

1924

1924 Mrs May Maxwell (Robt B7) *

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CONVERSATIONS WITH SHOGHI EFFENDI

From informal notes taken by Mrs. May Maxwell at Haifa in 1924, and reproduced for the information of the Baha'i friends with the permission of the National Spiritual assembly.

You will like to hear something of the daily life and more intimate impressions of our beloved Guardian from those who have had the privilege and blessing of being near him for many months.

Shoghi Effendi does not wish us in any way to dwell on his personality, but to turn our heart's love and longing, as he does, to the Infinite Sun of Truth, to the Bab, Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, and through adoration of that Divine Beloved to attain perfect love for one another, because this is the sign of real faith and sincere devotion.

Every form of separation or division, of classifying ourselves or one another, of having a group consciousness, or of thinking of the Baha'is in terms of duality, is a reflection of the material world of today, and not of that realm of truth and oneness which the Baha'is are destined by God to reflect and manifest.

He says we must entirely banish from our thoughts all such limited concepts and realize that absolute oneness is the Baha'i consciousness. It is not necessary that all Baha'is should think and feel exactly alike, but that all should unite in obeying the divine instructions, and in active co-operative service to the Cause of God.

We must never speak or think for a moment of these limited ideas, but create in ourselves and in each other a oneness and solidarity of thought and action, which shall constitute a mighty spiritual power subduing unto itself all the limited, narrow and negative concepts and conditions of the world.

It is this Baha'i attitude, this closely knit and united Baha'i body in America, rather than any organized plan of action which will profoundly affect the people and constitute a magnet drawing to itself all those who are seeking spiritual happiness and tranquility for themselves and for mankind.

Thus the standard of life and conduct of Shoghi Effendi for the believers is very high, and his family told us that he is not satisfied with anything short of perfection.

He wants the Baha'is to so live amongst themselves and in their communities that they will show forth the light of Baha to the world.

Ruha Khanum told me the following significant words spoken by the beloved Master to His Family. He said in substance as follows: "I am a loving and indulgent Father to all. I am very kind. You know only my love, my mercy, my forgiveness, my leniency, but it will not be always so. The time will come when I shall not be here to pour this love so freely, because you must be trained and disciplined and become obedient and attain to the divine standard."

The sweetness of the Master's love on which He nurtured us for years would have been sufficient and would have created in us an entirely new life and condition had we been more pure and selfless, had our capacity for this celestial food been greater.

But certain spiritual sickness and weakness crept in among us for which the remedy lies in the hands of our Guardian.

One day he said: "I know it is difficult to reconcile the teachings and instructions of the Master.

"In one case He exhorts us to be brave and courageous and on the other hand to be prudent.

"He commands us to exercise justice, on the other hand to be merciful. He wishes us to be frank and direct, at the same time to be discreet.

"How can we reconcile these things?

"It is very difficult, I realize that it is difficult, but as the believers grow in spiritual strength and maturity they will find the perfect balance of truth and justice, they will attain to wisdom."

Shoghi Effendi discusses the affairs and conditions of the Cause with astonishing openness and frankness, he does not like secrecy and told us many times that this openness, frankness and truthfulness among the friends constitutes one of the great remedies for many of our difficulties, and he sets us the example of free and open consultation.

With a modesty and simplicity which one must see in order to appreciate, because it is foreign to our American temperament, he invites suggestion and consultation from the visiting friends and from those around him.

He listens to every suggestion with the utmost courtesy and seriousness and then brings to bear upon it the light of his wonderful lucid mind, his clear all-comprehensive thought, his powerful and penetrative judgment.

The spirit of criticism is abhorrent to Shoghi Effendi, he will not permit a breath of criticism of one believer of another and although he wants to hear the truth of every matter this must be based on sincerity of purpose. He instantly detects the least insincerity of motive or effort to influence him in any way.

He is never influenced or swayed in the divine authority with which God has vested him, but exercises a perfect protection and tender guardianship over every soul.

In speaking of a certain matter which was troubling him at the time he said, "You see I wish to know the motive behind these actions," and then with his beautiful young face full of laughter, "I do not like to be put off and put off and have the matter delayed and when they are dealing with an impatient person like myself it becomes very difficult."

He laughs at his own impatience for action, for the growth of the Cause, for the deep results of real unity and one of the highest terms of praise from his lips is - "He is active" - or - "She is an active Baha'i."

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One day in discussing the question of submission to the authority of the Spiritual Assemblies Shoghi Effendi said: "The Master has not left any latitude for personal opinion, it is not a matter of reason, it is a matter of faith.

"Some of the instructions and commands may seem unreasonable, but if we believe we have faith in them and the sign of faith is obedience. The whole question resolves itself into a matter of faith and obedience is the proof of faith, it is the result of faith, if we do not obey it is because we have not faith in the commands of the Master.

"I cannot see it in any other way.

"When a certain believer was here the question was put to the Master very plainly; supposing that in a Convention the

will of the majority, the decision of the majority is against my individual conscience, suppose that my conscience cannot agree with their decision, must I submit my conscience to the will of the majority?

"The Master answered that the individual conscience must yield to the majority. He left no room for doubt on this point. He not only gave the command, but He explained the reason for it. He said that if each one followed his own conscience there would be no result, confusion would reign as no two consciences agree, therefore we must follow the will of the majority.

"At the present time this institution, this organization is absolutely necessary, it may not always be so but now it is necessary, and all must follow it without any exception."

It is a Divine Organization, the Institute of God for the establishment of His Kingdom upon earth. Shoghi Effendi said that this Institute is perfect, although its functioning and operation is necessarily imperfect in our present state of development and understanding, but as the Baha'is become matured and perfected, it will be found to be the most perfect Institute the world has ever known.

The energy of our Guardian is inexhaustible, and as he retires at one or two o'clock in the morning, his working day is very long.

His strength and vigour never flag, the stress of work, the magnitude of the complex problems pouring in daily in voluminous mail from every corner of the earth seem to serve to renew his forces, the progress of the Cause is reflected in his joy, his buoyancy, his eager enthusiasm and absorbed interest.

But when the welfare or progress of the Cause is menaced through the lack of love and harmony among the believers in any part of the world, when this sad news reaches him, his divine happiness suffers eclipse, his strength ebbs away.

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On another occasion Shoghi Effendi said in substance that he had written explicitly to America saying that the work of teaching was first in importance and overshadowed everything else, even the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar.

That as we teach and spread the Cause and many new souls arise they will help in this important work.

He said that the believers should grasp the essential and important things at this time and not diffuse their energies in many directions. He dwelt on the necessity of teaching and maintaining a strong teaching fund, the contributions to which must be entirely free and voluntary.

I then told him that some of the friends felt that sending out teachers and paying their expenses was not desirable, tending to affect the dignity of the Cause in the eyes of the world and creating what in time must appear as a priestly order.

In stating this I quoted the exact words of some of the friends in America. Shoghi Effendi said that there were three elements which constitute a priestly or paid order of teachers and that by entirely eliminating these three elements the Baha'i contributions for the expenses of traveling teachers bore no resemblance whatever to a priestly order. These three elements are:

- I. Obligatory contributions
- II. Contributions made at regular intervals
- III. Contributions made for a definite person

If a certain amount is given at a certain definite time for the expense of a definite person, this is a priestly order, but if free and voluntary contributions are forwarded to the National Spiritual Assembly or to the teaching committee to advance the work of teaching and of sending out teachers into the field, that this is active co-operation in the Cause of God. "How else", he said, "is the work of teaching to be carried on? If the friends do not do this the Cause of God will suffer. How do you suppose", he continued, "that Baha'u'llah and 'Abdul-Baha carried on the vast work for years? Was it not through the active support and co-operation of all the friends in the East?" Then I said that some of the friends felt that the teachers who go out in the field should be self-supporting, using Martha Root as a shining example of this principle, who is able by her pen and other means to support herself in her far-reaching travels in the Cause of God.

He said this was very good wherever a person combined the qualifications of a teacher with means or ability to be self-supporting, this was very acceptable.

But he said, "Suppose some one is a good teacher who has a wife and family to support, or who is free to travel but has neither the means nor the ability to support himself, should we refuse him and say, 'No, we do not want you.' We must avail ourselves of every means to spread the Teachings, otherwise the Cause of God will suffer. Some teachers are very frugal, others are less so, some have the strength and ability to support themselves while traveling, others have not. We must believe them when they say they have not, we must trust them. Everything depends on this trust in one another. The friends must trust the National Spiritual Assembly with their problems and with their money. As this trust in one another grows and deepens the Cause of God will grow stronger. The friends in the East have great trust and confidence. I hope that the friends in America will attain this same trust."

With his dazzling smile He left us, saying: "I am very busy. My time is full. Now I must go with Mirza Azizullah Khan and go through some writings and papers. At three o'clock Miss L (an American pilgrim) is coming to see me. She is leaving tomorrow and I want to talk with her. Then Mons. R (a pilgrim from India) is coming. Then I have to go over the manuscript of Mirza Mahmood, an important book he is writing on the Cause. Afterwards I go to the Shrine on Mount Carmel to oversee the excavating, the garden and the new pump which is sending water to the upper level. I will attend the men's meeting tonight and before retiring go through all my mail."

If I could only convey to you the spirit of his words, how vividly he pictures the true Cause of God on earth, the association, solidarity, co-operation and mutual support of all the friends!

Shoghi Effendi says that the burning question before us is the means of spreading the Cause and the most perfect and wise way to present the Message to the people.

Mankind in general is ready and eager for the divine teachings and the principles of Baha'u'llah meet with universal response and supply a universal necessity.

But this is not sufficient.

The high standard of Shoghi Effendi is not satisfied with this wide-spread attraction and sincere admiration. He says, "We must make real Baha'is, those who will become active supporters and ardent adherents to the Cause of God."

Then he said: "There are certain things one must accept in order to be a Baha'i; a faith and belief in the Manifestation of God, in the Bab, Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha. People will say this is dogma; certainly this is dogma, we must not be afraid of dogma, which is a statement of certain unchangeable truths.

"The Principles of the religion of Baha'u'llah which are being spread in the world today, are only a part of the Baha'i religion. To believe in these Principles, and to teach these Principles, is not sufficient. It is necessary to teach these Principles of Baha'u'llah, because through them the world will become awakened and true civilization will become established, but it is only through the belief in the Manifestation of God Himself, through the recognition and adoration of the Source of the Light, that the world will become regenerated."

The working of this mysterious power is not seen at once, its signs steal over the earth like the finger of dawn setting all things in unconscious motion, and in the vast outer changes, the crumbling away of old social systems, the breaking of political crystallizations, the growth and expansion of a new born consciousness in mankind sweeping away barriers and limitations of the past, seeking new, wider and deeper forms of expression, - these are among its visible signs.

As I write one of the last incidents come to mind: I was in the home of the Blessed Master, that home of perfect divine love, and had been with the dear members of His Family when Shoghi Effendi entered.

He said to me: "You are most fortunate to be so near the Greatest Holy Leaf, bodily close to her. I hope that you will be able to receive something of her spirit to take to the friends in America. Her spirit is the remedy for all their troubles."

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Again we are at Bahjé -- the strip of intense blue sea, the distant lapping of the waves, the sunlit olive orchard and that all-surrounding peace and stillness broken only by the occasional soft note of a bird, and into this outer chalice of nature pours continually the emanations of the Shrine, a subtle, divine afflatus, permeating earth and air and sky, so that one feels that here and on Mount Carmel alone, earth is connected with heaven.

On this holy mountain the soul frees itself from earthly entanglement and the cloudy mortal atmosphere is dispelled in the beaming rays of light and truth.

Such divine thoughts and feelings are engendered in the human heart near these Holy Shrines as cannot find their true expression in words, but must be translated into the beauty of character and into a life wholly dedicated at the altar of God.

In closing I want to say to all my loved brothers and sisters that Shoghi Effendi's hopes and wishes for us, his explicit instructions are contained in his Epistles to America, but that in sharing with you these notes and impressions - alas! so inadequate - it is my hope to bring us all nearer to that glorious life of servitude and sacrifice, to the beloved Guardian of the Cause of God, the visible Sign of our invisible Lord.

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From the Talks of Shoghi Effendi to Mrs. May Maxwell, Haifa, Syria, 1923-4.

Among the many and important things which Shoghi Effendi said was a statement He made regarding the Bahai Religion. He said there were certain things one must accept in order to be a Bahai, a faith and belief in the Manifestation of God in the Bab, Baha'u'llah and Abdul Baha. People will say this is dogma. Certainly this is dogma. We must not be afraid of dogma which is a statement of certain unchangeable truths.

The Principles of the religion of Baha'u'llah which are being spread in the world today are only a part of the Bahai religion. To believe in these Principles and to teach these Principles is not sufficient. It is necessary to teach these Principles of Baha'u'llah because through them the world will become awakened and true civilization will become established, but it is only through the belief in the Manifestation of GOD Himself, through the recognition and adoration of the Source of the Light that the world will become ~~again~~ regenerated.

In discussing the question of submission to the authority of the Spiritual Assemblies, Shoghi Effendi says the Master has not left any latitude for personal opinion. It is not a matter of reason- it is a matter of FAITH. Some of the instructions and commands may seem unreasonable, but if we believe, we have faith in them, and the sign of faith is OBEDIENCE. The whole question resolves itself into a matter of faith, and obedience is the proof of faith- it is the result of faith. If we do not obey, it is because we have not faith in the Commands of the Master. I cannot see it in any other way.

When Mrs. Parsons was here, she put the question to the Master very plainly. Supposing that in Convention the will of the majority, the decision of the majority is against my individual conscience. Must I submit my conscience to the will of the majority? The Master answered that the individual conscience must yield to the majority. He left no room for doubt on this point. He not only gave the command, but He explained the reason why. He said that if each one followed his own conscience, there would be no result, confusion would reign, as no two consciences agree, therefore we must follow the will of the majority.

At the present time, this institution., this organization is absolutely necessary, it may not always be so but now it is necessary, and all must follow it without any exceptions. This system cannot work perfectly in the beginning but it is not the system that is imperfect, it is the individual. In time, as the Bahais grow spiritually stronger and there is perfect cooperation and unity, it will be found to be the most perfect system. The believers do not stop to think- what is the alternative? Is there any alternative at the present time in the present state of the world to this organized authority? I do not see any. If every one is allowed to follow his own idea, his own initiative, his own inspiration, chaos will ensue. If we have FAITH, we will submit and obey. This is the only sign of faith. Faith is not love. Faith is something different.