings of His bounty are ceaseless and without limit." —*Selections from the Writings of the Báb* 87

12. "As for the reference in *The Hidden Words* regarding the Covenant entered into on Mount Párán, this signifieth that in the sight of God the past, the present and the future are all one and the same. . . . And it is a basic principle of the Law of God that in every Prophetic Mission, He entereth into a Covenant with all believers—a Covenant that endureth until the end of that Mission, until the promised day when the Personage stipulated at the outset of the Mission is made manifest. Consider Moses. . . . Verily upon Mount Sinai, Moses entered into a Covenant regarding the Messiah, with all those that would live in the Day of the Messiah. And those souls, although they appeared many centuries after Moses, were nevertheless—so far as the Covenant, which is outside time, was concerned—present there with Moses." —*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 207

13. "The Greater Covenant into which, as affirmed in His [the Báb's] writings, God had, from time immemorial, entered, through the Prophets of all ages, with the whole of mankind, regarding the newborn Revelation, had already been fulfilled. It had now to be supplemented by a Lesser Covenant which He felt bound to make with the entire body of His followers concerning the One Whose advent He characterized as the fruit and ultimate purpose of His Dispensation. Such a Covenant had invariably been the feature of every previous religion. It had existed, under various forms, with varying degrees of emphasis, had always been couched in veiled language, and had been alluded to in cryptic prophecies, in abstruse allegories, in unauthenticated traditions, and in the fragmentary and obscure passages of the sacred Scriptures. In the Bábí Dispensation, however, it was destined to be established in clear and unequivocal language. . . ."

—Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 27-28

14. "I am not apprehensive for My own self . . . My fears are for Him [the next Manifestation] Who will be sent down unto you after Me—Him Who will be invested with great sovereignty and mighty dominion.' . . . 'By those words which I have revealed, Myself is not intended, but rather He Who will come after Me. . . ."

—Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 117

## The Promise of a New Manifestation

ceaseless: unending

Mount Párán: mountain in Arabia; reference to the Islamic dispensation

signifies: means

endures: remains firm under difficulty; lasts

personage: person of importance

stipulated: specified as part of an agreement

Mount Sinai: mountain where God spoke to Moses

supplemented: completed or added to something

couched: put into words

alluded: referred indirectly

cryptic: hidden, secret; puzzling, mysterious

abstruse: hard to understand; unclear

allegories: stories that have a symbolic meaning

unauthenticated: not established as valid or genuine

fragmentary: incomplete or broken condition

obscure: not readily understood or not clearly expressed

unequivocal: unmistakably clear as to meaning

apprehensive: worried; uncertain of the future

15. "This is the Day, O my Lord, which Thou didst announce unto all mankind as the Day whereon Thou wouldst reveal Thy Self. . . . Thou hast, moreover, entered into a covenant with them, in Thy Books, and Thy Scriptures, and Thy Scrolls, and Thy Tablets, concerning Him Who is the Day-Spring of Thy Revelation, and hast appointed the Bayán to be the Herald of this Most Great and all-glorious Manifestation. . . ."

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations* 275

16. "The Revelation which, from time immemorial, hath been acclaimed as the Purpose and Promise of all the Prophets of God, and the most cherished Desire of His Messengers, hath now, by virtue of the pervasive Will of the Almighty and at His irresistible bidding, been revealed unto men. . . ."

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 5

17. "The progress of the Cause of God gathers increasing momentum and we may with confidence look forward to the day when this Community, in God's good time, shall have traversed the stages predicted for it by its Guardian, and shall have raised on this tormented planet the fair mansions of God's Own Kingdom wherein humanity may find surcease from its self-induced confusion and chaos and ruin, and the hatreds and violence of this time shall be transmuted into an abiding sense of world brotherhood and peace. All this shall be accomplished within the Covenant of the everlasting Father, the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh."

—*Messages from the Universal House of Justice* 119-120

18. "Then [when the Bahá'í Commonwealth is established] will the coming of age of the entire human race be proclaimed and celebrated by all the peoples and nations of the earth. Then will the banner of the Most Great Peace be hoisted. Then will the world-wide sovereignty of Bahá'u'lláh—the Establisher of the Kingdom of the Father foretold by the Son, and anticipated by the Prophets of God before Him and after Him—be recognized, acclaimed, and firmly established. Then will a world civilization be born, flourish, and perpetuate itself, a civilization with a fullness of life such as the world has never seen nor can as yet conceive. Then will the Everlasting Covenant be fulfilled in its completeness. Then will the promise enshrined in all the Books of God be redeemed, and all the prophecies uttered by the Prophets of old come to pass, and the vision of seers and poets be realized. Then will the planet . . . be . . . capable of fulfilling that ineffable destiny fixed for it, from time immemorial, by the love and wisdom of its Creator."

—Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come* 123-24

## The Everlasting Covenant

Day-Spring: the place where the sun rises; a symbol of the Manifestation of God

Bayán (buy-awn): one of the central books of the Báb; title given by the Báb to His Revelation, particularly His books

irresistible: too strong to be resisted

stages: see *Messages to the Bahá'í World* 155 and *The Advent of Divine Justice* 15

tormented: to have suffered extreme pain

surcease: end

self-induced: caused by oneself

transmuted: changed from one form, substance, nature, or class to another

consummation: finish, completion

Most Great Peace: second of two major stages by which peace is established; peace resulting from the spiritualization of the world and union of its peoples

perpetuate: to prolong the existence of; to make lasting

ineffable: unspeakable, too sacred for utterance

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 81.



## Further Study

Select one of the passages from the “Readings” section.

|                                    |                                                         |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| What does the passage mean to you? | What are the implications of the passage for your life? |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|

List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 81 and additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

|    |
|----|
| 1. |
| 2. |
| 3. |
| 4. |
| 5. |

*Gleanings*, by Bahá'u'lláh, 46-136

Passages on God and His Manifestations.

*All Things Made New*, by John Ferraby, Chapter XIV

Commentary, with quotations, on different types of Covenant, including the Eternal Covenant.

*The Eternal Covenant*, by Lowell Johnson

Includes an appendix that traces the concept of Covenant from the time of Adam using Bahá'í, biblical, and Qur'anic quotes.

## Personal Reflection

## Remaining Questions

## Additional Reading

## Questions

1. Describe the two parts of the Covenant of God:

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2. (Circle all that apply.) The Covenant of God:

- a. involves humanity's acceptance of and obedience to each Manifestation
- b. reaches a time of fulfillment with Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation
- c. includes the Covenant each Manifestation makes with His followers to accept the next Manifestation
- d. will continue beyond Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation

3. List (based on the references) four things that happen when we recognize the Manifestation of God:

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4. (Circle all that apply.) Fulfillment of the Everlasting Covenant:

- a. has been accomplished with Bahá'u'lláh's coming
- b. will be accomplished in this Revelation
- c. will be accomplished by the next Manifestation
- d. is God's purpose for humanity

## Answers

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The following are suggested answers. Depending on your understanding of the quotes, you may have different answers. Consider the suggested answers a starting point for thought and discussion.

1. One part of the Covenant of God concerns the “newborn Revelation” entered into by God through all the Prophets from time immemorial. The second part of God’s Covenant concerns the agreement between the Manifestation and His followers to accept the next Manifestation. See quote #13, page 20.
2. **a, b, c, and d.** For “a,” see #5 and #6, page 18, and page 19; for “b,” see the quotations on page 21; for “c,” see the quotations on page 20; and for “d,” see #1, page 18 and #14, page 20.
3. We attain the presence of God (#4, page 18); we are no longer remote from God (#4, page 18); we must obey His commands (#6, page 18); we are bound to accept the next Manifestation (#11, page 20); we are guided to true understanding (#5, page 18); and we gain the means to create peace (#5, page 18).
4. **b and d.** See the quotations on page 21. The purpose of God for society, as explained in the last lesson, is the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth—the peace and unity of all humanity. Regarding “a,” see #18, page 21 for the time of fulfillment.

## Discussion

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Explain your understanding of the Covenant of God—including the nature of humanity and its relationship to God’s will and purpose. What is the role of the Manifestations in the Covenant of God? (Support your view, when you can, with quotations.)

What is the role of obedience in the Covenant of God? Why has someone failed to remain faithful to the Covenant because they have not recited the verses of God, or because they are not distinguished from their fellow human beings? (Refer to page 19.) How do you think God’s justice and mercy relate to our obligation to be obedient to His teachings?

In what way is Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation the “Purpose” of the Prophets? In what way is it the “Promise?” (Refer to #16, page 21.)

# 3

## The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh

### Introduction

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Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant is, in its broadest sense, a renewal of the Covenant of God. His dispensation is the fulfillment of the Everlasting Covenant. Bahá'u'lláh has also assured us that God's Covenant will not end with this Covenant, for He has promised a new Manifestation Who will come in a thousand or more years.

In addition to renewing the Covenant of God, Bahá'u'lláh has created another Covenant with His followers. This is the "specific,"<sup>1</sup> the "lesser,"<sup>2</sup> or "second form"<sup>3</sup> of Covenant in which He called upon the believers to turn to 'Abdu'l-Bahá after His passing. Lessons 3 and 4 will examine this second type of Covenant.

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1 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 137

2 The Universal House of Justice, *The Covenant*, intro.

3 Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance* 147

“The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh,” Shoghi Effendi states, referring to the second form of Covenant, “had been solely instituted through the direct operation of His Will and purpose.”<sup>4</sup>

Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant, the “Instrument He had forged,” was created to channel, “after His passing, the forces released by Him in the course of a forty year ministry.” Its purpose was to preserve “the unity of His Faith” and provide “the impulse necessary to achieve its destiny,”<sup>5</sup> the Kingdom of God on earth. “Had not the Covenant come to pass,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states, “. . . the forces of the Cause of God would have been utterly scattered. . . .”<sup>6</sup>

The second form of Covenant is, in essence, the “continuation of divine guidance after the Ascension of the Prophet” through a person or institution that can “indisputably state what is the Will of God.”<sup>7</sup> Bahá’u’lláh instructed His followers to turn, after His passing, to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Center of His Covenant.

Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant is unique in religious history because it is explicitly revealed in writing.<sup>8</sup> His instructions regarding the Covenant are found in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (the book of His laws), in the Tablet of the Branch, and in the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd (the book of His Covenant). There are also a number of Bahá’u’lláh’s other Tablets that extol and reinforce the station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

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<sup>4</sup> *God Passes By* 325

<sup>5</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 405

<sup>6</sup> *Tablets of the Divine Plan* 49

<sup>7</sup> The Universal House of Justice, letter of 3-23-75

<sup>8</sup> The Universal House of Justice, *The Power of the Covenant*, Part II, 4-5

To understand the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant, we need only look at the experience of some earlier religions. Consider Christianity and Islam, two of the recent past dispensations.

Jesus left no detailed instructions for His followers. There was initially no written Holy Book, no designated successor, no administrative system. The powers released by the Revelation of Jesus led to the growth of Christianity. Throughout the centuries, however, the meaning of the Gospel has been vigorously debated. This led to innumerable divisions in the Christian Faith.

Muhammad left the text of the Qur'án with guidance for the faithful in the basics of His religion, such as prayer and fasting. Although some of His followers believe that He gave instructions regarding His successor, such instructions were not left in writing. Islam, therefore, also fell victim to division into different factions and denominations.

Bahá'u'lláh, however, has, through His Covenant, provided His followers "in unequivocal and emphatic language, all the laws, the regulations, the principles, the institutions, the guidance, they require."<sup>9</sup> He explicitly appointed His successor in writing—someone to whom the believers could turn for guidance and who would answer their questions and resolve their disputes. The unity of the Bahá'í Faith has thus been preserved.<sup>10</sup>

"So firm and mighty is this Covenant," 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "that from the beginning of time until the present day no religious Dispensation hath produced its like."<sup>11</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá is the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant—a Covenant intended to assure the continuation of the flow of divine will for the accomplishment of the divine purpose. It is interesting to note, therefore, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá is also the Interpreter of the Word of God (the source of God's will) and is the perfect Exemplar of the Bahá'í teachings (the perfect example of God's purpose for each human being).

<sup>9</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 21

<sup>10</sup> Shoghi Effendi, on page 50 of *Messages to America* wrote: "Were anyone to imagine or expect that [the] Cause . . . should, at all times, be immune to any divergence of opinion, or any defection on the part of its multitudinous followers, it would be sheer delusion. . . . That such a secession, however, . . . should have failed . . . to split in twain the entire body of the adherents of the Faith . . . is a fact too eloquent for even a casual observer . . . to either deny or ignore."

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in *God Passes By* 238



1. "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."

—The Universal House of Justice, *The Power of the Covenant*, Part II, 4

2. "A dynamic process, divinely propelled, possessed of undreamt-of potentialities, world-embracing in scope, world-transforming in its ultimate consequences, had been set in motion on that memorable night when the Báb communicated the purpose of His mission to Mullá Husayn in an obscure corner of Shíráz. It acquired a tremendous momentum with the first intimations of Bahá'u'lláh's dawning Revelation. . . . It was finally consummated by the laws and ordinances He [Bahá'u'lláh] formulated, by the principles which He enunciated and by the institutions which He ordained. . . .

"To direct and canalize these forces let loose by this Heaven-sent process, and to insure their harmonious and continuous operation after His ascension, an instrument divinely ordained, invested with indisputable authority, organically linked with the Author of the Revelation Himself, was clearly indispensable. That instrument Bahá'u'lláh had expressly provided through the institution of the Covenant. . . ."

—Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 237-38

3. "The purpose of the Blessed Beauty in entering into this Covenant and testament was to gather all existent beings around one point so that the thoughtless souls, who in every cycle and generation have been the cause of dissension, may not undermine the Cause. He hath, therefore, commanded that whatever emanateth from the Centre of the Covenant is right and is under His protection and favour, while all else is error."

—*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 209

4. "In accordance with the explicit text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh hath made the Center of the Covenant the Interpreter of the Word—a Covenant so firm and mighty that from the beginning of time until the present day no religious Dispensation hath produced its like."

—'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 136

5. "The Covenant is, moreover, embedded in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh Himself. Thus . . . to accept Bahá'u'lláh is to accept His Covenant; to reject His Covenant is to reject Him."

—written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *The Covenant* 18

## The Nature of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant

*potentialities: abilities, qualities, or talents that can be developed*

*transforming: changing significantly in form or condition*

*intimations: indirect indications; hints*

*ordinances: commands, laws*

*formulated: fixed or stated in definite terms; made*

*enunciated: declared or proclaimed*

*canalize: to create channels to direct the flow of water, or, in this case, spiritual energies*

*organically: parts connected, organized and related to one another as in a living thing*

*indispensable: required, essential*

*emanate: to come forth or issue from a source*

*embedded: fixed firmly in; part of*

6. "... Nowhere in the books pertaining to any of the world's religious systems . . . do we find any single document establishing a Covenant endowed with an authority comparable to the Covenant which Bahá'u'lláh had Himself instituted. . . .

"... Glorified by Him, in other passages of His writings, as the 'Ark of Salvation' and as 'the Cord stretched betwixt the earth and the Abhá Kingdom,' this Covenant has been bequeathed to posterity in a Will and Testament which, together with the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and several Tablets . . . constitute the chief buttresses designed by the Lord of the Covenant Himself to shield and support, after His ascension, the appointed Center of His Faith and the Delineator of its future institutions."

—Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 238-39

7. "'When the ocean of my presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root. . . . 'When the Mystic Dove will have winged its flight from its Sanctuary of Praise and sought its far-off goal, its hidden habitation, refer ye whatsoever ye understand not in the Book, to Him Who hath branched from this mighty Stock.'"

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 24

8. "'There hath branched from the Sadratu'l-Muntahá this sacred and glorious Being, this Branch of Holiness; well is it with him that hath sought His shelter and abideth beneath His shadow. . . . Render thanks unto God, O people, for His appearance; for verily He is the most great Favor unto you, the most perfect bounty upon you. . . . Whoso turneth towards Him hath turned towards God, and whoso turneth away from Him hath turned away from My beauty, hath repudiated My Proof, and transgressed against Me."

—Bahá'u'lláh, from the Tablet of the Branch, quoted in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 135

9. "The Will of the divine Testator is this: It is incumbent upon the Aghsán, the Afán and My kindred to turn, one and all, their faces towards the Most Mighty Branch. Consider that which We have revealed in Our Most Holy Book: 'When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.' The object of this sacred verse is none other except the Most Mighty Branch. Thus have We graciously revealed unto you our potent Will, and I am verily the Gracious, the All-Powerful." —Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in the Kitáb-i-'Ahd, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 221-22

## Uniqueness and Origin

*bequeathed: given or left by will; handed down,*

*posterity: future generations collectively*

*Kitáb-i-Aqdas (ket-awb-eh-ack-class): the Most Holy Book, revealed in 'Akká about 1873; "the Charter of His World Order, the chief repository of His laws, the Harbinger of His Covenant" (The Promised Day is Come 24)*

*buttress: support, prop*

*Delineator: one who describes something precisely in words*

*Sadratu'l-Muntahá (sad-ra-tol-monta-haw): the Divine Lote Tree; the tree which marks a boundary beyond which there is no passing; reference to the Manifestation of God*

*Branch: in Persian, Ghosn (gossn); a son or male descendant of Bahá'u'lláh*

*transgressed: broke a law; sinned against*

*Testator: one who makes a will*

*Aghsán (ax-awn): branches; sons and male descendants of Bahá'u'lláh*

*Afán (aff-nawn): twigs; the relatives of the Báb*

*the Most Mighty Branch: 'Abdu'l-Bahá; known to Bahá'ís by titles such as "the Master" and "the Most Mighty Branch," He did not take the title 'Abdu'l-Bahá (servant of Bahá) until after His Father's passing*

10. "Thou knowest, O my God, that I desire for Him ['Abdu'l-Bahá] naught except that which Thou didst desire, and have chosen Him for no purpose save that which Thou hadst intended for Him."

—Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 136

11. "He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Center and Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh's peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, His most exalted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Bahá'í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá'í virtue, the Most Mighty Branch . . . styles and titles that are implicit and find their truest, their highest and fairest expression in the magic name 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He is, above and beyond these appellations, the 'Mystery of God'—an expression by which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us to assign to Him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and super-human knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized."

—Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 134

12. "... The Blessed Beauty . . . appointed a Center, the Exponent of the Book and the annuller of disputes. Whatever is written or said by Him is conformable to the truth and under the protection of the Blessed Beauty. He is infallible."—'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith* 358

13. "The interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá . . . are divinely guided statements of what the Word of God means and as such these interpretations are binding on the friends."

—written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, letter of 3-9-87

14. "The continuity of that unerring guidance vouchsafed to it since its birth was now assured. The significance of the solemn affirmation that this is 'the Day which shall not be followed by night' was now clearly apprehended."

—Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 245

15. "He is the Trust of God amongst you, His charge within you, His manifestation unto you and His appearance among His favored servants. . . . Blest and sanctified be God Who createth whatsoever He willeth. . . . They who deprive themselves of the shadow of the Branch, are lost in the wilderness of error, are consumed by the heat of worldly desires, and are of those who will assuredly perish."

—Bahá'u'lláh, from the Tablet of the Branch, quoted in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 135

## 'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Center of the Covenant

*Pivot: person or thing on which something hinges or depends*

*Exemplar: model to be copied; example or pattern*

*embodiment: concrete expression*

*ideal: a norm of perfection to be aimed at*

*incarnation: concrete expression in human form*

*implicit: essentially contained in*

*appellations: titles, names*

*designate: name, appoint*

*incompatible: not capable of existing together in harmony or agreement*

*Exponent: one who explains or interprets; one who is regarded as the representative or symbol*

*annuller: one who cancels or abolishes*

*affirmation: positive declaration, confident statement*

*apprehended: understood*

*manifestation: state of making something clear or obvious to the senses*

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 81.

## Illustration

“Bahá’u’lláh had entrusted His Will and Testament to the care of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. On the ninth day after His ascension its contents became known. Earlier in the day nine of the Bahá’ís, including members of Bahá’u’lláh’s family who were chosen by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, gathered to witness the breaking of the seal and learn the counsel of the Testament. Later, the same day, within the walls of the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh, Mírzá Majdi’d-Dín—the son of Mírzá Músá, Bahá’u’lláh’s faithful brother and valiant supporter throughout forty years, then alas deceased—stood up to read the Will.<sup>11</sup> No doubt could be entertained. It was evident to Whom the Bahá’ís had to turn, and Whom they had to obey, on Whose shoulders the mantle of total authority now rested. No one expressed dissent. Everyone who was there, and heard that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the successor to Bahá’u’lláh, submitted to what He had ordained. Tarázu’lláh Samandarí [later appointed a Hand of the Cause] vividly recalled that felicitous day, and the obedience that was unquestionably rendered to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

“But there was a heart hopelessly stirred by envy. It beat in the frame of the second surviving son of Bahá’u’lláh, Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí, entitled *Ghusn-i-Akbar*, the Greater Branch, the man whose rank and station the Testament of Bahá’u’lláh had placed next to that of the Centre of the Covenant Himself. This half-brother of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had already committed an act of astounding perfidy. To this testifies the letter of repentance, short-lived though that repentance was, of Mírzá Badí’u’lláh, the fourth surviving son of Bahá’u’lláh. In that document he stated, in no uncertain terms, that two cases which belonged to Bahá’u’lláh and contained His writing materials, seals, and papers were purloined by Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí, on the very dawn of the day that their Father passed away. . . .

“Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí’s most cherished object had been to lay hands on the Will and Testament which he knew his Father had written. But that document had been entrusted to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Thus his first attempt to subvert the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh proved abortive. But ambition and jealousy drove him on to deeds more wretched, until he ultimately destroyed himself.”

—Balyuzi, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 51-52

*mantle*: cloak; anything that clothes or envelopes

*dissent*: disagreement

*felicitous*: marked by an agreeable manner

*perfidy*: deliberate violation of faith; treachery

*repentance*: regret for past sins

*purloined*: stolen

*object*: purpose, intention

*subvert*: to destroy or overthrow; to undermine

*abortive*: not reaching full or complete development

<sup>11</sup> The entire text of Bahá’u’lláh’s Will and Testament—the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd (Book of the Covenant)—can be found in *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, pages 217-23.

## Further Study

Select one of the passages from the “Readings” section.

|                                    |                                                         |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| What does the passage mean to you? | What are the implications of the passage for your life? |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|

List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 81 and additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

|                                            |
|--------------------------------------------|
| 1.<br><br>2.<br><br>3.<br><br>4.<br><br>5. |
|--------------------------------------------|

*The Kitáb-i-‘Ahd, in Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 219-23

*God Passes By*, by Shoghi Effendi, Chapter XIV  
Explanation of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh.

*The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, by Shoghi Effendi, 131-39  
Explanation of the station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

*The Power of the Covenant*, Part I  
Commentary, with quotations, on Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant.

## Personal Reflection

## Remaining Questions

## Additional Reading

## Questions

1. (Circle all that apply.) Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant:

- a. channels the forces first released by the Báb
- b. appoints 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Universal House of Justice as twin Centers of Authority
- c. prevents all disputes and defections
- d. prevents the scattering of the forces released by Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation

2. (Circle all that apply.) Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant is unique because:

- a. other Manifestations have not appointed successors
- b. other Manifestations have not made a lesser Covenant
- c. it is in writing
- d. infallible guidance will continue throughout the Dispensation

3. List the three major books or tablets by Bahá'u'lláh in which He gives authority to 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. Describe the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in relation to:

Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant:

God's will:

God's purpose:



## Answers

The following are suggested answers. Depending on your understanding of the quotes, you may have different answers. Consider the suggested answers a starting point for thought and discussion.

1. **a and d.** See page 26 and #2, page 28. “C” is not correct—the Covenant does not prevent disputes and defections, it provides a way to resolve them and protect the unity of the Faith. See footnote 10 on page 27.
2. **c and d.** See pages 26 and 27 and #14, page 30.
3. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas (The Most Holy Book), The Tablet of the Branch and the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd (Book of the Covenant). Although the references in the first two refer to a “Branch”—a male descendant of Bahá’u’lláh—the reference in the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd to the Most Mighty Branch could refer to no one else but ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.<sup>12</sup> (See #9, page 29.)
4. See pages 27, 29, and 30. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the “Center and Pivot” of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant, the “Delineator of its future institutions,” and the “annuller of disputes.” In relation to God’s will, He is the “Interpreter” and “Exponent” of the Word of God, the continuation of the channel of divine guidance, Whose statements about what the Word of God means are infallible. Regarding God’s purpose, He is the “perfect Exemplar” and the “embodiment of every Bahá’í ideal,” thus representing the realization of the potential within each human being.

## Discussion

What are the similarities between the greater (Covenant of God) and lesser (Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh) Covenants, particularly in their relation to God’s will and purpose. What are the differences?

How does Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant enable us to fulfill our purpose in life, both as individuals and as a society? What is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s role in Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant? What is our role in Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant?

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<sup>12</sup> Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*, Vol. III, 371

# 4

## The Covenant of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

### Introduction

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Shoghi Effendi stated that the believers should have “a deeper understanding of the Covenants of both Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.”<sup>1</sup> The Covenant of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, however, is not a third type of Covenant. It is an extension of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant.

The Guardian explains: “As regards the meaning of the Bahá’í Covenant [there are] two forms of Covenant. . . . First is the Covenant that every Prophet makes with . . . His people that they will accept and follow the coming Manifestation. . . . The second form of Covenant is such as the one Bahá’u’lláh made with His people that they should accept the Master. This is merely to establish and strengthen the succession of the series of Lights that appear after every Manifestation. Under the same category falls the Covenant the Master made with the Bahá’ís that they should accept His administration after Him. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

In this lesson we will examine the Covenant ‘Abdu’l-Bahá made with the believers. We will also explore some features of the Bahá’í administration which Shoghi Effendi described as the “child”<sup>3</sup> of the Covenant.

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1 *The Importance of Deepening* 26

2 Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance* 147

3 *Messages to the Bahá’í World* 88

## Overview

The Covenant of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was established with the believers in His Will and Testament. This Covenant continues the Covenant established by Bahá’u’lláh. “. . . 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 every believer undertakes to uphold when he becomes a Bahá’í.”<sup>4</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will clarified and explained the workings of the Administrative Order “that Bahá’u’lláh had already created”<sup>5</sup> in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and other Tablets. The administration is headed by the twin institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice. These two institutions are named by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as His successors in His Will.

After ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Administrative Order is the channel through which God’s will flows to humanity to accomplish His purpose. The growth of the Administrative Order will ultimately result in the raising of Bahá’u’lláh’s new World Order.

## Explanation

With the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá “the moment had now arrived for that undying, that world-vitalizing Spirit” released by the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh to “incarnate itself” (that is, take visible form) in “institutions designed to canalize its outspreading energies and stimulate its growth.”<sup>6</sup> In His Will and Testament ‘Abdu’l-Bahá lays the foundation for institutions that provide not only the structure of the Bahá’í Faith, but a plan for the reordering of society.

It was Bahá’u’lláh Who created the principles and institutions of the Administrative Order.<sup>7</sup> The guidance given in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will strictly conforms to Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings. It clarifies and fills in some details which Bahá’u’lláh deliberately did not specify. The Will was itself the result of the “creative energies”<sup>8</sup> released by Bahá’u’lláh.

## Influence of Bahá’u’lláh on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Covenant

4 The Universal House of Justice, letter of 3-23-75

5 The Universal House of Justice, *The Power of the Covenant*, Part II, 4

6 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 324

7 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* 145

8 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* 144

The chief institutions of the Administrative Order are the twin, infallible institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice. "It is clear . . . from the writings of the Guardian himself," The Universal House of Justice informs us, "that Bahá'u'lláh, in addition to appointing 'Abdu'l-Bahá, instituted the House of Justice and anticipated the Guardianship, and that the succession, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá, passed, not just to the Guardian, but to the Administration, of which the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice are the crowning institutions."<sup>9</sup>

The twin institutions are the channel for the expression of the will of God after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The Guardian is the Interpreter of the words of Bahá'u'lláh. The Universal House of Justice deals with matters not explicitly covered in Bahá'u'lláh's teachings.

The "seed" of the Administrative Order created by Bahá'u'lláh and described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá is to result in the "fruit" of a new World Order. The Administration, Shoghi Effendi explains, is the "nucleus" and "pattern"<sup>10</sup> of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh and a sign of the Faith's "Golden Age and future glory."<sup>11</sup>

The establishment of the new World Order will signify the coming of God's Kingdom on earth. Thus the promise of the Everlasting Covenant—the expression of God's Purpose for humanity—will after sixty centuries be realized by the channeling of the forces of the divine will through the Covenant and Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

## The Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice

## The Nucleus and Pattern of a New World Order

9 Letter of 1-14-73. 'Abdu'l-Bahá appointed the successors in the *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pages 3, 11, 14, 19, and 25. Bahá'u'lláh explicitly established the Universal House of Justice (see *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, pages 26-27, 68, 93, and 128-29) and anticipated by implication the Guardianship. In a letter dated 3-23-75 the Universal House of Justice states: "One such implication is in the matter of Huqúqu'lláh, which is ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas without provision being made for who is to receive it; in His Will and Testament 'Abdu'l-Bahá fills this gap by stating 'It is to be offered through the guardian of the Cause of God. . .'" (See also *Messages of the Universal House of Justice*, page 41.)

10 *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 144

11 *God Passes By* 158

## Readings

1. "There is also the Lesser Covenant that a Manifestation of God makes with His followers that they will accept His appointed successor after Him. . . . It is a Covenant of this kind that Bahá'u'lláh made with His followers regarding 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and that 'Abdu'l-Bahá perpetuated through the Administrative Order that Bahá'u'lláh had already created."

—The Universal House of Justice, letter of 3-23-75

2. "The creative energies released by the Law of Bahá'u'lláh, permeating and evolving within the mind of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, have . . . given birth to an Instrument which may be viewed as the Charter of the New World Order which is at once the glory and the promise of this most great Dispensation. . . . The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá can no more be divorced from Him Who supplied the original and motivating impulse than from the One Who ultimately conceived it. Bahá'u'lláh's inscrutable purpose, we must ever bear in mind, has been so thoroughly infused into the conduct of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and their motives have been so closely wedded together, that the mere attempt to dissociate the teachings of the former from any system which the ideal Exemplar of those same teachings has established would amount to a repudiation of one of the most sacred and basic truths of the Faith."

—Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 144

3. "... The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, . . . together with the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, constitutes the chief depository wherein are enshrined those priceless elements of that Divine Civilization, the establishment of which is the primary mission of the Bahá'í Faith. A study of the provisions of these sacred documents will reveal the close relationship that exists between them, as well as the identity of purpose and method which they inculcate. Far from regarding their specific provisions as incompatible and contradictory in spirit, every fair-minded inquirer will readily admit that they . . . mutually confirm one another, and are inseparable parts of one complete unit. A comparison of their contents with the rest of Bahá'í sacred Writings will similarly establish the conformity of whatever they contain with the spirit as well as the letter of the authenticated writings and sayings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In fact, . . . the Most Holy Book itself anticipates in a number of passages the institutions which 'Abdu'l-Bahá ordains in His Will. By leaving certain matters unspecified and unregulated in His Book of Laws, Bahá'u'lláh seems to have deliberately left a gap in the general scheme of Bahá'í Dispensation, which the unequivocal provisions of the Master's Will have filled."

—Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 3-4

## Influence of Bahá'u'lláh on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Covenant

*permeating: spreading through or mingling with*

*inscrutable: hard to grasp; mysterious*

*infused: filled, instilled, imparted*

*dissociate: to separate, disunite*

*repudiation: rejection of something as untrue*

*depository: place where something is kept for safekeeping*

*enshrined: preserved as sacred*

*contradictory: characterized by inconsistency or opposition*

*authenticated: established as genuine*

## The Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice

4. "The essence of the Covenant is the continuation of divine guidance after the Ascension of the Prophet through the presence in this world of an institution to which all the friends turn and which can indisputably state what is the Will of God. After 'Abdu'l-Bahá the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice are such institutions."

—The Universal House of Justice, letter of 3-23-75

5. "After the passing away of this wronged one, it is incumbent upon the Aghsán (Branches), the Afná (Twigs) of the sacred Lote tree, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God and the loved ones of the Abhá Beauty to turn unto Shoghi Effendi . . . as he is the sign of God, the chosen branch, the guardian of the Cause of God. . . ."

"The sacred and youthful Branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God, as well as the Universal House of Justice to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of the Exalted One (the Báb).... Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God. . . ."

—Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá 11

6. ". . . The Guardian . . . has been made the Interpreter of the Word and . . . the Universal House of Justice has been invested with the function of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the teachings. . . . Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other."—Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 150

7. "There is a profound difference between the interpretations of the Guardian and the elucidations of the House of Justice in exercise of its function to 'deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure, and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book.' The Guardian reveals what the Scripture means; his interpretation is a statement of truth which cannot be varied. . . . [The Universal House of Justice's] pronouncements, which are susceptible of amendment or abrogation by the House of Justice itself, serve to supplement and apply the Law of God."

—The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 52

8. "[The] House of Justice shares with the Guardian the responsibility for the application of the revealed word, the protection of the Faith, as well as the duty to 'insure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of our Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers, and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its Teachings.'"—The Universal House of Justice, letter of 8-22-77

*Interpreter:* person designated to say what the Word of God as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh means; the interpretation of the appointed Interpreter ('Abdu'l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi) is an extension of the Book and is as binding on the Bahá'ís as the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

*elucidations:* explanations; statements that make something clear

*susceptible of:* open to

*amendment:* formal change or alteration by a deliberative body

*abrogation:* annulment or repeal of a law by authority

*integrity:* completeness; purity



9. "The potent energies released through the ascension of the Center of His Covenant crystallized into this supreme, this infallible Organ for the accomplishment of a Divine Purpose. The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá unveiled its character, reaffirmed its basis, supplemented its principles, asserted its indispensability, and enumerated its chief institutions."—Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 89

10. "Let no one, while this System is still in its infancy, misconceive its character, belittle its significance or misrepresent its purpose. The bedrock on which this Administrative Order is founded is God's immutable Purpose for mankind in this day.... Its consummation [is] the advent of that golden millennium—the Day when the kingdoms of this world shall have become the Kingdom of God Himself, the Kingdom of Bahá'u'lláh."—Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 156-57

11. "Few will fail to recognize that the Spirit breathed by Bahá'u'lláh upon the world . . . can never permeate and exercise an abiding influence upon mankind unless and until it incarnates itself in a visible Order, which would bear His name, wholly identify itself with His principles, and function in conformity with His laws. . . .

"For Bahá'u'lláh, we should readily recognize, has not only imbued mankind with a new and regenerating Spirit. He has not merely enunciated certain universal principles, or propounded a particular philosophy. . . . In addition to these He, as well as 'Abdu'l-Bahá after Him, has, unlike the Dispensations of the past, clearly and specifically laid down a set of Laws, established definite institutions, and provided for the essentials of a Divine Economy. These are destined to be a pattern for future society, a supreme instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace, and the one agency for the unification of the world, and the proclamation of the reign of righteousness and justice upon the earth. Not only have they revealed all the directions required for the practical realization of those ideals which the Prophets of God have visualized, and which from time immemorial have inflamed the imagination of seers and poets in every age. They have also, in unequivocal and emphatic language, appointed those twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship as their chosen Successors, destined to apply the principles, promulgate the laws, protect the institutions, adapt loyally and intelligently the Faith to the requirements of progressive society, and consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world." —Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 19-20

## The Nucleus and Pattern of a New World Order

*crystallized: assumed a definite shape*

*enumerated: reckoned or named singly*

*immutable: unchangeable*

*incarnates: takes on a visible form*

*imbued: to inspire, permeate or fill*

*enunciated: stated or set forth thoroughly and systematically*

*propounded: presented for consideration*

*reign: period of rule*

*incorruptible: not subject to decay; original form cannot be changed*

*seers: prophets; those who foresee future events*

*emphatic: with emphasis*

*promulgate: to make known; to disseminate*

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 81.

## Illustration

"Nine days had not yet elapsed after the interment of the sacred remains of our beloved Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, in London, when the Hands of the Cause . . . assembled at the World Center of the Faith, in our capacity as 'Chief Stewards of the embryonic World Commonwealth of Bahá'u'lláh', to consult together on the most tragic situation facing the Bahá'ís since the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and to take all necessary and appropriate measures to safeguard the highest interests of our Faith. . . .

"On . . . November 19th, nine Hands of the Cause, selected from the Holy Land, and the several continents of East and West, with Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, broke the seals placed upon the beloved Guardian's safe and desk and made careful examination of their precious contents. These same Hands, rejoining the other Hands assembled in the Mansion of Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí, certified that Shoghi Effendi had left no Will and Testament. It was likewise certified that 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.

"The first effect of the realization that no successor to Shoghi Effendi could have been appointed by him was to plunge the Hands of the Cause into the very abyss of despair. . . .

"From this dark abyss, however, contemplation of the Guardian's own life of complete sacrifice and his peerless services gradually redeemed our anguished hearts. . . .

"The Hands of the Cause, determined to carry out every aspect of the Guardian's expressed wishes and hopes, call upon the National Assemblies to proceed with the holding of the International Continental Conferences. . . . We are, moreover, to keep ever before us the other tasks fixed in the Ten Year Plan as objectives to be won by 1963.

"Meanwhile the entire body of the Hands assembled by the nine Hands of the World Center will decide when and how the International Bahá'í Council is to evolve through the successive stages outlined by the Guardian, culminating in the call to election of the Universal House of Justice by the membership of all National Spiritual Assemblies.

"When that divinely ordained body comes into existence, all the conditions of the Faith can be examined anew. . . ."

—Proclamation by the Hands of the Cause to the Bahá'ís of East and West  
November 25, 1957, printed in *The Bahá'í World*, Vol. XIII, 341-45

*interment: burial*

*Stewards: those entrusted  
with management of  
affairs not their own*

*abyss: a very deep and  
large hole; a huge  
emptiness*

*culminating: reaching the  
highest point or degree;  
climaxing in*

## Further Study

Select one of the passages from the “Readings” section.

|                                    |                                                         |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| What does the passage mean to you? | What are the implications of the passage for your life? |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|

List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 81 and additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

|                                  |
|----------------------------------|
| 1.<br><br>2.<br><br>3.<br><br>4. |
|----------------------------------|

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

Excerpts can be found in *Bahá’í Administration*, pages 3-12.

*Wellspring of Guidance* 44-56, 81-91 and *Messages of the Universal House of Justice* 37-43

Letters discussing the relationship between the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice (see the “Exercise,” page 45).

*A Commentary on the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*,  
by David Hoffman

Commentary, with quotations, on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will.

## Personal Reflection

## Remaining Questions

## Additional Reading

## Questions

1. Which best describes the succession of authority in the Faith:

- a. Bahá'u'lláh was succeeded by 'Abdu'l-Bahá; 'Abdu'l-Bahá was succeeded by the Guardian; and the Guardian was succeeded by the Universal House of Justice
- b. Bahá'u'lláh appointed 'Abdu'l-Bahá as His successor and 'Abdu'l-Bahá appointed the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice as His successors
- c. Bahá'u'lláh appointed 'Abdu'l-Bahá as His successor and Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá passed authority to the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice

2. (Circle all that apply.) The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

- a. is in agreement with Bahá'u'lláh's writings
- b. provides for institutions not mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh
- c. is the charter of a new World Order
- d. was influenced by Bahá'u'lláh's purpose

3. Name one function performed only by the Guardian and one performed only by the Universal House of Justice. Name four functions that they both perform:

unique:

common:

to the Guardian:

\_\_\_\_\_

to the House of Justice:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. (Circle all that apply.) The Administrative Order is:

- a. the child of the Covenant
- b. an integral part of the Covenant
- c. a channel for forces released by the Revelation
- d. the crystallization of energies channeled by the Covenant

## Answers

The following are suggested answers. Depending on your understanding of the quotes, you may have different answers. Consider the suggested answers a starting point for thought and discussion.

1. **c.** This is the only choice that indicates that after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, authority passed to the Administration’s twin institutions and that these institutions were referred to by Bahá’u’lláh as well as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. See page 39 and footnote 9 on page 37.
2. **a, b, c, and d.** For “a,” “c,” and “d” see the quotations on page 38. Regarding “b,” quote #3, page 38 indicates Bahá’u’lláh left gaps for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to fill. Footnote 9 indicates the Guardianship was not explicitly mentioned by Bahá’u’lláh, but was anticipated.
3. The specific function of the Guardianship is interpretation of the writings of Bahá’u’lláh, while for the Universal House of Justice, it is legislation on items not revealed in the teachings. See #6 and #7, page 39. See #8, page 39 for five common responsibilities of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice.
4. **a, b, c, and d.** For “a,” see page 35; for “b,” see page 36; for “c,” see the quotations on pages 36-37; and for “d,” see #4 and #11, page 40 and the quotations on pages 36-37.

## Discussion

Describe your understanding of the relationship of the Universal House of Justice and the Guardianship to the Covenant, including their relationship to God’s will and purpose.

What is the difference between interpretations by the Guardian and the explanations of the Universal House of Justice’s on matters that are not clear or that are not recorded in the Book?

What are a believer’s responsibilities to the Covenant of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá? Give some examples of how that translates into your personal and community life.

## Exercise

After the ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, authority passed to the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice. Although ‘Abdu’l-Bahá specified how the House of Justice should be elected—through a three stage election process where members of the National Assemblies would serve as delegates—He did not specify when the election should take place. Shoghi Effendi, assuming his responsibilities as the Head of the Faith, immediately considered whether to form the Universal House of Justice.<sup>15</sup> He consulted with a number of veteran believers from around the world before concluding that the Bahá’í world was not yet ready to support the supreme administrative body of the Faith. It would first be necessary to increase and strengthen the pillars of the House of Justice—the local and national assemblies.

For thirty-six years Shoghi Effendi guided the expansion of the Faith and the building of the Administrative Order. By the time of his death in 1957, however, the Universal House of Justice had not yet been formed. Furthermore, the directive of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá regarding the appointment of future guardians could not be fulfilled.<sup>16</sup> Yet, Shoghi Effendi had left the believers with guidance for the expansion of the Faith through the year 1963, had designated the Hands of the Cause as the “Chief Stewards of Bahá’u’lláh’s embryonic World Commonwealth,”<sup>17</sup> and had explained the stages through which the Bahá’í International Council<sup>18</sup> had to pass to evolve into the Supreme Body of the Faith. Thus the Bahá’í world community, though suffering greatly from the loss of its beloved Guardian, had all the divine guidance it needed to eventually establish, in 1963, the Universal House of Justice.

In response to many questions about the unexpected end of the line of guardians and the operation of the Universal House of Justice without a living guardian, the House of Justice wrote three letters. They are published in *Wellspring of Guidance*, pages 44-56 and 81-91, and *Messages of the Universal House of Justice*, pages 37-43. See if you can answer the following questions. You may wish to read the three letters first.

1. Why did Shoghi Effendi not appoint a second Guardian?
2. Was a break in the line of guardians foreseen in the Writings?
3. What was the role of the Hands of the Cause after the Guardian’s death?
4. Why were steps taken to elect the Universal House of Justice in 1963?
5. Can the Universal House of Justice function properly without a Guardian?
6. Has the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh been damaged or altered?
7. What is the duty of the believers?

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<sup>15</sup> Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl* 54-56

<sup>16</sup> *Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 12

<sup>17</sup> *Messages to the Bahá’í World* 127; to learn more about the actions of the Hands of the Cause after the passing of the Guardian see *The Bahá’í World*, Vol. XIII, 333-78, especially “Proclamation of the Hands of the Cause to the Bahá’ís of East and West” 341-45

<sup>18</sup> The Bahá’í International Council was an international body that was the forerunner to the Universal House of Justice; see *Messages to the Bahá’í World* 7-8



### 1. Why did Shoghi Effendi not appoint a second Guardian?

"There is no doubt at all that in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi was the authority designated to appoint his successor; but he had no children and all the surviving Aghsán had broken the Covenant. Thus, as the Hands of the Cause stated in 1957, it is clear that there was no one he could have appointed in accordance with the provisions of the Will. To have made an appointment outside the clear and specific provisions of the Master's Will and Testament would obviously have been an impossible and unthinkable course of action. . . ." —*Wellspring of Guidance* 81-82

### 2. Was a break in the line of guardians foreseen in the Writings?

"One of the most striking passages which envisage the possibility of such a break . . . is in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas itself:  
"The endowments dedicated to charity revert to God, the Revealer of Signs. No one has the right to lay hold on them without leave from the Dawning-Place of Revelation. After Him the decision rests with the Aghsán (Branches), and after them with the House of Justice—should it be established in the world by then. . . .  
"The passing of Shoghi Effendi in 1957 precipitated the very situation provided for . . . in that the line of Aghsán ended before the House of Justice had been elected. Although . . . the ending of the line of Aghsán . . . was provided for, we must never underestimate the grievous loss that the Faith has suffered." —*Messages of the Universal House of Justice* 41

### 3. What was the role of the Hands of the Cause after the the Guardian's death?

" . . . The international administration of the Faith was carried on by the Hands of the Cause of God with the complete agreement and loyalty of the national spiritual assemblies and the body of the believers. This was in accordance with the Guardian's designation of the Hands as the 'Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth.'  
"From the very outset of their custodianship . . . the Hands realized that since they had no certainty of Divine guidance such as is incontrovertibly assured to the Guardian and to the Universal House of Justice, their one safe course was to follow with undeviating firmness the instructions and policies of Shoghi Effendi. The entire history of religion shows no comparable record of such strict self-discipline, such absolute loyalty. . . ." —*Wellspring of Guidance* 45

### 4. Why were steps taken to elect the Universal House of Justice in 1963?

"[First] this situation, in which the Guardian died without being able to appoint a successor, presented an obscure question not covered by the explicit Holy Text, and had to be referred to the Universal House of Justice. . . . Before the election of the Universal House of Justice there was no knowledge that there would be no Guardian. . . .  
"The Guardian had given the Bahá'í world explicit and detailed plans covering the period until Ridván 1963, the end of the Ten Year Crusade. From that point onward, unless the Faith were to be endangered, further Divine guidance was essential. This was the second pressing reason for the calling of the election of the Universal House of Justice. The rightness of the time was further confirmed by references in Shoghi Effendi's letters to the Ten Year Crusade's being followed by other plans under the direction of the Universal House of Justice. . . ." —*Wellspring of Guidance* 45-46

### 5. Can the Universal House of Justice function properly without a Guardian?

" . . . Shoghi Effendi repeatedly stressed the inseparability of these two institutions. Whereas he obviously envisaged their functioning together, it cannot logically be deduced from this that one is unable to function in the absence of the other. During the whole thirty-six years of his Guardianship Shoghi Effendi functioned without the Universal House of Justice. Now the Universal House of Justice must function without the Guardian, but the principle of inseparability remains. The Guardianship does not lose its significance nor position in the Order of Bahá'u'lláh merely because there is no living Guardian." —*Wellspring of Guidance* 86-87

### 6. Has the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh been damaged or altered?

"God's purpose for mankind remains unchanged, however, and the mighty Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh remains impregnable. Has not Bahá'u'lláh stated categorically, 'The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation.' While 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirms: 'Verily, God effecteth that which He pleaseth; naught can annul His Covenant; naught can obstruct His favor nor oppose His Cause!' 'Everything is subject to corruption; but the Covenant of thy Lord shall continue to pervade all regions. . . .'" —*Messages of the Universal House of Justice* 41-42

### 7. What is the duty of the believers?

"It is His Cause. He has promised that its light will not fail. Our part is to cling tenaciously to the revealed Word and to the institutions that He has created to preserve His Covenant. . . ." —*Wellspring of Guidance* 87



# The Purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant

## Introduction

The Covenant, as an instrument designed to direct and channel the forces of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, possesses tremendous power. "There is a power in this Cause," 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "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."<sup>1</sup> "If it is considered with insight," He also notes, "it will be seen that all the forces of the universe, in the last analysis serve the Covenant."<sup>2</sup>

The power of the Covenant is channeled for a purpose. The ultimate purpose is, as previously stated, the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. In this lesson we will see how the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh (including the Covenant made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá) works to build the Kingdom by promoting the fortunes of the Faith.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Power of the Covenant*, Part I, intro.

<sup>2</sup> *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 228

## Overview

Shoghi Effendi described four purposes of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant:

- to “perpetuate the influence” of the Faith;
- to “insure its integrity;”
- to “safeguard it from schism;” and
- to “stimulate its world-wide expansion.”<sup>3</sup>

## Explanation

To “perpetuate the influence” of the Faith means to preserve its ability to affect human affairs. The Covenant does this, in part, by extending the channel for the forces of the Revelation—the institution to which all in the Faith can turn to receive the will of God. Since the passing of Bahá'u'lláh this channel has been continued through the ministries of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. It continues today through the Universal House of Justice.

The influence exerted by the Covenant extends beyond the Bahá'ís. It impacts, in concrete ways and through spiritual means, on the development of humanity. For example, the Universal House of Justice is charged by Bahá'u'lláh to promote the Lesser Peace,<sup>4</sup> despite the fact that it is the nations, not the Bahá'ís directly, that will ultimately establish this political peace.<sup>5</sup> Also, it was the power of the Covenant that resulted in the downfall of Sultán ‘Abdu’l-Ḥamíd and the release of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from captivity.<sup>6</sup>

The integrity of the Faith refers to the “purity”<sup>7</sup> and “flexibility”<sup>8</sup> of the teachings. Regarding purity, the Covenant insures that God's will as expressed through Bahá'u'lláh's writings remains unaltered. It provides an appointed Interpreter (‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian) to infallibly explain what the Word of God means. Regarding flexibility, the Covenant provides an institution (the Universal House of Justice) inspired to infallibly apply the laws and state what should be done in cases where the writings and the authoritative interpretation are not explicit. This institution may amend or repeal its statements to meet changing conditions.

**To Perpetuate  
the Influence  
of the Faith**

**To Insure  
the Integrity  
of the Faith**

3 *God Passes By* 244-45

4 *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 89

5 *Lights of Guidance* 323

6 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 295; ‘Abdu’l-Ḥamíd was the ruler of Turkey who kept ‘Abdu’l-Bahá a prisoner in ‘Akká.

7 The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 13

8 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 148

While all believers are bound by the authoritative interpretation, all have the freedom of individual interpretation. In fact, such thought is essential to understanding the Revelation. While “personal interpretations can be most illuminating... it is only a personal view and can never be upheld as a standard for others to accept, nor should disputes ever be permitted to arise over differences in such opinions.”<sup>9</sup> Differences are resolved by the Universal House of Justice.

The Covenant safeguards the unity of the Bahá’ís by providing an infallible source of guidance that protects the Cause from “differences and schisms, making it impossible for any one to create a new sect or faction of belief.”<sup>10</sup> The Covenant further protects the Faith’s unity by requiring that the believers shun those who seek to create division (see lesson 7). “Were it not for the protecting power of the Covenant,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá warns, “there would arise among the Bahá’ís in one day, a thousand different sects as was the case in former ages.”<sup>11</sup> Because it unifies the believers, the Covenant is the pivot for the eventual—and inevitable—uniting of humanity.

The growth of the Faith is stimulated by the power of the Covenant and by specific directions given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the institutions of the Administrative Order. Shoghi Effendi attributes the birth of the American Bahá’í Community,<sup>12</sup> the spread of the Faith in the West,<sup>13</sup> and the remarkable activities initiated by the early Western believers<sup>14</sup> to the “energies,” “impelling influence,” and “propelling power” of the Covenant. Beside being a force which moves the believers, the Covenant stirs the hearts of humanity. Individual souls are “enkindled, attracted and confirmed.”<sup>15</sup>

The growth of the Faith proceeds systematically through a plan initiated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *Tablets of the Divine Plan*. This plan is “divine in origin, is guided by the explicit and repeated instructions . . . of the Center of the Covenant Himself, is energized by the all-compelling will of its Author, . . . and must continue to function . . . throughout successive epochs . . . of the Bahá’í Dispensation.”<sup>16</sup> The plan is carried forward today under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.

## **To Safeguard the Unity of the Faith**

## **To Stimulate the Expansion of the Faith**

9 The Universal House of Justice, letter of 1-3-82

10 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í World Faith* 248

11 *Bahá’í World Faith* 357-58

12 *God Passes By* 255

13 *God Passes By* 245

14 *God Passes By* 279

15 *Star of the West*, Vol. X, 233

16 Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 7

## Readings

1. "The power of the Covenant is as the heat of the sun which quickeneth and promoteth the development of all created things on earth. The light of the Covenant, in like manner, is the educator of the minds, the spirits, the hearts and souls of men."

—'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *God Passes By* 239

2. "To direct and canalize the forces released by His Revelation He instituted His Covenant whose power has preserved the integrity of the Faith, maintained its unity and stimulated its world-wide expansion throughout the successive ministries of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. It continues to fulfill its life-giving purpose through the agency of the Universal House of Justice. . . ."

—*The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice* 3-4

3. "Conscious of their high calling, confident in the society-building power which their Faith possesses, they press forward undeterred and undismayed, in their efforts to fashion and perfect the necessary instruments wherein the embryonic World Order of Bahá'u'lláh can mature and develop. It is this building process, slow and unobtrusive, to which the life of the world-wide Bahá'í Community is wholly consecrated, that constitutes the one hope of a stricken society. For this process is actuated by the generating influence of God's changeless Purpose, and is evolving within the framework of the Administrative Order of His Faith.

"In a world the structure of whose political and social institutions is impaired, whose vision is befogged, whose conscience is bewildered, whose religious systems have become anemic and lost their virtue, this healing Agency, this leavening Power, this cementing Force, intensely alive and all-pervasive, has been taking shape, is crystallizing into institutions, is mobilizing its forces, and is preparing for the spiritual conquest and the complete redemption of mankind. Though the society which incarnates its ideals be small, and its direct and tangible benefits as yet inconsiderable, yet the potentialities with which it has been endowed, and through which it is destined to regenerate the individual and rebuild a broken world, are incalculable."

—Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 195

4. "In the Bahá'í Faith there are two authoritative centers appointed to which the believers must turn. . . . One center is the Book with its Interpreter, and the other is the Universal House of Justice guided by God to decide on whatever is not explicitly revealed in the Book."

—*Messages of the Universal House of Justice* 42

## To Perpetuate the Influence of the Faith

*quicken: to bring life to*

*undeterred: unrestrained*

*embryonic: in an early stage of development*

*unobtrusive: not readily noticeable; inconspicuous*

*consecrated: devoted*

*actuated: put into action or motion*

*impaired: lessened; weakened*

*befogged: clouded; confused*

*anemic: without vitality*

*leavening: enlivening or lightening*

*tangible: real; capable of being determined*

## To Insure the Integrity of the Faith



5. "The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh is unbroken, its all-encompassing power inviolate. The two unique features which distinguish it from all religious covenants of the past are unchanged and operative. The revealed Word, in its original purity, amplified by the divinely guided interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, remains immutable, unadulterated by any man-made creeds or dogmas, unwarrantable inferences, or unauthorized interpretations. The channel of Divine guidance, providing flexibility in all the affairs of mankind, remains open through that institution which was founded by Bahá'u'lláh and endowed by Him with supreme authority and unfailing guidance, and of which the Master wrote: 'Unto this body all things must be referred.' How clearly we can see the truth of Bahá'u'lláh's assertion: 'The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an enduring foundation. Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men's fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure.'"

—The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 13

6. "Independent investigation of truth recognizes that no human being can have a full and correct understanding of the revelation of God; it places upon each individual the duty to strive for an ever greater understanding of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. . . . This will produce great diversity of views on a wide variety of subjects, and this is excellent. What it cannot and must not do is to produce 'sects' in relation to the Teachings of the Faith; the Covenant provides the centre of guidance which is to prevent such a degeneration."

—The Universal House of Justice, letter of 10-20-77

7. "A mighty force, a consummate power lieth concealed in the world of being. Fix your gaze upon it and upon its unifying influence, and not upon the differences which appear from it."—*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 221

8. "The first condition is firmness in the Covenant. . . . 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. . . . It is evident that the axis of the oneness of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant and nothing else."

—'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan* 49

9. "The Covenant is the 'axis of the oneness of the world of humanity' because it preserves the unity and integrity of the Faith itself and protects it from being disrupted. . . ."

—The Universal House of Justice, *The Covenant* 18

*inviolate: not violated;  
pure*

*unadulterated: uncor-  
rupted*

*dogmas: doctrines*

*unwarrantable: not  
justifiable*

*assertion: declaration;  
affirmation*

*degeneration: decay or  
alteration*

## **To Safeguard the Unity of the Faith**

*conserve: keep in safe or  
sound shape*

*axis: a straight line around  
which an object rotates or  
can be imagined to rotate*



10. "As the central teaching of the Bahá'í Faith is the unity of mankind, it is essential that the Faith itself remain one and undivided if it is to achieve its purpose. It was to preserve the unity of the Faith and the purity of His Message that Bahá'u'lláh instituted His Covenant, 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."

—The Universal House of Justice, letter of 3-23-75

*subvert: overturn from the foundation*

11. "Through the power which that Divine Instrument had conferred upon Him ['Abdu'l-Bahá] the light of God's infant Faith had penetrated the West, had diffused itself as far as the Islands of the Pacific, and illumined the fringes of the Australian continent."

—Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 314

## To Stimulate the Expansion of the Faith

12. "Rest ye assured that if a soul ariseth in the utmost perseverance and raiseth the Call of the Kingdom and resolutely promulgateth the Covenant, be he an insignificant ant he shall be enabled to drive away the formidable elephant from the arena, and if he be a feeble moth he shall cut to pieces the plumage of the rapacious vulture."

—Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá 209

*diffused: spread out*

*perseverance: persistence in spite of difficulties*

*resolutely: with strong will and determination*

*formidable: powerful; hard to overcome*

*rapacious: plundering, greedy*

*world of nature: material world*

*pavilion: an ornate tent; an open structure with a roof*

*sentiments: emotions, feelings; attitudes based on emotions*

*zeal: eagerness, fervor*

*ardour: passion, intensity*

13. "... The world of nature hath fully stretched its pavilion over Paris and hath done away with religious sentiments. But this power of the Covenant shall heat every freezing soul, shall bestow light upon everything that is dark and shall secure for the captive in the hand of nature the true freedom of the Kingdom.

"Arise thou at present in Paris with the power of the Kingdom, with a divine confirmation, with a genuine zeal and ardour and with a flame of the love of God. . . . Rest thou assured. If thou dost act accordingly and hoist the standard of the Covenant, Paris shall burst into flame."

—Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá 102-03

14. "From the beginning of this dispensation the most urgent summons of the Word of God, voiced successively by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, has been to teach the Cause. . . . Shoghi Effendi . . . raised the Administrative Order . . . and forged it into a teaching instrument to accomplish through a succession of plans, national, international and global, the entire Divine Plan of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and he clearly foresaw . . . a series of plans to be launched by the Universal House of Justice. . . ." —The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 22-23

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 81.

Among the results produced by the power of the Covenant was that it enabled ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, despite many obstacles, to entomb the Báb’s remains on Mt. Carmel.<sup>17</sup> “‘Every stone of that building, every stone of the road leading to it,’ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is known to have said, ‘I have, with infinite tears . . . raised and placed in position.’”<sup>18</sup> This added “tremendous impetus”<sup>19</sup> to the process of the development of the World Center of the Faith that was initiated by Bahá’u’lláh when He revealed the Tablet of Carmel. The same process continues today through our efforts to raise the buildings of the Arc.

“On the morning of March 21st 1909, the day of Naw-Rúz, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had the marble sarcophagus—gift of the Bahá’ís of Rangoon—carried up the mountain and placed in the vault. That evening he laid in the sarcophagus the wooden casket which contained the inseparable remains of the Báb and the disciple who had died with Him. A solitary lamp lit the scene, so poignant and yet so exultant. The Báb had been cruelly maligned, cruelly wronged, cruelly put to death. His torn and smashed body had had no home for many long years. Now the heart of Carmel was receiving it forevermore. Of this event Zechariah had written: ‘Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The Branch; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord’. How mysteriously and indubitably had his prophecy come true. ‘The Branch’ had built ‘the temple of the lord,’ had raised His ‘tabernacle’ on His Mountain—on Carmel—the Mountain of God. . . .

“‘When all was finished, and the earthly remains of the Martyr-Prophet of Shíráz were, at long last, safely deposited for their everlasting rest in the bosom of God’s holy mountain, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who had cast aside His turban, removed His shoes and thrown off His cloak, bent low over the still open sarcophagus, His silver hair waving about His head and His face transfigured and luminous, rested His forehead on the border of the wooden casket, and, sobbing aloud, wept with such a weeping that all those who were present wept with Him’. Sorrows and memories of a lifetime came flooding in His tears. That night, too, sleep parted from His eyes.

“The triumph which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá achieved on that day in 1909 shines with ever-increasing splendour.”

—Balyuzi, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 129-30

*sarcophagus: a stone coffin or tomb*

*poignant: touching; keenly affecting the feelings*

*exultant: full of great joy; jubilant; triumphant*

*maligned: spoken evil of, verbally abused*

*indubitably: without doubt*

*transfigured: changed in appearance*

*luminous: full of light; glowing*

<sup>17</sup> *God Passes By* 295

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Balyuzi, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 126

<sup>19</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 345

## Further Study

Select one of the passages from the “Readings” section.

|                                    |                                                         |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| What does the passage mean to you? | What are the implications of the passage for your life? |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|

**Personal  
Reflection**

List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 81 and additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

|                                            |
|--------------------------------------------|
| 1.<br><br>2.<br><br>3.<br><br>4.<br><br>5. |
|--------------------------------------------|

**Remaining  
Questions**

*God Passes By*, by Shoghi Effendi, Chapter XX

Discusses the impact of the Covenant on the growth of the Faith

**Additional  
Reading**

## Questions

1. List the four purposes of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant as described by the Guardian:

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2. Associate the following effects of the power of the Covenant with each of its four purposes. If the effect is not one of the purposes of the Covenant, indicate this with an "x."

- a. extends the channel of divine guidance 

---
- b. unifies the believers 

---
- c. provides authorized interpretations 

---
- d. prevents the formation of divisions 

---
- e. restrains independent investigation of truth 

---
- f. brought the Faith to America 

---
- g. regenerates humanity 

---
- h. protects the purity of the teachings 

---
- i. illumines hearts 

---
- j. prevents individual interpretations 

---
- k. stops people from imposing their personal will on the Faith 

---

## Answers

The following are suggested answers. Depending on your understanding of the quotes, you may have different answers. Consider the suggested answers a starting point for thought and discussion.

1. The Covenant perpetuates the influence of the Faith; insures the integrity of the Faith; safeguards the unity of the Faith; and stimulates the expansion of the Faith.
2. Perpetuates the influence of the Faith: a and g. Insures the integrity of the Faith: c and h (and possibly k). Safeguards the unity of the Faith: b, d, and k. Stimulates the expansion of the Faith: f and i.

Regarding “e,” independent investigation of truth is in no way restrained by the need to preserve the integrity of the teachings; what is outside the boundaries of the pure meaning of the Covenant is by definition not “truth.” See the second quotation on page 53. Similarly “j” is also not an effect due to the Covenant. Individual interpretations of the Writings are encouraged but they may not be imposed on others, nor can they conflict with authorized interpretations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi. See page 51.

## Discussion

How does the individual relate to each of the four purposes of the Covenant. How do each of these purposes serve God’s will and purpose?

Explain the difference between authoritative interpretation and individual interpretation. How do these two things relate to one another in the Bahá’í Faith? Consider this relationship in the process of consultation. Finally, compare the role of authoritative and individual interpretation in the Bahá’í Faith with what you know about their role in other religions.

What are the implications of the Covenant for teaching the Faith? How can you “hoist the standard of the Covenant” in your village, town, or city? (Refer to quotations #13 and #14, page 52.)



## Exercise

The Bahá'í writings often use images or word pictures to expand our understanding of a particular teaching. For example, to broaden our understanding of the relationship among all people, Bahá'u'lláh uses the image of a tree. The tree represents the whole of humanity and the fruits represent the individuals—"Ye are all the fruits of one tree."<sup>20</sup>

In the following exercise, several images of the Covenant are given. Each image leads us to a deeper awareness of the nature of the Covenant and its power. Read the following quotes, then list the qualities of the image that is used to help describe the Covenant. What do these qualities tell us about the Covenant? An example of how to complete the exercise is given.

| Description                                                                                                                                                                   | Qualities                                                                                                                                | Implications                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Images or pictures that describe the nature of the Covenant.                                                                                                                  | The characteristics or properties that the image has.                                                                                    | What the qualities of the image tell us about the Covenant.                                                                      |
| "It [the Covenant] is the fortified <b>FORTRESS</b> of the Cause of God and the firm <b>PILLAR</b> of the religion of God." <sup>21</sup>                                     | <i>A fortress is a stronghold—a place where people of a kingdom take refuge and are protected. A pillar is a support for a building.</i> | <i>The Covenant is a refuge for the believers from disunity and conflict. It supports the Faith and protects it from schism.</i> |
| "The <b>LIGHT</b> of the Covenant . . . is the educator of the minds, the spirits, the hearts and souls of men." <sup>22</sup>                                                |                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                  |
| "The Covenant is like the <b>SEA</b> and the believers as fishes in the sea. If a fish leaves water it cannot live." <sup>23</sup>                                            |                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                  |
| "[The Covenant is] the <b>CORD</b> stretched betwixt the earth and the Abhá Kingdom." <sup>24</sup>                                                                           |                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                  |
| "... The dynamic power of the world of existence is the power of the Covenant which like an <b>ARTERY</b> pulsateth in the body of the contingent world. . . ." <sup>25</sup> |                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                  |
| "... The <b>PIVOT</b> of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant." <sup>26</sup>                                                                 |                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                  |

20 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 2

21 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan* 48

22 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *God Passes By* 239

23 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. VIII, 222

24 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *God Passes By* 239

25 *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 208-09

26 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *God Passes By* 238



## Feedback

The following are suggested answers to the exercise. You may have additional answers that are appropriate.

| <b>Description</b>                                                                                                                                            | <b>Qualities</b>                                                                                                                              | <b>Implications</b>                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Images or pictures that describe the nature of the Covenant.                                                                                                  | The characteristics or properties that the image has.                                                                                         | What the qualities of the image tell us about the Covenant.                                                                                                          |
| "It [the Covenant] is the fortified <b>FORTRESS</b> of the Cause of God and the firm <b>PILLAR</b> of the religion of God."                                   | <i>A fortress is a stronghold—a place where people of a kingdom take refuge and are protected. A pillar is a support for a building.</i>      | <i>The Covenant is a refuge for the believers from disunity and conflict. It supports the Faith and protects it from schism.</i>                                     |
| "The <b>LIGHT</b> of the Covenant . . . is the educator of the minds, the spirits, the hearts and souls of men."                                              | <i>A light chases away the darkness and makes visible things previously hidden.</i>                                                           | <i>The Covenant brings to light God's will, which chases away the darkness of ignorance and develops our latent attributes.</i>                                      |
| "The Covenant is like the <b>SEA</b> and the believers as fishes in the sea. If a fish leaves water it cannot live."                                          | <i>The sea is a great body of water that covers much of the earth. Many fish live in the sea, but all depend on it for their survival.</i>    | <i>The Covenant is vast and the believers are diverse, yet the Covenant unites all. Outside the Covenant there is no spiritual life.</i>                             |
| "[The Covenant is] the <b>CORD</b> stretched betwixt the earth and the Abhá Kingdom."                                                                         | <i>The cord is a connector, a lifeline, a bond—for example, an umbilical cord.</i>                                                            | <i>The Covenant connects us to God and so gives spiritual life, it is a bond that ties us to God.</i>                                                                |
| ". . . The dynamic power of the world of existence is the power of the Covenant which like an <b>ARTERY</b> pulsath in the body of the contingent world. . ." | <i>An artery carries blood from the heart to the rest of the body. Without it, the body is deprived of oxygen-rich blood and would die.</i>   | <i>The Covenant brings spiritual life to the body of the world. It provides a channel for God's will to the different organs and cells (believers) of the Faith.</i> |
| ". . . The <b>PIVOT</b> of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant."                                                             | <i>A pivot is a point on which something rotates. It can be a person who plays a central role. Everything is organized around that point.</i> | <i>The believers revolve around one point—the center of the Covenant. This is the focus for uniting all humanity.</i>                                                |

# 6

## Our Attitude Toward the Covenant

### Introduction

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We have, so far, examined the meaning and origin of the Covenant. We have yet to explore “what should be our attitude towards it.”<sup>1</sup>

In lesson 1, we learned that the Covenant is an instrument through which God’s will is made known to us and His blessings are channeled for the accomplishment of His purpose. Shoghi Effendi indicates that, as believers, we ourselves can be “channels through which God carries His Message to mankind” and “instruments whereby He communicates His Will to His people.”<sup>2</sup>

The degree of our firmness in the Covenant—the meeting of our obligation as human beings, as instruments, and channels—is dependent upon the attitude with which we approach the Covenant. Our goal must be to “deepen the understanding and love” we have for the Covenant” and to increase our “level of conviction, and . . . loyalty to the Cause and its Institutions.”<sup>3</sup>

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1 The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1987

2 *The Power of Divine Assistance* 20

3 The Universal House of Justice, letter of 12-25-87

## Overview

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Our responsibility to the Covenant involves two duties. The first is recognition of the source of God's will. This means recognition of God's Manifestation, and, after Him, the person or institution He has designated as His successor. The second duty is obedience to the commands provided through God's will. Through firmness in the Covenant—holding fast to the duties of recognition and obedience—we receive the blessings of God through which we are able to accomplish His purpose for ourselves and for society.

Attaining the highest degree of firmness depends upon our attitude toward the Covenant. Attitude, the feeling we have toward something, influences our behavior. Without proper attitudes recognition lacks conviction and evaporates in times of tests, while obedience is reduced to stretching the boundaries of the letter of the law.

There are a number of attitudes that influence our relationship to the Covenant. These center around faith and love. Through faith our recognition can grow to its highest degree—certitude. Likewise, through love our obedience can grow to its highest degree—submission to God's will.

## Explanation

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The year was 1898. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a prisoner. For six years He had faced—virtually alone—the onslaught of His faithless brother and the violators of the Covenant. The light of the Cause of God had spread to only a few countries.

Gathered with 'Abdu'l-Bahá were the first pilgrims from the West. Though only a mere handful, these were the instruments through which the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant would work to conquer the world. He nourished them with love and the divine teachings. Now they were ready to depart. What would He tell them? He spoke about their attitude toward the Covenant.

First, He discussed faith and a believer's primary duty to recognize and be steadfast in the Cause: "And now I give you a commandment which shall be for a covenant between you and Me—that you have faith; that your faith be steadfast as a rock that no storms can move, that nothing can disturb, and that it endure through all things

even to the end; even should ye hear that your Lord has been crucified, be not shaken in your faith; for I am with you always, whether living or dead, I am with you to the end. As ye have faith so shall your powers and blessings be. This is the balance—this is the balance—this is the balance.”<sup>4</sup>

Second, He spoke of love and its relation to the second duty of obedience: “Another commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another even as I love you. Great mercy and blessings are promised to the people of your land, but on one condition: that their hearts are filled with the fire of love, that they live in perfect kindness and harmony like one soul in different bodies. If they fail in this condition the great blessings will be deferred. Never forget this; look at one another with the eye of perfection; look at Me, follow Me, be as I am; take no thought for yourselves or your lives, whether ye eat or whether ye sleep, whether ye are well or ill, whether ye are with friends or foes, whether ye receive praise or blame; for all these things ye must not care at all. Look at Me and be as I am; ye must die to yourselves and to the world, so shall ye be born again and enter the Kingdom. Behold a candle how it gives its light. It weeps its life away drop by drop in order to give forth its flame of light.”<sup>5</sup>

Many of the pilgrims proved themselves worthy of the charge given to them by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Their subsequent actions opened “a new epoch in the development of the Faith in the West.”<sup>6</sup> The twin duties of recognition and obedience are our responsibility as well.

The attitudes that relate to recognition concern the degree to which we know God through His Manifestation and steadfastly maintain our connection with our Lord. Our goal is the lofty summit of absolute certitude—certainty in the belief that we have found the source of God’s will.

The attitudes that relate to obedience concern loving God and His will more than we love our own wishes. We must demonstrate that love through action. “Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty.”<sup>7</sup> The ideal state of this duty is complete submission to the will of God—consecration to doing what God wants us to do.

4 reported words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *An Early Pilgrimage* 40

6 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 258

5 reported words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *An Early Pilgrimage* 41-42

7 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 332

1. "Unless one recognize God and love Him, his cry shall not be heard by God in this Day. This is of the essence of His Faith, did ye but know it."

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 293

2. "The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Day Spring of His Revelation . . . . It behoveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. . . .

" . . . They that have violated the Covenant of God by breaking His commandments, and have turned back on their heels, these have erred grievously in the sight of God, the All-Possessing, the Most High."

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 330-31

3. "The supreme cause for creating the world and all that is therein is for man to know God. In this Day whosoever is guided . . . to . . . the station of recognizing the Source of divine commandments and the Dayspring of His Revelation, hath everlastingly attained unto all good. Having reached this lofty station a twofold obligation resteth upon every soul. One is to be steadfast in the Cause with such steadfastness that were all the peoples of the world to attempt to prevent him from turning to the Source of Revelation, they would be powerless to do so. The other is observance of the divine ordinances. . . . For man's knowledge of God cannot develop fully and adequately save by observing whatsoever hath been ordained by Him and is set forth in His heavenly Book."

—*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 268

4. " . . . With His own pen He wrote the Book of His Covenant, addressing His relations and all people of the world saying, 'Verily, I have appointed One Who is the Centre of My Covenant. All must obey Him; all must turn to Him; He is the Expounder of My Book, and He is informed of My purpose. All must turn to Him. Whatsoever He says is correct....' The purpose of this statement is that there should never be discord and divergence among the Bahá'ís but that they should always be unified and agreed. . . . Therefore, whosoever obeys the Centre of the Covenant appointed by Bahá'u'lláh has obeyed Bahá'u'lláh, and whosoever disobeys Him has disobeyed Bahá'u'lláh. . . ."

—'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 322-23

5. "I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee."

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers* 4

## Twin Duties

*sublime: exalted; lofty*

*summit: the highest degree*

*transcendent: of very high and remarkable degree; unsurpassing*



6. "They who are the beloved of God, in whatever place they gather and whomsoever they may meet, must evince, in their attitude towards God, and in the manner of their celebration of His praise and glory, such humility and submissiveness that every atom of the dust beneath their feet may attest the depth of their devotion. . . ."

"... Beseech ye the one true God to grant that ye may taste the savor of such deeds as are performed in His path, and partake of the sweetness of such humility and submissiveness as are shown for His sake. . . . If ye follow in His way, His incalculable and imperishable blessings will be showered upon you." —Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 7, 9

7. "Rest thou assured and feel confident. Observe the written commandments of thy Lord with joy and peace, with earnestness and sincerity. . . . His grace shall assist thee at all times, His blessings shall be bestowed upon thee...." —*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 309

8. "... More vital than any scheme . . . , far above the most elaborate structure which . . . organized Assemblies can hope to raise, is the realization down in the innermost heart of every true believer of the regenerating power, the supreme necessity, the unfailing efficacy of the Message he bears. . . . Nothing short of such an immovable conviction could have in days past enabled our beloved Cause to weather the blackest storms in its history. Naught else can today vitalize the manifold activities in which unnumbered disciples of the Faith are engaged; naught else can provide that driving force and sustaining power that are both so essential to the success of vast and enduring achievements. It is this spirit that above all else we should sedulously guard, and strive with all our might to fortify and exemplify in all our undertakings." —Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration* 111

9. "... For such an arresting and majestic vindication of the undefeatable powers inherent in our precious Faith, we can but bow our heads in humility, awe and thanksgiving, renew our pledge of fealty to it, and, each covenanting in his own heart, resolve to prove faithful to that pledge and persevere to the very end, until our earthly share of servitude to so transcendent and priceless a Cause has been totally and completely fulfilled." —Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 104

10. "I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth.

"There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting."

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers* 4

## Attitude and the Release of Divine Power

*evince*: show or demonstrate clearly

*attest*: to bear witness to

*humility*: lack of pride

*submissiveness*: quality of readily yielding to authority

*incalculable*: beyond measure

*imperishable*: not subject to destruction or decay

*vital*: of great importance; essential

*efficacy*: effectiveness

*conviction*: strong belief

*vitalize*: to fill with life; energize

*sedulously*: diligently; painstakingly

*fortify*: strengthen

*exemplify*: to serve as an example

*arresting*: striking

*vindication*: justification; defense

*inherent*: being a permanent and essential quality of something

*fealty*: faithfulness, loyalty



11. "O ye peoples of the Kingdom! How many a soul expended all its span of life in worship, endured the mortifications of the flesh, longed to gain entry into the Kingdom, and yet failed, while ye, with neither toil nor pain nor self-denial, have . . . entered in. . . .

"The time hath come when, as a thank-offering for this bestowal, ye should grow in faith and constancy as day followeth day, and should draw ever nearer to the Lord, your God. . . ."

—*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 18-19

12. "Such should be thy certitude that if all mankind were to advance such claims as no man hath ever advanced, or any mind conceived, thou wouldst completely ignore them . . . and would set thy face towards Him Who is the Object of the adoration of all worlds....

"Sharp must be thy sight . . . and adamant thy soul, and brass-like thy feet, if thou wishest to be unshaken by the assaults of the selfish desires that whisper in men's breasts. . . . Whatever thou seest in this Day shall perish. Supremely lofty will be thy station, if thou remainest steadfast in the Cause of thy Lord."—*Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings* 245-46

13. "The second Tajallí is to remain steadfast in the Cause of God . . . and to be unswerving in His love. And this can in no wise be attained except through full recognition of Him [the Manifestation]; and full recognition cannot be obtained save by faith in the blessed words: 'He doeth whatsoever He willeth.'" —*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 51

14. "Neither the administration, nor the general teaching work of the Cause . . . will progress, or be able to accomplish anything, unless the believers are truly firm, deep spiritually convinced Bahá'ís. . . . Once a Bahá'í has the profound conviction of the authority from God, vested in the Prophet, passed on to the Master, and by Him, to the Guardians, and which flows out through the assemblies and creates order based on obedience—once a Bahá'í has this, nothing can shake him." —Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 48

15. "Only when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker's heart, and the breeze of His loving-kindness is wafted upon his soul, will the darkness of error be dispelled, the mists of doubts and misgivings be dissipated, and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being. . . . Gazing with the eye of God, he will perceive within every atom a door that leadeth him to the stations of absolute certitude." —*The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 195-96

## Faith: From Recognition to Certitude

*expended: spent, used up*

*constancy: steadfastness or faithfulness*

*Tajallí (ta-ja-lee): one of four sections of a Tablet of Baha'u'llah entitled Tajalláyát (ta-ja-lee-yawt) or Effulgences (Splendors)*

*unswerving: not turning aside from*

*profound: deep*

*vested: given to someone by one who has power and authority*

*fervid: with passion*

*rapture: overwhelming delight*

*dispelled: driven away*

*dissipated: scattered; driven away*

*certitude: complete confidence; certainty*

16. "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."

—'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Power of the Covenant*, Part II, 33

17. "Are we to doubt that the ways of God are not necessarily the ways of man? Is not faith but another word for implicit obedience, whole-hearted allegiance, uncompromising adherence to that which we believe is the revealed and express will of God, however perplexing it might first appear? . . . If we are to falter or hesitate, if our love for Him should fail to direct us and keep us within His path, if we desert Divine and emphatic principles, what hope can we any more cherish for healing the ills and sicknesses of this world?"

—Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration* 62-63

18. "The true lovers of the Abhá beauty, and they that have quaffed the Cup of the Covenant fear no calamity, nor feel depressed in the hour of trial. . . .

"Rest thou assured and feel confident. Observe the written commandments of thy Lord with joy and peace, with earnestness and sincerity. . . . His grace shall assist thee at all times, His blessings shall be bestowed upon thee, and thy heart's desire shall be realized."

—*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 309

19. "The essence of love is for man to turn his heart to the Beloved One, and sever himself from all else but Him, and desire naught save that which is the desire of His Lord."

—*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 155

20. "By self-surrender and perpetual union with God is meant that men should merge their will wholly in the Will of God, and regard their desires as utter nothingness beside His Purpose. Whatsoever the Creator commandeth His creatures to observe, the same must they diligently, and with the utmost joy and eagerness, arise and fulfil. . . . In the Prayer of Fasting We have revealed: 'Should Thy Will decree that out of Thy mouth these words proceed and be addressed to them, "Observe, for My Beauty's sake, the fast, O people, and set no limit to its duration," I swear by the majesty of Thy glory, that every one of them will faithfully observe it, will abstain from whatsoever will violate Thy law, and will continue to do so until they yield up their souls unto Thee.' In this consisteth the complete surrender of one's will to the Will of God. . . . The station of absolute self-surrender transcendeth, and will ever remain exalted above, every other station."

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 337-38

## Love: From Obedience to Submission

*implicit: unquestioning; absolute*

*allegiance: loyalty or devotion*

*uncompromising: unyielding; inflexible*

*adherence: loyalty; faithful attachment*

*sever: to cut off*

*self-surrender: to give up one's self*

*perpetual: lasting forever*

*diligently: with hard work and effort*

*decree: an order given by one in authority*

*duration: length of time something lasts*

*abstain: refrain from; avoid*

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 81.

## Illustration

"There is a natural poetry in the African speech. It is not dependent on education. One of the most eloquent of all those we met was an illiterate. . . .

"He wanted so sincerely to be a Bahá'í. We had come to determine his understanding, to see if he were ready to become a believer. . . .

"Tell us in your own words,' we asked him, 'about the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.'

"He nodded. Never taking his eyes from ours, he began to speak.

"When it is dusk, no one sees good. They fear. They hate what they don't see. Even if it is people. Then the sun comes and they do see a little. And things are not so bad. That is the Báb. He was good. They killed him because they liked it to be dark. But it needed to be brighter like hot day-time to see they are wrong to hate. This was Bahá'u'lláh. "See everybody," He said, "how nice they are. Love, don't hate." He died. Not really death because he left His son 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Not so bright, but good like afternoon sun to see us safe home before it is black. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said good things. People are alike even if they look different. All belong to God, so don't do what God wouldn't do. Be good men. Then He died. But he told us to go to the Guardian (Shoghi Effendi). He would be strong and guard us. He would take away our troubles. He will, too; I believe in him. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, "Whatever the Guardian says is right. Do it." And I will.'

"When he had finished, a questioning look came into his eyes. It seemed to say, 'Please, am I a Bahá'í?'

"I know I am ignorant,' he told us, 'but I want to learn all there is in the world to know about my Faith. I can't find words for the fullness of my heart.' He sighed sadly, as he made a confession. 'I tried to tell my religious man what I believe. He stops me sometimes and says "Where are you when it is church?" I told him what I believe, but always he defeats me what I say. He defeats me with words.' Suddenly he looked up and smiled happily. 'But he only defeats my head, not my heart. This,' he said, touching his heart, 'belongs to Bahá'u'lláh and no one can conquer it away from Him.'

"When they asked us later if we thought the young man should be taken into the Faith, we replied, 'If you don't take him in, you had better put us out because we are learning from him every moment.'"

—Sears, 'Black Sunlight,' *The Bahá'í World*, Vol. XII, 926-27

Juliet Thompson, an early American believer, related the following incident from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's stay in New York:

"... Miss Buckton had arrived ... and a poor little waif of humanity. ... She was all in black, this poor child, with a little, pale face, careworn and tearworn.

"I had been in the kitchen with Lua. I came out upon a scene dominated by the Master. He was sitting, as usual, at the window. ... On one side sat Miss Buckton, on the other, this poor stricken child. While the biggest tears I have ever seen splashed from her eyes she told him her hopelessly dismal story.

"Don't grieve now, don't grieve,' He said. He was very, very still. ...

"My brother has been in prison for three years. He was imprisoned unjustly. It was not his fault; he was led; he was weak, a victim of others. He has four more years to serve. My father and mother are depressed all the time. My brother-in-law who was our support has just died. ...'

"You must trust in God,' said 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

"But the more I trust the worse things become!' she sobbed.

"You have never trusted.'

"But my mother is reading the psalms all the time. She does not deserve that God should so abandon her! I read the psalms myself, the ninety-first psalm and the twenty-third psalm every night before I go to bed. I pray, too.'

"To pray is not to read the psalms. To pray is to trust in God and be submissive in all things to Him. Be submissive, and then things will change for you. Put your family in God's hands. Love God's will. Strong ships are not conquered by the sea; they ride the waves! Now be a strong ship, not a battered one."

—quoted in Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá* 213-14

## Further Study

Select one of the passages from the “Readings” section.

|                                    |                                                         |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| What does the passage mean to you? | What are the implications of the passage for your life? |
|                                    |                                                         |

List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 81 and additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

|    |
|----|
| 1. |
| 2. |
| 3. |
| 4. |
| 5. |

*Gleanings*, by Bahá'u'lláh, 259-346

Passages concerning the duties of the individual and the spiritual meaning of life.

*The Imperishable Dominion*, by Udo Schaefer, Chapters X-XII

A discussion of issues related to the individual's attitude and responsibility toward the Covenant..

## Personal Reflection

## Remaining Questions

## Additional Reading

## Questions

1. Name the two duties prescribed by God for all humans:

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

How are these duties related to the Covenant  
between God and humanity?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. (Circle all that apply.) Our degree of certitude should be such  
that we:

- a. ignore attacks made by those who don't  
believe in Bahá'u'lláh
- b. recognize that God does whatever He wills
- c. never disobey God
- d. remain unshaken by those who advance selfish  
claims

3. (Circle all that apply.) To surrender ourselves to the will of God  
means to:

- a. merge our will with the God's will
- b. see our own desires as nothing compared to  
God's purpose
- c. avoid doing what violates the laws of God
- d. realize that we all will eventually die



## Answers

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The following are suggested answers. Depending on your understanding of the quotes, you may have different answers. Consider the suggested answers a starting point for thought and discussion.

1. Recognition of God's Manifestation and obedience to His teachings. These two duties are our part of the Covenant. This extends in Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant to steadfastness and obedience toward the institutions which are the source of God's will.
2. **a, b, and d.** Regarding "a," see #12 page 64; for "b," see #15, page 64; and for "d," see #12, page 64. Regarding "c," if we never disobeyed God, we would have reached a state of perfection that is impossible for humans to attain. Also, degree of obedience relates more directly to submission than to certitude (we can be assured of what the will of God is even though we sometimes fail to obey it).
3. **a, b, and c.** See #20, page 65.

## Discussion

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What does the Short Obligatory Prayer (quotes #5 and #10) teach us about our attitude toward the Covenant? Consider the other obligatory prayers as well if time permits.

Bahá'u'lláh ties steadfastness in the Cause to faith in the words "He doeth whatsoever He willeth." What is your understanding of this phrase? How does faith in these words relate to steadfastness? (Refer to #13, page 64.)

How is "surrendering the self to the Will of God" demonstrated in our daily lives?

Keeping in mind the concept of our twin duties and attitude toward the Covenant, how could you respond to the question: "I'm a good person (or good Christian, etc.); I treat my fellow humans well (or obey what Christ taught); why should I become a Bahá'í?"

How does our attitude toward the Covenant relate to our interaction with our local or National Spiritual Assembly?

# 7

## Covenant-breaking

### Introduction

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“Violate not the Covenant of God,” Bahá’u’lláh warns us.<sup>1</sup> Telling of the suffering of the Manifestations of the past at the hands of those who rejected Them, He explains: “My Pen groaneth, and all created things weep with a great weeping, as a result of the woes . . . suffered at the hands of them that have broken the Covenant of God.”<sup>2</sup> In the Aqdas He states: “They that have violated the Covenant of God by breaking His commandments . . . these have erred grievously in the sight of God.”<sup>3</sup> To break God’s Eternal Covenant with us by rejecting our personal responsibility to accept the Manifestation and obey His teaching injures our relationship with God, and deprives us of His blessings.

Yet another grievous error comes, in this Day, through the breaking of the specific Covenant Bahá’u’lláh made with His followers. This occurs when a believer attacks Bahá’u’lláh or the institutions He designated as the channel of infallible divine guidance—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, or the Universal House of Justice. Such action threatens the very existence of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gleanings* 328

<sup>2</sup> *Gleanings* 57

<sup>3</sup> *Gleanings* 331

## Overview

There are three main questions involved in helping us gain a better understanding of the nature of Covenant-breaking:

- What is Covenant-breaking?
- How should Bahá'ís respond to Covenant-breaking?
- What is the effect of Covenant-breaking?

A Covenant-breaker is someone who, after accepting Bahá'u'lláh, attacks Him or the institutions designated as the infallible source of the divine will after His passing.

Covenant-breaking is a threat to the very life of the Faith and the accomplishment of God's purpose. To prevent its harmful influence Bahá'u'lláh instructs the believers to shun all Covenant-breakers.

Covenant-breaking brings harm upon the violators themselves and can harm individual believers who interact with them. Though Covenant-breaking can potentially destroy the Faith, the Covenant provides protection and is “indestructible.”<sup>4</sup>

## Explanation

“When a person declares his acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of God,” the Universal House of Justice writes, “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.”<sup>5</sup>

Such actions are motivated, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá tells us, by “personal desires,”<sup>6</sup> “human pride” and the “demands of the insistent self”<sup>7</sup> for “the achievement of leadership.”<sup>8</sup> “It is not that they do not know what they do—they are perfectly aware and still they exhibit opposition.”<sup>9</sup> The threat of Covenant-breaking is that it can, if unchecked, “destroy the Cause of God, exterminate His Law and render of no account all efforts exerted in the past.”<sup>10</sup>

## The Nature of Covenant-breaking

4 Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration* 192

5 *The Power of the Covenant*, Part II, 7

6 *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 214

7 *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 259

8 *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 214

9 *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 216

10 *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 20

It is just as important to understand what Covenant-breaking **is not**. For example, someone who breaks Bahá'í law is not a Covenant-breaker.<sup>11</sup> Someone who withdraws from the Faith is not a Covenant-breaker. Nor is someone who rejects Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be a Manifestation of God.

A Bahá'í who violates the Covenant is declared a Covenant-breaker only after "every effort is made to help that person see the illogicality and error of his actions."<sup>12</sup> The decision whether or not to expel or reinstate (if a Covenant-breaker sincerely repents) is made by the Hands of the Cause residing in the Holy Land subject to the approval of the Universal House of Justice.<sup>13</sup>

"One of the greatest principles of the Cause of God," 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "is to shun and avoid entirely the Covenant-breakers. . . ."<sup>14</sup> Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá "also told us, however, to pray for them" for "these souls are not lost forever."<sup>15</sup>

To shun Covenant-breakers is not an act of disunity. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that Covenant-breaking is like a contagious disease. The sufferer must be isolated to prevent infecting others, and is attended only by those specialists who can help treat the problem. When freed of the disease, the patient can once again associate with others.

Breaking the Covenant affects the Covenant-breaker and, potentially, the believers. Individuals who violate the Covenant are as "dead bodies—souls that are deprived of the Spirit of God and are lost in passion and self."<sup>16</sup> The "lamps" of the believers may, through association with Covenant-breakers, be "extinguished."<sup>17</sup>

Although Covenant-breaking could destroy the Faith if allowed to flourish, we are assured that the Covenant "will preserve the unity of the religion of God and the foundation of religion will not be shaken."<sup>18</sup>

## The Response to Covenant-breaking

## The Results of Covenant-breaking

11 Breaking Bahá'í law is breaking the Covenant of God (lesson 2) not breaking Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant (lessons 3 and 4) which is being discussed here.

12 The Universal House of Justice, *The Power of the Covenant*, Part II, 7-8

13 The Universal House of Justice, *The Power of the Covenant*, Part II, 44

14 *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 20

15 Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Principles of Bahá'í Administration* 22

16 *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 210

17 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 381

18 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. VIII, 223

## Readings

1. "... A believer failing in his duties in living the Bahá'í life would be a breaker of God's Eternal Covenant, in the general sense of becoming heedless in following the way of God, not in the sense of being a Covenant-breaker of Bahá'u'lláh's Lesser Covenant deserving to be identified and declared as such and to be shunned by the friends." —Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, letter of 3-4-81

2. "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 or who 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. 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."

—The Universal House of Justice, letter of 3-23-75

3. "One of the enemies of the Cause is he who endeavors to interpret the Words of Bahá'u'lláh and thereby colors the meaning according to his capacity, and collects around him a following, forming a different sect, promoting his own station, and making a division in the Cause."

—'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* 130

4. "Now some of the mischief-makers, with many stratagems, are seeking leadership, and in order to reach this position they instill doubts among the friends that they may cause differences, and that these differences may result in their drawing a party to themselves. But the friends of God must be awake and must know that the scattering of these doubts hath as its motive personal desires and the achievement of leadership."

—*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 214

5. "These [Covenant-breakers] 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."

—'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Power of the Covenant*, Part II, 11

## The Nature of Covenant-breaking

*illogicality: senselessness, unreasonableness*

*stratagems: plans or action intended to fool or deceive*

*expulsion: dismissal; removal from membership*

*reinstatement: being restored to a previous position*

6. "For so grievous is the conduct and behavior of this false people that they are become even as an axe striking at the very root of the Blessed Tree. Should they be suffered to continue they would, in but a few days' time, exterminate the Cause of God, His word and themselves."

—*Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 25

7. "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?

"... The believers are commanded to shun Covenant-breakers for the same reason as healthy people do not associate with a person suffering from a serious contagious illness. A contagiously sick person cannot catch health from a thousand healthy people, but, on the contrary, he can infect them with his illness. Therefore such a person is quarantined and only those few people qualified to attend him do so. . . . Then, if he proves adamant he is free to go his way, but the Bahá'ís must cease to have any association with him until such time as he repents when, of course, he can be accepted back into the community."

—The Universal House of Justice, letter of 3-23-75

8. "Bahá'u'lláh and the Master in many places and very emphatically have told us to shun entirely all covenant-breakers . . . they have also told us, however, to pray for them. These souls are not lost forever. In the Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh says that God will forgive Mírzá Yahyá if he repents. It follows, therefore, that God will forgive any soul if he repents. Most of them don't want to repent, unfortunately.

"... Also, it has nothing to do with 'unity' in the Cause; if a man cuts a cancer out of his body to preserve his health and very life, no one would suggest that for the sake of unity it should be reintroduced into the otherwise healthy organism."

—Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Principles of Bahá'í Administration* 22

9. "A hundred times it hath been foretold that the violators are lying in ambush and by every means desire to cause dissension among the friends so that this dissension may end in violation of the Covenant. How is it that, notwithstanding this warning, the friends have ignored this explicit statement?

"The point at issue is clear, direct, and of the utmost brevity. Either Bahá'u'lláh was wise, omniscient and aware of what would ensue, or was ignorant and in error. . . .

"... One must say that the Blessed Beauty hath made a mistake, or He must be obeyed. . . ." —*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 213, 214

## The Response to Covenant-breaking

*grievous: extremely serious*

*exterminate: to get rid of by destroying completely*

*shun: to avoid completely and habitually; to keep away from a person or thing that is repugnant*

*adamant: unwilling to change*

*Mírzá Yahyá (mere-zaw-ya-h-yaw): treacherous half-brother of Bahá'u'lláh and "Arch-Breaker of the Covenant of the Báb;" the Báb never named a successor or interpreter—He nominated Mírzá Yahyá as "a figurehead pending the imminent manifestation of the Promised One" (God Passes By 28, 233)*

*omniscient: all-knowing*

*ensue: to follow as a consequence; to result*



10. “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.”

—Bahá’u’lláh, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* 109

11. “There have been violators here in Chicago for twenty years. What have they done? Nothing. Have they been able to teach anybody? Have they been able to speak in churches or address audiences elsewhere? Have they been able to make anyone firm in the Cause? They are doing nothing but extinguishing the lamps we ignite.”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 381

12. “Under all conditions those who have remained firm in the Covenant have conquered, while the violators have met defeat, disappointment and dejection.”

—*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 212

13. “The Covenant of God . . . is a lifeboat and ark of salvation. All true followers of the Blessed Perfection are sheltered and protected in this ark. Whoever leaves it, trusting in his own will and strength, will drown and be destroyed. . . .”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. VIII, 222

14. “These agitations of the violators are no more than the foam of the ocean, which is one of its inseparable features; but the ocean of the Covenant shall surge and cast ashore the bodies of the dead, for it cannot retain them. . . .”

—*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 210

15. “. . . 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.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 51

16. “Today the Lord of Hosts is the defender of the Covenant, the forces of the Kingdom protect it, heavenly souls tender their services, and heavenly angels promulgate and spread it broadcast. If it is considered with insight, it will be seen that all the forces of the universe, in the last analysis serve the Covenant. . . . In view of this fact, what can these weak and feeble souls achieve? Hardy plants that are destitute of roots and are deprived of the outpourings of the cloud of mercy will not last. What then may be expected of feeble weeds?”

—*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 228

## The Results of Covenant-breaking

extinguishing: putting out

dejection: unhappiness; depression

agitations: great disturbances

inseparable: cannot be separated

sustaining: maintaining

confounding: overthrowing or defeating

adversaries: enemies

providential: resulting from divine control

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 81.

“While the disciples of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá were blazing the trail in the west . . . a hurricane . . . threatened to extinguish the light which they had lit and kept shining with exemplary devotion. The same person who had taken the Message of Bahá’u’lláh across the ocean, who had established the first Bahá’í centre in the Christian west . . . became the vehicle of that storm. He, whose services ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had highly extolled, whom He had addressed as ‘Bahá’s Peter,’ chose to join the ranks of the violators of the Covenant. The success which attended Dr. Khayru’lláh’s endeavours became eventually the instrument of his downfall. He became vainglorious and introduced tenets and interpretations . . . of his own invention. . . .

“Khayru’lláh dreamt of sharing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s authority. Let ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, he conjured in a mind dangerously distorted, have the East to guide and administer; he, Khayru’lláh, by virtue of his brilliant achievement, would lead and shepherd the West. Until he went in Mrs. Hearst’s party on pilgrimage to ‘Akká [1898], he had not met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. It was then he saw how appallingly he had miscalculated. The integrity of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s stewardship could not be breached. But having become enamoured of power and having followed the mirage of leadership, Dr. Khayru’lláh decided to turn to Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí [‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s half-brother, who broke Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant]. . . .

“‘Abdu’l-Bahá tried hard to rescue Dr. Khayru’lláh. Hájí ‘Abdu’l-Karím . . . who had taught [Khayru’lláh] the Faith . . . was instructed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to go to the United States, both to protect the nascent community . . . and to endeavour to make Khayru’lláh see the error of his ways. . . .

“Tribulations which afflicted the newly-born community of American Bahá’ís were severe, and the gales of violation that swept over it were tempestuous. But the Bahá’ís of America proved their mettle. . . . Their ranks could not be breached.

“Thus Dr. Ibráhím Khayru’lláh, defeated and disowned, passed from the scene. . . .

“ . . . The man who was once known as ‘the conqueror of America’ and ‘the second Columbus,’ condemned and exposed his own delusions. Not one person did he lead to the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh in those long, long years of treading the wilderness. And he was the same man who established this Faith in the American continent in the days when he walked the high-road of the Covenant.”

—Balyuzi, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 85-89

*exemplary: worthy of imitation*

*extolled: praised in the highest terms*

*vainglorious: full of vanity and boastfulness*

*tenets: beliefs, principles*

*conjured: to produce as if by magic*

*distorted: twisted*

*appallingly: frightfully*

*enamoured: in love with*

*nascent: just beginning to exist*

*tempestuous: stormy; turbulent; violent*

*mettle: spirit; courage*

*delusions: false, fixed beliefs that have little basis in reality; illusions*

## Further Study

Select one of the passages from the “Readings” section.

|                                                  |                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>What does the passage mean to you?</b></p> | <p><b>What are the implications of the passage for your life?</b></p> |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|

List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 81 and additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## Personal Reflection

## Remaining Questions

*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá 208-228*

*God Passes By*, by Shoghi Effendi, Chapters X and XV

A description of some activities of Covenant-breakers against Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

## The Power of the Covenant, Part II

A commentary, including quotations, on Covenant-breaking.

## Additional Reading

## Questions

1. (Circle all that apply.) A Covenant-breaker is someone who:

- a. breaks God's Covenant by rejecting Bahá'u'lláh
- b. after accepting Bahá'u'lláh, violates His laws
- c. after accepting Bahá'u'lláh, attacks Him
- d. after accepting Bahá'u'lláh, attacks one of His central institutions

2. (Circle all that apply.) Covenant-breaking is caused by:

- a. desire for leadership
- b. demands of the insistent self
- c. disobeying Bahá'í law
- d. not understanding Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant

3. How are we to treat Covenant-breakers:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_

4. (Circle all that apply.) Covenant-breaking:

- a. if unchecked, could destroy the Cause
- b. can damage the Covenant
- c. ultimately yields no lasting harmful result
- d. is counteracted by a measure of divine aid

## Answers

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The following are suggested answers. Depending on your understanding of the quotes, you may have different answers. Consider the suggested answers a starting point for thought and discussion.

1. **c** and **d**. See page 72 and 73 and quotes #1 and #2 on page 74.
2. **a** and **b**. “Regarding “a,” see #4, page 74; for “b,” see page 72. Failure to understand Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant is not a cause of Covenant-breaking. Covenant-breaking is a conscious act that occurs after the person recognizes Bahá’u’lláh. Suspected Covenant-breakers are always helped to understand the Covenant and the nature of their actions before they are declared to be violators.. See #2, page 74.
3. Shun them and pray for them. See the quotation on page 75.
4. **a**, **c**, and **d**. Regarding “a,” see #6, page 75; for “c,” see #10-12, #14, and #16 on page 76; and for “d,” see #15, page 76. Regarding “b,” see page 73 on the results of Covenant-breaking.

## Discussion

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Why is Covenant-breaking such a serious offense? Describe Covenant-breaking in relation to God’s will and purpose.

How would you respond to someone who raised this argument: “Shunning Covenant-breakers seems to go against the Bahá’í teaching on unity?” (Refer to #8, page 75.)

In the opening of His Will and Testament, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes the Covenant as a “shield” that guards the Cause “from the darts of doubtfulness.” Explore the ideas raised by the image “darts of doubtfulness.” What does it mean? How does the Covenant shield the believers from these darts?

What has been the result of Covenant-breaking?

What is the difference between expressing your opinion and understanding of the Teachings and opposing the Covenant?

# Index for the Covenant

## Introduction

The index provides references on the topic of the Covenant from a wide range of Bahá'í books. The bold page numbers (beginning on page 83) indicate quotations used, at least in part, in this book; the corresponding page number from *The Covenant: Its Meaning and Origin and Our Attitude Toward It* is included in parenthesis.

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Index Abbreviation:  
PT

SAB

SAQ

TDP

PUP

WT

SB

ESW

GL



|                                                                                                                                                                                 |        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| _____. <i>The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh</i> . Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1939.                                                                                  | HW     |
| _____. <i>The Kitáb-i-Íqán</i> . 2nd ed. Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1950.                                                                                         | KI     |
| _____. <i>Prayers and Meditations</i> . Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1938.                                                                                          | PM     |
| _____. <i>Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas</i> . Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1973.                                                     | KA     |
| _____. <i>Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas</i> . Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978.                                                                       | TB     |
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| _____. <i>Bahá'í World Faith</i> . Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976.                                                                                               | BWF    |
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