

NINE LESSONS
ON THE
BAHA'I COVENANT

by

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Dedicated to my beloved daughters, Layli and Zarinne

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FOREWORD

This deepening course on the Covenant of Baha'u'llah was written in response to a request from the International Chinese Teaching Committee in 1988 for a deepening course on the Baha'i Covenant, which, after translation into the Chinese language, could be used for deepening the Chinese believers. Although this course was initially designed for the Chinese Baha'i believers it can equally be used by other Baha'is.

The course is divided into nine lessons. Each lesson includes various aspects of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah which the author feels are commonly covered in deepening classes and seminars hence some subject matter is only dealt with briefly. Each lesson is accompanied by a set of questions and answers like those found in some school or college text-books in order to enhance further understanding of the subject matter.

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INTRODUCTION

The Covenant of Baha'u'llah is one of the most mighty and distinguishing features of His Dispensation. No such parallel can be found in previous Dispensations. This weighty document, the 'Book of the Covenant' (*Kitab-i-'Ahd*), is indeed unique in the history of religion in both its content and revelation. None of the previous Manifestations of God produced its like or bestowed upon their followers such a clear and powerful document. As a result of the Baha'i Covenant, the Cause of Baha'u'llah is shielded from schism and division, and today there exists only one Baha'i Faith. As a consequence, the believers of Baha'u'llah are united and in agreement.

“So firm and mighty is this Covenant that from the beginning of time until the present day no religious Dispensation hath produced its like...”

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “World Order of Baha'u'llah”, p.146)

The importance of the Baha'i Covenant in safeguarding the cause of Baha'u'llah cannot be underestimated and is evident from the growth and strength of the Baha'i community throughout the world. This mighty Covenant of Baha'u'llah must therefore be carefully studied and its content fully understood by the believers to enable them to both protect our beloved Faith and be protected from those who oppose the Cause. The understanding of and obedience to the Covenant is essential for both our own spiritual growth and the promotion of this world embracing Cause. Throughout its history the Baha'i Faith has witnessed on several occasions how the Covenant's mighty power has defeated the efforts of enemies from within and without to subvert and supplant this infant Cause.

The importance of studying the Covenant as a course was encouraged by the Guardian as early as November 1949 in his letter to a British Summer School Committee.

“...it would be good to have some course on the Covenant, the force that binds and strengthens the Baha'i community and holds it together, when so many man-made institutions are disintegrating and going on the rocks of discord and lack of faith.”

(Shoghi Effendi, “Unfolding Destiny”, p.235)

The Universal House of Justice in a letter on the Covenant to all National Spiritual Assemblies on December 25th, 1987 reiterated the importance of the Covenant and that it should be studied by the believers.

“...The Covenant of Baha'u'llah...must be the subject of sustained and concentrated study. Instituted by the Revealer of God's Word in this Day to direct and canalize the forces released by His Revelation, the Covenant in essence guarantees the continuation of divine guidance after the ascension of the Manifestation through the presence in the world of an institution to which all the friends must turn.”

So important is the understanding of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah that the study of it has also been designated as a major goal in the Six Year Plan. The Universal House of Justice in its 1988 Ridvan message stated that “every individual believer - man, woman, youth and child” summoned to the field of teaching should be “well-grounded in the mighty Covenant of Baha'u'llah”. Furthermore the study and understanding of the significance of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah is especially important and pertinent as the Holy Year of 1992 commemorates the Centenary of the Ascension of Baha'u'llah and of the inauguration of His world-unifying Covenant.

This deepening guide aims to assist the user in the understanding and comprehension of the significance, importance and power of the Baha'i Covenant.

LESSON 1 - WHAT IS THE COVENANT?

Definition of the Word 'Covenant'

There are a number of definitions of the word 'covenant' found in various dictionaries.

“a binding agreement, contract”. - Collins English Dictionary. (1)

“God's promise of a blessing to be fulfilled on the performance of a condition.” And *“a divine ordinance designed to govern the relations between God and man.”* - Funk & Wagnall's New Dictionary. (2)

“the promises of God as revealed in the Scriptures, conditioned on certain terms on the part of man, as obedience, repentance, faith, etc.” - Webster's New International Dictionary. (3)

A covenant in the general sense is a binding agreement or contract made between two people or parties. Since it is binding it means that the people or parties involved are obliged to be faithful to the covenant for it to be effective. The word covenant can also have a religious meaning. The Universal House of Justice in a letter written to an individual believer on March 23rd, 1975 stated:

“A Covenant in the religious sense is a binding agreement between God and man, whereby God requires of man certain behaviour in return for which He guarantees certain blessings, or whereby He gives man certain bounties in return for which He takes from those who accept them an undertaking to behave in a certain way. There is, for example, the Greater Covenant which every Manifestation of God makes with His followers, promising that in the fullness of time a new Manifestation will be sent, and taking from them the undertaking to accept Him when this occurs. There is also the Lesser Covenant that a Manifestation of God makes with His followers that they will accept His appointed successor after Him. If they do so, the Faith can remain united and pure, if not, the Faith becomes divided and its force spent. It is a Covenant of this kind that Baha'u'llah made with His followers regarding 'Abdu'l-Baha and that 'Abdu'l-Baha perpetuated through the Administrative Order...” (4)

The 'Great' or 'Ancient' Covenant

The first kind of Covenant is called the 'Great' or 'Ancient' Covenant of God in which God promises that He will always give eternal guidance to mankind by sending His Prophets (Manifestations of God) and that He would not leave mankind to itself. The cycle of appearance of these Prophets is approximately every one thousand years.

“God hath sent down His Messengers to succeed 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.” (5)

(Baha'u'llah, cited in “World Order of Baha'u'llah”, p.116)

God has promised to give eternal guidance to mankind by sending His Manifestations whenever the need arises. Likewise, mankind itself has to be faithful to this binding agreement between God and man by first recognising His station and mission and second to be obedient to His commandments.

“...The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Day Spring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof, hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. 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. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration. (6)

(Baha'u'llah, "Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah", pp.329-30)

God sends us His Messenger every time the need arises. The Manifestations of God are Divine Educators and the purpose of their coming is to enlighten mankind and ensure peace and tranquillity.

"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 to provide all the means by which they can be established." (7)

(Baha'u'llah, "Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah", pp.79-80)

It is through the recognition of the Manifestation of God for the day and obedience to His Covenant and commandments that both the spiritual and the material well-being of mankind can be assured.

"They whom God hath endued with insight will readily recognise that the precepts laid down by God constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its people... Hasten to drink your fill, O men of understanding! 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." (8)

(Baha'u'llah, "Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah", pp.330-31)

The coming of the Bab and Baha'u'llah signalled the closure of the Prophetic Cycle or Era and the inception of a new cycle, the Baha'i Cycle or the Era of Fulfilment. This new cycle, Baha'u'llah promised, will last no less than five thousand centuries in duration.

"The Faith of Baha'u'llah should indeed be regarded, if we wish to be faithful to the tremendous implications of its message, as the culmination of a cycle, the final stage in a series of successive, of preliminary and progressive revelations. These, beginning with Adam and ending with the Bab, have paved the way and anticipated with an ever-increasing emphasis the advent of that Day of Days in which He Who is the Promise of All Ages should be made manifest. (9)

(Shoghi Effendi, "World Order of Baha'u'llah", p.103)

The Era of Fulfilment begins with the advent of Baha'u'llah.

"A Revelation, hailed as the promise and crowning glory of past ages and centuries, as the consummation of all Dispensations within the Adamic Cycle, inaugurating an era of at least a thousand years' duration, and a cycle destined to last no less than five thousand centuries, signaling the end of the Prophetic Era and the beginning of the Era of Fulfilment...." (10)

(Shoghi Effendi, "God Passes By", p.100)

The Lesser Covenant

The second kind of Covenant is that made by the Manifestation of God with His followers. It is known as the Lesser Covenant. This Covenant is of two kinds: the first, concerns the advent of the next Manifestation of God; the second, refers to the successor after His passing.

"His Holiness Abraham, on Him be peace, made a covenant concerning His Holiness Moses and gave the glad-tidings of His coming. His Holiness Moses made a covenant concerning the Promised One, i.e. His Holiness Christ, and announced the good news of His Manifestation to the

world. His Holiness Christ made a covenant concerning the Paraclete and gave the tidings of His coming. His Holiness the Prophet Muhammad made a covenant concerning His Holiness the Bab and the Bab was the One promised by Muhammad, for Muhammad gave the tidings of His coming. The Bab made a Covenant concerning the Blessed Beauty of Baha'u'llah and gave the glad-tidings of His coming for the Blessed Beauty was the One promised by His Holiness the Bab. Baha'u'llah made a covenant concerning a promised One who will become manifest after one thousand or thousands of years. He likewise, with His Supreme Pen, entered into a great Covenant and Testament with all the Baha'is whereby they were commanded to follow the Centre of the Covenant after His departure, and turn not away even to a hair's breadth from obeying Him.”(11)*

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, “Baha’i World Faith”, p.358).

The Lesser Covenant found in the Baha’i Faith is unique and different from those of past Dispensations because it is in writing.

“It is a Covenant of this kind that Baha'u'llah made with His followers regarding 'Abdu'l-Baha, and that 'Abdu'l-Baha perpetuates through the Administrative Order that Baha'u'llah had already created. The Covenant of Baha'u'llah, however is unique in religious history because it was made clearly and explicitly in writing. Therefore, although individuals have broken the Covenant and thus excluded themselves from the community of the Faithful, they have never succeeded in destroying the Covenant itself: it remains inviolable and is the fulfilment of the prophecy that this is the Day that shall not be followed by Night.”(12)

(The Universal House of Justice, letter to an individual believer, March 23rd, 1975, cited in “The Power of the Covenant”, Part II, pp.4-5)

The Baha’i Covenant

The Guardian of the Baha’i Faith, Shoghi Effendi, stated there are two forms of Baha’i Covenant.

“As regards the meaning of the Baha’i Covenant: The Guardian considers the existence of two forms of Covenant both of which are explicitly mentioned in the literature of the Cause. First is the Covenant that every Prophet makes with humanity, or, more definitely, with His people that they will accept and follow the coming Manifestation who will be the reappearance of His reality. The second form of Covenant is such as the one Baha'u'llah made with His people that they should accept the Master ['Abdu'l-Baha]. 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 Baha'is that they should accept His administration after Him...”(13)

(Shoghi Effendi, cited in “The Covenant and Administration: A Compilation”, p.12)

The Everlasting or Eternal Covenant

The Everlasting Covenant is different from the Great or the Lesser Covenants.

“The Most Great Covenant is different from the Everlasting Covenant. (14)

(Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 19th, 1945, cited in “Lights of Guidance”, No.403, p.147)

All the Messengers of God from Adam to the Bab have prophesied about the Day of God, the Day of the coming of Baha'u'llah, 'the Promise of All Ages'. God had covenanted about this Day in an

* His Holiness Muhammad ('Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “Star of the West”, vol.IV, no.14, p.238)

Eternal or Everlasting Covenant. Every dispensation of previous ages has contributed to this Day of God and foretold of the advent of this supreme Manifestation of God. The coming of Baha'u'llah is the fulfilment of this Everlasting Covenant. Baha'u'llah Himself testified to this Day:

“All the Divine Books and Scriptures have predicted and announced unto men the advent of the Most Great Revelation. None can adequately recount the verses recorded in the Books of former ages which forecast this supreme Bounty, this most mighty Bestowal.” (15)

(Baha'u'llah, cited in “God Passes By”, p.100)

“This is the Day, O my Lord, which Thou didst announce unto all mankind as the Day whereon Thou wouldst reveal Thy Self, and shed Thy radiance, and shine brightly over all Thy creatures. 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 Bayan to be the Herald of this Most Great and all-glorious Manifestation, and this most resplendent and most sublime Appearance.” (16)

(Baha'u'llah, “Prayers and Meditations”, p.275)

Shoghi Effendi expounds further the significance of this great day.

“Then 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 be the world-wide sovereignty of Baha'u'llah - 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 recognised, 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 realised...” (17)

(Shoghi Effendi, “Promised Day is Come”, pp.128-29)

LESSON 1 - QUESTIONS

- Q1. Give a dictionary definition of the word covenant
- Q2. Name the two major types of Covenant
- Q3. Describe the Great Covenant.
- Q4. Describe the Lesser Covenant.
- Q5. Is there a reward for obedience to the Covenant of God?
- Q6. Have previous Manifestations made a covenant with their followers and, if so, why?
- Q7. His Holiness Muhammad made a covenant with His followers concerning whose coming?
- Q8. Describe in detail the two forms of the Baha'i Covenant explained by the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith?
- Q9. What is God's purpose in making a covenant with mankind?
- Q10. Who did Baha'u'llah say the Baha'is should turn to after His passing?
- Q11. What covenant did Baha'u'llah make with His followers?
- Q12. What is the first duty prescribed by God for His servants?
- Q13. Which Prophet of God closed the Prophetic Cycle and opens the Cycle of Fulfilment?
- Q14. What is the Everlasting Covenant?

LESSON 1 - ANSWERS

- A1. See definition.
- A2. The Great or Ancient Covenant; and the Lesser Covenant.
- A3. The Great Covenant is the covenant God made with man in which He said He would always guide mankind through His Manifestations e.g. Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, Baha'u'llah, etc. The purpose of the appearance of these prophets throughout the ages of human history is the education of mankind and the establishment of peace and tranquillity. (See quotations 5 - 7).
- A4. The Lesser Covenant is the covenant the Manifestation of God made with His followers concerning e.g His successor, the advent of the next Manifestation of God, of laws, etc. (See quotations 4, 13).
- A5. Yes, blessings and bounty from God. (See quotation 4).
- A6. Yes, so as to guide mankind to the recognition of His next Manifestation of God, and steadfastness in His Covenant. (See quotation 11).
- A7. The Bab. (See quotation 11).
- A8. See quotation 13.
- A9. In order to guide mankind till *“the end that hath no end”*. (See quotation 5).
- A10. 'Abdu'l-Baha. (See quotation 13).
- A11. *“concerning a promised One who will become manifest after one thousand or thousands of years...to follow the Centre of the Covenant...”*. (See quotation 11).
- A12. Recognition of His station and obedience to His commandments and teachings. (See quotation 6).
- A13. The Bab.
- A14. The Everlasting Covenant is the Covenant that refers to the coming of Baha'u'llah as the 'Promised of All Ages'. (See quotations 14, 17).

LESSON 2 - THE COVENANT OF BAHĀ'U'LLĀH

Ministry of Baha'u'llah

The advent of Baha'u'llah had been foretold in numerous tablets, by the Bab, the Forerunner of the Dispensation of Baha'u'llah. The Bab, meaning the 'Gate', had come to prepare the way for the coming of Baha'u'llah and referred to Him as 'Him Whom God shall make manifest'. All the followers of the Bab were told to seek His advent.

“Today the Bayan is in the stage of seed; at the beginning of the manifestation of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' its ultimate perfection will become apparent...The Bayan deriveth all its glory from 'Him Whom God shall make manifest.'” (1)

(The Bab, cited in “World Order of Baha'u'llah”, p.100)

The period of waiting foretold by the Bab of the Advent of Baha'u'llah would be nine years. The Bab declared His Mission to Mulla Husayn, the First Letter of the Living, two hours and eleven minutes after sunset on May 22nd, 1844 in Shiraz. This day is commemorated as one of the nine Baha'i Holy Days.

“Ere nine will have elapsed from the inception of this Cause, the realities of the created things will not be made manifest. All that thou hast yet seen is but the stage from the moist germ until We clothed it with flesh. Be patient, until thou beholdest a new creation.” (2)

(The Bab, cited in “God Passes By”, p.29)

The Bab made a Covenant to prepare His followers for the coming of Baha'u'llah.

“His Holiness the Bab, made a Covenant for Baha'u'llah with all the people of the Bayan, so that on the day of appearance of 'Him Whom God shall manifest' - and of the radiation of the Light of Baha'u'llah, they might believe and be assured, arise in service and promulgate the Word of God...However, when the light of the Covenant of His Holiness, the Bab, lighted the universe, then all the faithful and sincere souls were freed from the darkness of the violation of the people of the Bayan and shone like brilliant candles.” (3)

(Abdu'l-Baha, “Baha'i World Faith”, pp.429-30)

Baha'u'llah was a prisoner for about 40 years because of His proclamation to an unbelieving humanity that He was the Promised One of all Ages. As a result of His belief in the mission of the Bab, Baha'u'llah was taken prisoner and incarcerated for four months in the latter part of 1852 in the Siyah-Chal - the Black Pit, in Tihiran. It was in this most dismal and putrid prison in 1853 that He became conscious of His Divine Mission. This was the inception of His ministry. On January 12th, 1853, Baha'u'llah, accompanied by His family, left Tihiran with two of His brothers, Mirza Musa and Mirza Muhammad-Quli, as exiles to Baghdad, never again to return to His native land. He sojourned in Baghdad for about 10 years and was exiled to Constantinople, the capital city of the Ottoman Empire, with His family, Mirza Musa, Mirza Muhammad-Quli, His faithful brothers, and twenty-six of His disciples. Having stayed in Constantinople for five months, Baha'u'llah and His family, together with His followers, were once more exiled, this time to Adrianople, designated by Baha'u'llah as the 'remote prison'. He stayed there for five years. Baha'u'llah, His family and His followers were finally exiled to Akka, arriving on August 31st, 1868. Baha'u'llah was confined for 9 years within the barrack-walls of Akka, designated by Him as the 'Most Great Prison'. The remaining 15 years were spent in the surrounding countryside. He died in the early hours of the morning of 29th of May, 1892 in Bahji. The day of the Ascension of Baha'u'llah is commemorated as one of the nine Baha'i Holy days.

The Kitab-i-'Ahd of Baha'u'llah

Nine days after the ascension of Baha'u'llah, His Will and Testament, known as the *Kitab-i-'Ahd*, the 'Book of the Covenant', was unsealed and read in Bahji. In this document Baha'u'llah designated as His Successor and the Centre of His Covenant His eldest Son - known to us as Abdu'l-Baha (the Servant of Glory) - the Expounder of His revealed Word, the Greatest Branch (Ghusnu'llahu'l-A'zam), the Mystery of God (Sirru'llah). He is also known as the Master. Baha'u'llah stated that all the Baha'is should turn to Him for guidance. Baha'u'llah had also previously referred to Abdu'l Baha as His Successor in His Most Holy Book, the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*. The *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, revealed by Baha'u'llah and described by Him as His 'weightiest testimony unto all people', was revealed in the early part of 1873 when He was confined in the House of 'Udi Khammar in Akka. In the *Kitab-i-'Ahd*, Baha'u'llah solemnly and explicitly declares:

"It is incumbent upon the Aghsan, the Afnan, and My kindred to turn, one and all, their faces towards the Most Mighty Branch. Consider that which We have revealed in Our Most Holy Book: 'When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.' The object of this sacred verse is none other except the Most Mighty Branch ('Abdu'l-Baha). Thus have we graciously revealed unto you our potent Will, and I am verily the Gracious, the All-Powerful." (4)

(Baha'u'llah, cited in "World Order of Baha'u'llah", p.134)

The Guardian of the Baha'i Faith writes about the significance of the *Kitab-i-'Ahd*, the Book of the Covenant.

"Written entirely in His own hand...this unique and epoch-making Document [Kitab-i-'Ahd]", designated by Baha'u'llah as His 'Most Great Tablet', and alluded to by Him as the 'Crimson Book' in His 'Epistle to the Son of the Wolf', can find no parallel in the Scriptures of any previous Dispensation, not excluding that of the Bab Himself. For nowhere in the books pertaining to any of the world's religious systems, not even among the writings of the Author of the Babi Revelation, do we find any single document establishing a Covenant endowed with an authority comparable to the Covenant which Baha'u'llah had Himself instituted." (5)

(Shoghi Effendi, "God Passes By", p.238)

And Shoghi Effendi further emphasizes that:

*"In this weighty and incomparable Document its Author discloses the character of that 'excellent and priceless heritage' bequeathed by Him to His 'heirs'; proclaims afresh the fundamental purpose of His Revelation; enjoins the 'peoples of the world' to hold fast to that which will 'elevate' their 'station'; announces to them that 'God hath forgiven what is past'; stresses the sublimity of man's station; discloses the primary aim of the Faith of God; directs the faithful to pray for the welfare of the kings of the earth, 'the manifestations of the power, and the daysprings of the might and riches, of God'; invests them with the rulership of the earth; singles out as His special domain the hearts of men; forbids categorically strife and contention; commands His followers to aid those rulers who are 'adorned with the ornament of equity and justice'; and directs, in particular, the Aghsan⁺ (His sons) to ponder the 'mighty force and the consummate power that lieth concealed in the world of being'. He bids them, moreover, together with the Afnan (the Bab's kindred) and His own relatives, to 'turn, one and all, unto the Most Great Branch ('Abdu'l-Baha)'; identifies Him with 'the One Whom God hath purposed,' 'Who hath branched from this pre-existent Root,' referred to in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*; ordains the station of the 'Greater*

⁺ The Kitab-i-'Ahd (The Book of the Covenant) is also known as the Kitab-i-'Ahdī (The Book of My Covenant)

^{*+} The word Aghsan (plural of *Ghusn*), literally meaning 'branches', is a designation used by Baha'u'llah to refer to His male descendants. The word Afnan, literally meaning 'twigs', is a designation used by Baha'u'llah to indicate the Bab's kinsmen, who are the descendants of the three maternal uncles of the Bab, of the two brothers of the wife of the Bab and of her sister. (Adib Taherzadeh, "The Revelation of Baha'u'llah", vol.4, p.50).

Branch' (Mirza Muhammad-'Ali) to be beneath that of the 'Most Great Branch' ('Abdu'l-Baha); exhorts the believers to treat the Aghsan with consideration and affection; counsels them to respect His family and relatives, as well as the kindred of the Bab; denies His sons 'any right to the property of others'; enjoins on them, on His Kindred and on that of the Bab to 'fear God, to do that which is meet and seemly' and to follow the things that will 'exalt' their station; warns all men not to allow 'the means of order to be made the cause of confusion and the instrument of union an occasion for discord'; and concludes with an exhortation calling upon the faithful to 'serve all nations', and to strive for the 'betterment of the world'." (6)

(Shoghi Effendi, "God Passes By", pp.239-40)

The most characteristic feature of the revelation of Baha'u'llah not found in previous Dispensations is the ordination and appointment of the Centre of the Covenant.

"As to the most great characteristic of the revelation of Baha'u'llah, a specific teaching not given by any of the Prophets of the past: It is the ordination and appointment of the Centre of the Covenant. By this appointment and provision He has safeguarded and protected the religion of God against differences and schisms, making it impossible for anyone to create a new sect or faction of belief. To ensure unity and agreement He has entered into a Covenant with all the people of the World, including the interpreter and explainer of His teachings, so that no one may interpret or explain the religion of God according to his own view or opinion and thus create a sect founded upon his individual understanding of the divine Words. The 'Book of the Covenant' or Testament of Baha'u'llah is the means of preventing such a possibility..." (7)

(Abdu'l-Baha, "Promulgation of Universal Peace", pp.455-56)

In the Dispensation of Baha'u'llah, unlike the previous Dispensations, His Covenant, is written down and a successor appointed. This, therefore, does not allow any individual misinterpretation of the Word of God or lead to verbal tradition. The station of 'Abdu'l-Baha as the authoritative interpreter of the Words of Baha'u'llah has been emphasized in the Tablet of the Branch which was revealed by Baha'u'llah in Adrianople.

"In former cycles no distinct Covenant was made in writing by the Supreme Pen; no distinct personage was appointed to be the Standard differentiating falsehood from truth, so that whatsoever he said was to stand as truth and that which he repudiated was to be known as falsehood. At most, His Holiness Jesus Christ gave only an intimation, a symbol, and that was but an indication of the solidity of Peter's faith. When he mentioned his faith, His Holiness said, 'Thou art Peter' - which means rock- and upon this rock will I build My church.' This was a sanction of Peter's faith; it was not indicative of his [Peter] being the expounded of the Book, but was a confirmation of Peter's faith..."

"But in this Dispensation of the Blessed Beauty (Baha'u'llah) among its distinctions is that He did not leave people in perplexity. He entered into a Covenant and Testament with the people. He wrote with His own pen and revealed it in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the 'Book of Laws', and Kitab-i-'Ahd, the 'Book of the Covenant', appointing Him ('Abdu'l-Baha) the Expounder of the Book. You must ask Him ('Abdu'l-Baha) regarding the meanings of the texts of the verses. Whatsoever He says is correct. Outside of this, in numerous Tablets He (Baha'u'llah) has explicitly recorded it, with clear, sufficient, valid and forceful statements. In the Tablet of the Branch He explicitly states: Whatsoever the Branch says is right, or correct; and every person must obey The Branch with his life, with his heart, with his tongue. Without his Will, not a word shall anyone utter. This is an explicit text of the Blessed Beauty. So there is no excuse left for anybody. No soul shall, of himself, speak anything. Whatsoever his ('Abdu'l-Baha's) tongue utters, whatsoever his pen records, that is correct; according to the explicit text of Baha'u'llah in the Tablet of the Branch." (8)

(Abdu'l-Baha, cited in "Star of the West", vol.III, No.14, p.9)

Besides appointing His successor and admonishing those who do not obey His Will Baha'u'llah also assures His followers in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* of His unfailing support at all times.

“Be not dismayed, O peoples of the world, when the day-star of My Beauty is set, and the heaven of My Tabernacle is concealed from your eyes. Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognised Me, will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.” (9)

(Baha'u'llah, “Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book of Baha'u'llah”, p.14)

In another passage of the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* Baha'u'llah again assures His followers of continual assistance after His ascension.

“Let not your heart be perturbed, O people, when the glory of My Presence is withdrawn, and the ocean of My utterance is stilled. In My presence amongst you there is a wisdom, and in My absence there is yet another, inscrutable to all but God, the Incomparable, the All-Knowing. Verily, We behold you from our realm of glory, and shall aid whosoever will arise for the triumph of Our Cause with the hosts of the Concourse on high and a company of Our favoured angels.” (10)

(Baha'u'llah, “A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book of Baha'u'llah”, p.16)

Furthermore, Baha'u'llah warns strongly against those who will make claim to prophethood before the expiration of a thousand years.

“Whoso layeth claim to a Revelation direct from God...ere the expiration of a full thousand years, such a man is assuredly a lying imposter...Should a man appear...ere the lapse of a full thousand years - each year consisting of twelve months according to the Qu'ran, and of nineteen months of nineteen days each, according to the Bayan - and if such a man reveal to your eyes all the signs of God, unhesitatingly reject him!” (11)

(Baha'u'llah, cited in “World Order of Baha'u'llah”, p.132)

Baha'u'llah also warns and admonishes His followers not to interpret His words and that 'Abdu'l-Baha is the Authoritative Interpreter of His revelations.

“Whoso interpreteth what hath been sent down from the heaven of Revelation, and altereth its evident meaning, he, verily, is of them that have perverted the Sublime Word of God, and is of the lost ones in the Lucid Book.” (12)

(Baha'u'llah, “A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book of Baha'u'llah”, p.23)

LESSON 2 - QUESTIONS

- Q1. How long was Baha'u'llah's ministry?
- Q2. In which year did Baha'u'llah arrive in Akka and how many years was He imprisoned there?
- Q3. What is the Will and Testament of Baha'u'llah called?
- Q4. Who did Baha'u'llah appoint in His Will and Testament as His Successor?
- Q5. Is the *Kitab-i-'Ahd* the same as the *Kitab-i-'Aqdas*? If not, why?
- Q6. In which year and where was the *Kitab-i-'Aqdas* revealed?
- Q7. Name four titles given to 'Abdu'l-Baha by Baha'u'llah.
- Q8. What did Baha'u'llah promise His followers in the *Kitab-i-'Aqdas*?
- Q9. Name some features in the *Kitab-i-'Ahd* as described by Shoghi Effendi?
- Q10. What did Baha'u'llah warn His followers about in regard to His Words?
- Q11. Who are the Aghsan and Afnan?
- Q12. Discuss the significance of the *Kitab-i-'Aqdas* and the *Kitab-i-'Ahd* in relation to the Covenant of Baha'u'llah.
- Q13. What is the most characteristic feature of the Dispensation of Baha'u'llah not found in previous Dispensations?
- Q14. What is unique about the Covenant in this Dispensation?

LESSON 2 - ANSWERS

- A1. Baha'u'llah's ministry lasted for 40 years (1853 - 1892). (See quotation 2 - His ministry commenced nine years after 1844 i.e. from 1853)
- A2. Baha'u'llah and His family with His faithful brothers and followers arrived in Akka via the sea gate on 31st August, 1868; and was held Prisoner for 9 years of which 2 years were in solitary confinement within the barrack-walls.
- A3. The Will and Testament of Baha'u'llah is called the *Kitab-i-'Ahd*.
- A4. Baha'u'llah appointed His eldest Son, 'Abdu'l-Baha, as His Successor and all should turn to Him for guidance and interpretation of His Word. (See quotation 4).
- A5. No, the *Kitab-i-'Ahd* is the Book of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah in which He appoints His Successor, whereas the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* is the 'Most Holy Book' of Baha'u'llah in which the laws of Baha'u'llah are revealed.
- A6. The *Kitab-i-Aqdas* was revealed in 1873 before Baha'u'llah revealed His Will and Testament.
- A7. 'Expounder of His Revealed Word', 'the Greatest Branch', 'the Mystery of God', 'the Master'.
- A8. Baha'u'llah promised He will assist His followers who arise to serve Him. (See quotation 9).
- A9. 'excellent and priceless heritage'; 'the manifestation of the power, and the day-spring of the might and riches, of God'; etc. (See quotation 6).
- A10. Baha'u'llah warned His followers not to interpret His Word since 'Abdu'l-Baha is the Expounder of His Book. (See quotation 8).
- A11. Aghsan are the male descendants of Baha'u'llah; and Afnan ('Twigs') are the descendants of the three maternal uncles of the Bab, and of the two brothers of His wife and her sister.
- A12. Both of these documents of Baha'u'llah refer to the appointment of His Successor and obedience and steadfastness to His Covenant. (See quotation 3).
- A13. It is the ordination and appointment of the Centre of the Covenant. (See quotation 7).
- A14. The authority endorsed in this Covenant is unique among all the Dispensations, including the Bab's. (See quotation 5).

LESSON 3 - 'ABDU'L-BAHA, THE CENTRE OF THE COVENANT

'Abdu'l-Baha

'Abdu'l-Baha, the Master and Centre of the Covenant, was the eldest son of Baha'u'llah and was born in Tihran on May 23rd, 1844. That was the very same day the Bab declared His Mission in Shiraz. 'Abdu'l-Baha, which in Arabic means the 'Servant of the Glory', was always at the service of Baha'u'llah. He was only nine years old when Baha'u'llah was imprisoned in the Siyah-Chal in Tihran and from then on was a constant companion His exile from Tihran to Baghdad, Constantinople, Adrianople and Akka. The followers of Baha'u'llah would constantly turn to 'Abdu'l-Baha seeking advice and guidance and He would always exhort them to be faithful to the Covenant of Baha'u'llah and to abide by His teachings. The officials, notables, men of wealth and poor alike would also seek 'Abdu'l-Baha for advice and guidance pertaining to all kinds of matters. 'Abdu'l-Baha arranged to conceal the remains of the Bab after He was martyred in Tabriz. The Holy Remains arrived in Akka on 31st January, 1899 and were interred in the Holy Shrine on Mount Carmel on 21st March, 1909 after 'Abdu'l-Baha was freed as a result of the Young Turk Revolution. In August 1910 He travelled to Egypt, Europe and North America to spread the Cause of His Father. He returned to the Holy Land on December 5th, 1913. The Tablets of the Divine Plan, one of the charters for the establishment of the new world order of Baha'u'llah, was revealed by 'Abdu'l-Baha from March to April of 1916 and February to March of 1917. As a result of His service to the poor in Akka and His humanitarian work during the First World War in Palestine, 'Abdu'l-Baha received a knighthood from the British Government in 1920. 'Abdu'l-Baha passed away at 1.15 am on November 28th, 1921 in Haifa.

'Abdu'l-Baha, the Centre of the Covenant

Before His ascension, Baha'u'llah, entrusted His Will and Testament, the *Kitab-i-'Ahd*, to the care of 'Abdu'l-Baha. The seal of this document was broken on the ninth day after the ascension of Baha'u'llah witnessed by some members of Baha'u'llah's family chosen by 'Abdu'l-Baha. On the same day the same document was read by Mirza Majdi'd-Din, the son of Mirza Musa, who was Baha'u'llah's faithful brother, within the walls of the Shrine of Baha'u'llah, and witnessed by members of Baha'u'llah's family. It was not until June 19, 1912 in New York, designated by 'Abdu'l-Baha, as the City of the Covenant, that He publicly declared that He was the Centre of the Covenant and the 'Tablet of the Branch' was read out.

The authority conferred upon 'Abdu'l-Baha as the Centre of the Covenant is given by Baha'u'llah in the *Suriy-i-Ghusn* (Tablet of the Branch), the *Kitab-i- Aqdas* (the Most Holy Book) and the *Kitab-i-'Ahd* (the Book of My Covenant).

In the *Suriy-i-Ghusn*, Baha'u'llah refers to the station of 'Abdu'l-Baha.

“There hath branched from the Sadratu'l-Muntaha this sacred and glorious Being, this Branch of Holiness; well is it with him that hath sought His shelter and abideth beneath His shadow. Verily the Limb of the Law of God hath sprung forth from this Root which God had firmly implanted in the Ground of His Will, and Whose Branch hath been so uplifted so as to encompass the whole of creation. Magnified be He, therefore, for this sublime, this blessed, this mighty, this exalted Handiwork!...Render thanks unto God, O people, for His appearance; for verily He is the most great Favour unto you, the most perfect bounty upon you; and through Him every mouldering bone is quickened. 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. He is the Trust of God amongst you, His charge within you, His manifestation unto you and His appearance among His favoured servants...We have sent Him down in the form of a*

* The Lote-Tree beyond which there is no passing'. It is the symbol of the Manifestation of God, to which no one has access. (Adib Taherzadeh, "The Revelation of Baha'u'llah", vol.4, p.436).

human temple. Blest and sanctified by God who created whatsoever He willeth through His inviolable, His infallible degree. They who deprive themselves of the shadow of the Branch, are lost in the wilderness of error, are consumed by the heat of world desires, and are of those who will assuredly perish.”(1)

(Baha'u'llah, cited in “World Order of Baha'u'llah”, p.135)

Baha'u'llah had referred to 'Abdu'l-Baha as His Successor in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*.

“When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces towards 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.”(2)

(Baha'u'llah, cited in “World Order of Baha'u'llah”, p.134)

In the *Kitab-i-'Ahd*, Baha'u'llah reaffirms the station of 'Abdu'l-Baha.

“It is incumbent upon the Aghsan, the Afnan, and My kindred to turn, one and all, their faces towards the Most Mighty Branch. Consider that which We have revealed in Our Most Holy Book: 'When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.' The object of this sacred verse is none other except the Most Mighty Branch ('Abdu'l-Baha). Thus have we graciously revealed unto you our potent Will, and I am verily the Gracious, the All-Powerful.”(3)

(Baha'u'llah, cited in “World Order of Baha'u'llah”, p.134)

The meaning and significance of the term 'branch' are explained by the Hands of the Cause of God.

“The word 'Ghosn’⁺ (plural 'Aghsan') is an Arabic word, meaning branch.

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

“All the male relatives of the Bab are invariably referred to as 'Afnan', which means 'twigs'.

“These two designations are not interchangeable. Over and over in Baha'u'llah's Tablets these terms 'Aghsan' and 'Afnan' are specifically used in this sense.

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

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

It should likewise be pointed out that neither in Persian nor Arabic are there ever any capital letters, so that is impossible to deduce any arguments from a capitalization or lack of capitalization in the English texts.”(4)

(Hands of the Cause of God, U.S. Baha'i News, December, 1960, cited in “Power of the Covenant”, Part II, pp.24-5).

⁺ As in original quote.

When 'Abdu'l-Baha was appointed as Successor by Baha'u'llah the only believers who were loyal and faithful to him were His sister, Baha'iyiyh Khanum, His four daughters and His uncle Mirza Muhammad-Quli (half-brother of Baha'u'llah) and his family. The remaining sons and daughters of Baha'u'llah with their wives and husbands turned against 'Abdu'l-Baha and chose to be violators of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah. The chief opponent of 'Abdu'l-Baha was His half-brother, Mirza Muhammad-'Ali, entitled by Baha'u'llah as the 'Greater Branch' (Ghusn-i-Akbar).

Reaffirmation of the station of 'Abdu'l-Baha

'Abdu'l-Baha reaffirms His authority as the Centre of the Covenant in various Tablets and exhorts the believers to be obedient to the Covenant of Baha'u'llah.

“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, for, verily, He knoweth the texts of My Book. Other than He, no one doth know My Book.’ The purpose of this statement is that there should never be discord and divergence among the Baha’is but they should always be unified and agreed... Therefore, whosoever obeys the Centre of the Covenant appointed by Baha’u’llah has obeyed Baha’u’llah, and whosoever disobeys Him has disobeyed Baha’u’llah.” (5)

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, “Promulgation of Universal Peace”, p.323)

Again 'Abdu'l-Baha confirms His authority.

“...In accordance with the explicit text of the Kitab-i-Aqdas Baha’u’llah hath made the Centre of the Covenant the Interpreter of His Word - a Covenant so firm and mighty that from the beginning of time until the present day no religious Dispensation hath produced its like.” (6)

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “World Order of Baha’u’llah”, p.136)

The instruction given by Baha'u'llah to His followers to turn to 'Abdu'l-Baha after His passing was both clear and explicit.

“Baha’u’llah covenanted, not that I am the Promised One, but that 'Abdu'l-Baha is the Expounder of the Book and the Centre of His Covenant, and that the Promised One of Baha’u’llah will appear after one thousand or thousands of years. This is the Covenant which Baha’u’llah made. If a person deviates, he is not acceptable at the Threshold of Baha’u’llah. In case of difference, 'Abdu'l-Baha must be consulted. All must revolve around His good pleasure. After 'Abdu'l-Baha, whenever the Universal House of Justice is organised it will ward off differences.” (7)

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, “Star of the West”, vol.IV, no.14, p.238).

'Abdu'l-Baha, The Perfect Exemplar

'Abdu'l-Baha is not only the Centre of the Covenant but the perfect 'Exemplar' of the teachings of Baha'u'llah and the 'Mystery of God'.

“He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Centre and Pivot of Baha’u’llah’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 Baha’i ideal, the incarnation of every Baha’i virtue, the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root, the Limb of the Law of God, the Being 'round Whom all names revolve,' the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the Ensign of the Most Great Peace, the Moon of the Central Orb of this most Holy Dispensation - styles and titles that are implicit and find their truest, their highest and fairest expression in the magic name 'Abdu'l-Baha. He is,

above and beyond these appellations, the 'Mystery of God' - an expression by which Baha'u'llah 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-Baha the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized.” (8)

(Shoghi Effendi, “World Order of Baha'u'llah”, p.134)

'Abdu'l-Baha's Relationship With Us

As mentioned earlier there were many who broke the Covenant of Baha'u'llah and did not accept 'Abdu'l-Baha as the Centre of the Covenant. Even some of the Aghsan broke the Covenant. 'Abdu'l-Baha cautioned His followers against these disbelievers.

“Beware! Beware! lest anyone should speak from the authority of his own thoughts or create a new thing out of himself. Beware! Beware! According to the explicit Covenant of Baha'u'llah you should care nothing at all for such a person. Baha'u'llah shuns such souls. I have expounded these things for you, for the conservation and protection of the teachings of Baha'u'llah, in order that you may be informed, lest any souls deceive you and lest any souls shall cause suspicion among you. You must love all people, and yet if any souls put you in doubt, you must know Baha'u'llah is severed from them.” (9)

('Abdu'l-Baha, “Promulgation of Universal Peace”, pp.323-24)

'Abdu'l-Baha further warns that the authority conferred upon Him as the Centre of the Covenant should not be challenged or tested. In a reply to a proud and wayward man who sent a blank piece of paper to 'Abdu'l-Baha to test Him, He replied:

“O Thou who posed a test for 'Abdu'l-Baha! Is it seemly for a man like thee to test a servant submissive and lowly before God? Nay by God, it is given to the Centre of the Covenant to test the peoples of the world.” (10)

('Abdu'l Baha, cited in “'Abdu'l Baha”, p.51)

Servitude Of 'Abdu'l-Baha

In spite of all the power and authority conferred upon 'Abdu'l-Baha as the Centre of the Covenant, He often reminds the believers that His true station is one of servitude.

“...My station is the station of servitude - a servitude which is complete, pure and real, firmly established, enduring, obvious, explicitly revealed and subject to no interpretation whatever...I am the Interpreter of the Word of God; such is my Interpretation.” (11)

('Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “World Order of Baha'u'llah”, p.133)

Again 'Abdu'l-Baha reaffirms His station of servitude.

“...My name is 'Abdu'l-Baha. My qualification is 'Abdu'l-Baha. My reality is 'Abdu'l-Baha. My praise is 'Abdu'l-Baha. Thralldom to the Blessed Perfection is my glorious and refulgent diadem, and servitude to all the human race my perpetual religion...No name, no title, no mention, no commendation have I, nor will ever have, except 'Abdu'l-Baha. This is my longing. This is my greatest yearning. This is my eternal life. This is my everlasting glory.” (12)

('Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “World Order of Baha'u'llah”, p.139)

There were many who opposed and schemed against 'Abdu'l-Baha but in spite of all this He invoked God to forgive their sins and wrong-doings, and even offered to bear the afflictions and hardship of His enemies.

“I call upon Thee, O Lord my God! with my tongue and with all my heart, not to requite them for their cruelty and their wrong-doings, their craft and their mischief, for they are foolish and ignoble and know not what they do. They discern not good from evil, neither do they distinguish right from wrong, nor justice from injustice. They follow their own desires and walk in the footsteps of the most imperfect and foolish amongst them. O my Lord! Have mercy upon them, shield them from all afflictions in these troubled times and grant that all trials and hardships may be the lot of this Thy servant that hath fallen into this darksome pit. Single me out for every woe and make me a sacrifice for all Thy loved ones...” (13)

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, “Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha”, p.18-9)

LESSON 3 - QUESTIONS

- Q1. What does 'Abdu'l-Baha mean?
- Q2. When was 'Abdu'l-Baha born and what is the significance of the date?
- Q3. What was the exact date and time of 'Abdu'l-Baha's ascension?
- Q4. List a number of important events associated with 'Abdu'l-Baha during His ministry.
- Q5. What kind of services did 'Abdu'l-Baha render to the people of Akka and followers of Baha'u'llah?
- Q6. Who designated 'Abdu'l Baha as the Centre of the Covenant and in which document?
- Q7. Why must we turn to 'Abdu'l-Baha for guidance?
- Q8. What was 'Abdu'l-Baha's role?
- Q9. Is 'Abdu'l-Baha an ordinary man or a prophet?
- Q10. Does 'Abdu'l Baha have a special relationship with us individually? Discuss what it may be.
- Q11. What did 'Abdu'l-Baha warn the believers about?
- Q12. Discuss the significance of 'Abdu'l-Baha being the Centre of the Covenant.
- Q13. Who is designated 'The Most Great Branch'; 'The Greater Branch'; 'The Purest Branch' and 'The Chosen Branch'?
- Q14. What station did 'Abdu'l-Baha designate Himself?

LESSON 3 - ANSWERS

- A1. 'Abdu'l-Baha in Arabic means the Servant of Baha or Servant of the Glory i.e. Servant of Baha'u'llah.
- A2. 'Abdu'l-Baha was born on May 23rd, 1844, the day the Bab declared His station to Mulla Husayn in Shiraz that 'He was the Promised of All Ages'.
- A3. 'Abdu'l Baha ascended at 1.15 am on November 28th, 1921.
- A4. 'Abdu'l- Baha arranged for the concealment of the Holy Remains of the Bab and the final internment of them in the Shrine of the Bab on Mount Carmel on March 21st, 1909. He revealed the Tablets of the Divine Plan. He travelled in the West from 1910 to 1913.
- A5. 'Abdu'l-Baha rendered both spiritual and material comfort to the poor; gave advice and guidance to people from all walks of life; gave advice and guidance to the followers of Baha'u'llah exhorting and encouraging them to be firm and steadfast in the Covenant of Baha'u'llah.
- A6. Baha'u'llah appointed 'Abdu'l-Baha as His Successor and Centre of His Covenant in the *Tablets of the Branch; Kitab-i-Aqdas* and *Kitab-i-'Ahd*. (See quotations 1, 2, 3).
- A7. 'Abdu'l-Baha is the Centre of the Covenant and the Expounder of the Word of Baha'u'llah. Therefore, infallible guidance comes from Him.
- A8. 'Abdu'l-Baha's role was the Sole Interpreter and Protector of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah and to guide the followers of Baha'u'llah to be steadfast and firm in the Covenant.
- A9. 'Abdu'l-Baha is neither an ordinary man nor a prophet of God but is the 'Mystery of God' and the 'Perfect Exemplar'. (See quotation 8).
- A10. 'Abdu'l-Baha is the Master and the Perfect Exemplar of the Revelation of Baha'u'llah and from Him we all seek infallible guidance. (See quotation 8).
- A11. 'Abdu'l-Baha warned the followers not to set themselves up as authority but to turn to 'Abdu'l-Baha. (See quotation 9).
- A12. See quotations 5, 7, 8, 9.
- A13. 'Abdu'l-Baha; Mirza Muhammad-'Ali; Mirza Mihdi and Shoghi Effendi.
- A14. The station of servitude to Baha'u'llah and humanity. (See quotations 11, 12).

LESSON 4 - THE WILL AND TESTAMENT OF 'ABDU'L-BAHA

'Abdu'l-Baha wrote His Will and Testament in three parts at different times between 1901 and 1908 while confined as a Prisoner for seven years within the city walls of Akka. The first part was written during the darkest period of His imprisonment in the prison-fortress of Akka. In this section 'Abdu'l-Baha had already designated Shoghi Effendi as His successor and Guardian* of the Cause of Baha'u'llah. This section was concealed underground for a long period of time.

The Guardian of the Baha'i Faith expounds upon the significance of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha:

"It was 'Abdu'l-Baha Who, through the provisions of His weighty Will and Testament, has forged the vital link which must for ever connect the age that has just expired with the one we now live in - the Transitional and Formative period of the Faith - a stage that must in the fullness of time reach its blossom and yield its fruits in the exploits and triumphs that are to herald the Golden Age of the Revelation of Baha'u'llah." (1)

(Shoghi Effendi, "World Order of Baha'u'llah", p.98)

Shoghi Effendi goes on to emphasize that:

"The Covenant of Baha'u'llah had been instituted solely through the direct operation of His Will and purpose. The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha, on the other hand, may be regarded as the offspring resulting from that mystic intercourse between Him Who had generated the forces of a God-given Faith and the One Who had been made its sole Interpreter and was recognised as its Perfect Exemplar..." (2)

(Shoghi Effendi, "God Passes By", p.325)

Unique In Its Origin And Character

The Administrative Order established in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha is unique in its origin and character in the annals of the world's religious systems.

"The Administrative Order which this historic Document has established, it should be noted, is by virtue of its origin and character, unique in the annals of the world's religious systems. No Prophet before Baha'u'llah, it can be confidently asserted, not even Muhammad Whose Book clearly lays down the laws and ordinances of the Islamic Dispensation, has established, authoritatively and in writing, anything comparable to the Administrative Order which the authorized Interpreter of Baha'u'llah's teachings has instituted, an Order which, by virtue of the administrative principles which its Author has formulated, the institutions He has established, and the right of interpretation with which He has invested its Guardian, must and will, in a manner unparalleled in any previous religion, safeguard from schism the Faith from which it has sprung..." (3)

(Shoghi Effendi, "God Passes By", p.326)

The Charter Of Future World Civilization

"The Document establishing that Order, the Charter of a future world civilization, which may be regarded in some of its features as supplementary to no less weighty a Book than the Kitab-i-Aqdas; signed and sealed by 'Abdu'l-Baha; entirely written by His own hand; its first section composed during one of the darkest periods of His incarceration in the prison-fortress of 'Akka,

* The original word in Arabic for the Guardian is 'Valiyy-i-Amru'llah' which means 'Defender of the Faith, Leader, Commander-in-Chief'. A much more powerful and befitting title than Guardian.

proclaims, categorically and unequivocally, the fundamental beliefs of the followers of the Faith of Baha'u'llah; reveals, in unmistakable language, the two-fold character of the Mission of the Bab; discloses the full station of the Author of the Baha'i Revelation; asserts that 'all others are servants unto Him and do His bidding'; stresses the importance of the Kitab-i-Aqdas; established the institution of the Guardianship as a hereditary office and outlines its essential functions; provides the measures for the election of the International House of Justice, defines its scope and sets forth its relationship to that Institution; prescribes the obligations, and emphasizes the responsibilities, of the Hands of the Cause of God; and extols the virtues of the indestructible Covenant established by Baha'u'llah..." (4)

(Shoghi Effendi, "God Passes By", p.328)

Protection Of The Faith Of Baha'u'llah

The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha ensured infallible protection for the Cause of Baha'u'llah and provided guidance for the believers. Protection of the Cause of God is very important and considered one of the greatest of all things a believer can do.

"All praise to Him Who, by the Shield of His Covenant, hath guarded the Temple of His Cause from the darts of doubtfulness, Who by the Hosts of His Testament hath preserved the Sanctuary of His Most Beneficent Law and protected His Straight and Luminous Path, staying thereby the company of Covenant-breakers, that have threatened to subvert His Divine Edifice; Who hath watched over His Mighty Stronghold and All-glorious Faith, through the aid of men whom the slander of the slanderer affect not, whom no earthly calling, glory, and power can turn aside from the Covenant of God and His Testament, established firmly by His clear and manifest words, writ and revealed by His All-Glorious Pen and recorded in the Preserved Tablet..."

"O ye beloved of the Lord! The greatest of all things is the protection of the True Faith of God, the preservation of His Law, the safeguarding of His Cause and service unto His Word." (5)

('Abdu'l-Baha, "Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha", pp.3-4)

"O ye beloved of the Lord! Strive with all your heart to shield the Cause of God of God from the onslaught of the insincere, for souls such as these cause the straight to become crooked and all benevolent efforts to produce contrary results." (6)

('Abdu'l-Baha, "Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha", p.22)

'Abdu'l-Baha then warns against those who might go against or stray from the Covenant.

"Beware lest anyone falsely interpret these words, and like unto them that have broken the Covenant after the Day of Ascension (of Baha'u'llah) advance a pretext, raise the standard of revolt, wax stubborn, and open wide the door of false interpretation. To none is given the right to put forth his own opinion or express his particular convictions. All must seek guidance and turn unto the Centre of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error. The Glory of Glories rest upon you!" (7)

('Abdu'l-Baha, "Baha'i World Faith", p.449)

Appointment Of Shoghi Effendi As The Guardian

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith of Baha'u'llah, was born in the House of 'Abdu'llah Pasha in Akka on Sunday, 1st March, 1897. He was the eldest grandchild and first grandson of 'Abdu'l-Baha, born of His eldest daughter, Diya'iyiyh Khanum and her husband Mirza Hadi Shirazi (an Afnan). He was named Shoghi, literally meaning 'the one who longs', and given the

family name Rabbani, 'divine', by His Grandfather, 'Abdu'l-Baha. Effendi means 'sir' or 'mister' and is used in a similar manner as khanum which means 'lady' or 'madame' (as a term of respect). Shoghi Effendi was studying in England when the Master passed away in Haifa on November 28th, 1921. His appointment as Guardian of the Faith of Baha'u'llah and Head of the House of Justice by 'Abdu'l-Baha in His Will and Testament was announced to the Baha'i world via a cable by the Greatest Holy Leaf, Bahiyyih Khanum, on January 22nd, 1922. Shoghi Effendi was 24 years old when appointed Guardian.

“Salutation and praise, blessing and glory rest upon that primal branch of the Divine and Sacred Lote Tree, grown out, blest, tender, verdant, and flourishing from the Twin Holy Trees; the most wondrous, unique, and priceless pearl that doth gleam from out the Twin surging seas; upon the offshoots of the Tree of Holiness, the twigs of the Celestial tree, they that in the Day of the Great Dividing have stood fast and firm in the Covenant; upon the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God that have diffused widely the Divine Fragrances, declared His Proof, proclaimed His Law, detached themselves from all things but Him, stood for righteousness in this world, and kindled the Fire of the Love of God in the very hearts and souls of His servants; upon them that have believed, rest assured, stood steadfast in His Covenant, and followed the Light that after my passing shineth from the Dayspring of Divine Guidance - for behold! he is the blest and sacred bough that hath branched out from the Twin Holy Trees. Well is it with him that seeketh the shelter of his shade that shadoweth all mankind.” (8)

(Abdu'l-Baha, “Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p.3)

'Abdu'l-Baha continues:

“O my loving friends! After the passing away of this wronged one, it is incumbent upon the Aghsan (Branches), the Afnan (Twigs) of the Sacred Lote-Tree, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God and the loved ones of the Abha Beauty to turn unto Shoghi Effendi - the youthful branch branched from the two hallowed and sacred Lote-Trees and the fruit grown from the union of the two offshoots of the Tree of Holiness, - as he is the sign of God, the chosen branch, the guardian of the Cause of God, he unto whom all the Aghsan, the Afnan, the Hands of the Cause of God and His loved ones must turn. He is the expounder of the words of God and after him will succeed the first-born of his lineal descendants.

“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 Abha Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyed him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God...It is incumbent upon the members of the House of Justice, upon all the Aghsan, the Afnan, the Hands of the Cause of God to show their obedience, submissiveness, and subordination unto the guardian of the Cause of God, to turn unto him and be lowly before him. He that opposeth him hath opposed the True One, will make a breach in the Cause of God, will subvert His Word and will become a manifestation of the Centre of Sedition...” (9)

(Abdu'l-Baha, “Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha, pp.11-2)

The Universal House Of Justice

It should be noted that it was Baha'u'llah who conferred the authority upon the Universal House of Justice in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*. This was further clarified upon by 'Abdu'l-Baha in His Will and Testament. The Universal House of Justice is the only infallible administrative institution of the Baha'i Faith.

“And now, concerning the House of Justice which God hath ordained as the source of all good and freed from all error, it must be elected by universal suffrage, that is, by the believers. Its members must be manifestations of the fear of God and day-springs of knowledge and understanding, must be steadfast in God's faith and the well-wishers of all mankind. By this House is meant the Universal House of Justice, that is, in all countries, a secondary House of Justice must be instituted, and these secondary Houses of Justice must elect the members of the

Universal one. Unto this body all things must be referred. It enacted all ordinances and regulations that are not to be found in the explicit Holy Text. By this body all the difficult problems are to be resolved...”(10)

(Abdu'l-Baha, “Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha”, p.14)

The Universal House of Justice has the authority to decide upon that which is not explicitly revealed in the Baha'i Writings.

“Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the Truth and Purpose of God Himself. Whoso doth deviate therefrom is verily of them that love discord, hath shown forth malice and turned away from the Lord of the Covenant. By this House is meant that Universal House of Justice which is to be elected from all countries, that is from those parts in the East and West where the loved ones are to be found after the manner of the customary elections in Western countries such as those of England.”(11)

(Abdu'l-Baha, “Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha”, pp.19-20)

Twin Pillars Of The Administrative Order Of Baha'u'llah

The institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice constitute the 'twin pillars' of the Administrative Order of Baha'u'llah. The Guardian explains the character and functions of these 'twin pillars'.

“...the twin pillars that support this mighty Administrative Structure - the institutions of the Guardianship and of the Universal House of Justice...

“It should be stated, at the very outset, in clear and unambiguous language, that these twin institutions of the Administrative Order of Baha'u'llah should be regarded as divine in origin, essential in their functions and complementary in their aim and purpose. Their common, their fundamental object is to ensure 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. Acting in conjunction with each other these two inseparable institutions administer its affairs, co-ordinate its activities, promote its interests, execute its laws and defend its subsidiary institutions. Severally, each operates within a clearly defined sphere of jurisdiction; each is equipped with its own attendant institutions - instruments designed for the effective discharge of its particular responsibilities and duties. Each exercises, within the limitations imposed upon it, its power, its authority, its rights and prerogatives. These are neither contradictory, nor detracted in the slightest degree from the position which each of these institutions occupies. Far from being incompatible or mutually destructive, they supplement each other's authority and functions, and are permanently and fundamentally united in their aims.”(12)

(Shoghi Effendi, “World Order of Baha'u'llah”, p.148)

LESSON 4 - QUESTIONS

- Q1. In how many parts and in what period was the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha revealed?
- Q2. Name the three major features of the Will.
- Q3. None of the prophets before Baha'u'llah has authoritatively in writing established an administrative order and line of succession. True or false?
- Q4. Which document is the charter of a future world civilization?
- Q5. Who did 'Abdu'l-Baha appoint as His successor in His Will and Testament?
- Q6. What is Shoghi Effendi's full title in Arabic?
- Q7. What is one of the greatest things a believer can do?
- Q8. Who are the “Twin Holy Trees”, and the “Twin Surging Seas” referred to by 'Abdu'l-Baha in His Will and Testament?
- Q9. To whom must the Aghsan, Afnan, the Hands of the Cause of God and the believers turn to after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Baha?
- Q10. Who is the 'priceless pearl' referred to by 'Abdu'l-Baha in His Will and Testament?
- Q11. Which supreme body is the source of all good and freed from all error?
- Q12. Discuss the significance of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha.
- Q13. What are the twin pillars of the Administrative Order of Baha'u'llah?
- Q14. Which institution of the Baha'i Faith has infallibility?

LESSON 4 - ANSWERS

- A1. Three parts, and from 1901-1908.
- A2. Infallible protection for the Faith of Baha'u'llah; appointment of Shoghi Effendi as the successor of 'Abdu'l-Baha and the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith; and the definition of the means for the election of the Universal House of Justice.
- A3. True. (See quotation 3).
- A4. The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha. (See quotation 4).
- A5. Shoghi Effendi, the eldest grandson of 'Abdu'l-Baha. (See quotation 9).
- A6. The Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, 'Valiyy-i-Amru'llah'.
- A7. Protection of the Faith of God. (See quotation 5).
- A8. The Bab and Baha'u'llah.
- A9. The Guardian, Shoghi Effendi. (See quotation 9).
- A10. Shoghi Effendi. (See quotation 8).
- A11. The Universal House of Justice. (See quotation 10).
- A12. See quotation 4.
- A13. The institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice. (See quotation 12).
- A14. The Universal House of Justice.

LESSON 5 - SUCCESSION

We have learned in the previous lessons (2-4) about the question of succession i.e. after the passing of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha. Baha'u'llah in 'His Book of the Covenant', the *Kitab-i-'Ahd*, had appointed His eldest son 'Abdu'l Baha as His Successor and the Centre of the Covenant. 'Abdu'l-Baha had, in turn, in His Will and Testament appointed his eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi, as the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith. We have also learned of the references made by the Bab in His Holy Writings proclaiming the coming of Baha'u'llah and the exhortations made to the followers of the Bab to await His advent. In this lesson we will study in more detail the following:

1. The Institution of the Guardianship.
2. The Institution of the Universal House of Justice.
3. The Institution of the Hands of the Cause of God.

These three institutions are mentioned in detail in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha.

The Institution of the Guardianship

It is appropriate to repeat here the quotation taken from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha referring to the appointment of Shoghi Effendi as the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith.

“O my loving friends! After the passing away of this wronged one, it is incumbent upon the Aghsan (Branches), the Afnan (Twigs) of the Sacred Lote-Tree, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God and the loved ones of the Abha Beauty to turn unto Shoghi Effendi - the youthful branch branched from the two hallowed and sacred Lote-Trees and the fruit grown from the union of the two offshoots of the Tree of Holiness, - as he is the sign of God, the chosen branch, the guardian of the Cause of God, he unto whom all the Aghsan, the Afnan, the Hands of the Cause of God and His loved ones must turn. He is the expounder of the words of God and after him will succeed the first-born of his lineal descendants.

“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 Abha Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyed him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God...It is incumbent upon the members of the House of Justice, upon all the Aghsan, the Afnan, the Hands of the Cause of God to show their obedience, submissiveness, and subordination unto the guardian of the Cause of God, to turn unto him and be lowly before him. He that opposeth him hath opposed the True One, will make a breach in the Cause of God, will subvert His Word and will become a manifestation of the Centre of Sedition...” (1)

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, “Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha, pp.11-2)

In the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha, the Guardian has the following authorities and functions.

- . Interpreter of the Word of God.
- . *“He is the expounder of the words of God...” (p.11) (2)*
- . Appointment of his own successor.

“It is incumbent upon the guardian of the Cause of God to appoint in his own life-time him that shall become his successor, that differences may not arise after his passing.” (p.12) (3)

- . Permanent Head of the Universal House of Justice.

“By this body [The Universal House of Justice] all the difficult problems are to be resolved and the guardian of the Cause of God is its sacred head and the distinguished member for life...” (p.14) (4)

- . Possesses the sole right to expel a member of the Universal House of Justice.

“Should any of the members commit a sin, injurious to the common weal, the guardian of the Cause of God hath at his own discretion the right to expel him...” (p. 14) (5)

Shoghi Effendi passed away in 1957 and the Universal House of Justice was elected in Ridvan 1963. Thus the two institutions never physically co-existed.

The Institution Of The Universal House Of Justice

The authority of the institution of the Universal House of Justice was revealed by Baha'u'llah in His 'Most Holy Book', the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, and confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Baha in His Will and Testament, which not only confirmed the authority of the institution of the Universal House of Justice but also clarified and made provisions for its elections. This institution had also been foreshadowed by the Bab in His most weighty Book, the *Bayan*⁺.

“...the Administrative Edifice now being laboriously erected by the privileged builders of a Divine Order, whose features have been delineated by the Centre of the Covenant in His Will and Testament, whose fundamental laws have been revealed by the Founder of our Faith in His Kitab-i-Aqdas, and Whose advent has been foreshadowed by the Herald of the Baha'i Dispensation in the Bayan, His most weighty Book.” (6)

(Shoghi Effendi, “Unfolding Destiny”, p.261)

The members of the Universal House of Justice are at present elected every five years by the members of the National Spiritual Assembly of each country. This provision is made in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha.

“...the House of Justice which God hath ordained as the source of all good and freed from error, it must be elected by universal suffrage, that is, by the believers. Its members must be manifestations of the fear of God and day-springs of knowledge and understanding, must be steadfast in God's faith and the well-wishers of all mankind. By this House is meant the Universal House of Justice, that is, in all countries a secondary House of Justice must be instituted, and these secondary House of Justice must elect the members of the Universal one...” (7)

('Abdu'l-Baha, “Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha”, p.14)

During the Ministry of the Guardian the believers were asked to turn to him but with his passing and the election of the Universal House of Justice the same authority is now given to that infallible institution.

“...under the Covenant of God, Shoghi Effendi was, during the ministry as Guardian of the Cause, the point of authority in the Faith to which all were to turn... The same thing applies to the position occupied by the Universal House of Justice in its relationship to the friends.” (8)

(The Universal House of Justice, letter to all National Spiritual Assemblies, December 25th, 1987, p.6)

⁺ The Mother Book and most weighty book of the Babi Dispensation.

Relationship Between The Guardian And The Universal House Of Justice

The institution of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice are, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, 'complementary in their aim and purpose'. Each has its own sphere of authority and jurisdiction.

"...it is made indubitably clear and evident that the Guardian of the Faith has been made the Interpreter of the Word and that the Universal House of Justice has been invested with the function of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the teachings. The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgement on such laws and ordinances as Baha'u'llah has not expressly revealed. Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested."(9)

(Shoghi Effendi, "World Order of Baha'u'llah", pp.149-50)

"...They [Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha] 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."(10)

(Shoghi Effendi, "World Order of Baha'u'llah", pp.19-20)

The Institution Of The Hands Of The Cause Of God

Baha'u'llah appointed four Hands of the Cause of God during His Ministry. 'Abdu'l-Baha did not appoint any living Hands but appointed four posthumously and made provisions for their appointment in His Will and Testament. This prerogative was given only to the Guardian.

"O friends! The Hands of the Cause of God must be nominated and appointed by the guardian of the Cause of God. All must be under his shadow and obey his command. Should any, within or without the company of the Hands of the Cause of God, disobey and seek division, the wrath of God and His vengeance will be upon him, for he will have caused a breach in the true Faith of God." (11)

('Abdu'l-Baha, "Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha", pp.12-3)

Shoghi Effendi appointed thirty-two living Hands of the Cause of God. He also appointed ten Hands posthumously. The first contingent of twelve Hands of the Cause of God was appointed on December 24th, 1951, in the same year as the formation of the first International Baha'i Council. Two months later, on February 29th, 1952, Shoghi Effendi appointed the second contingent, raising the total number of Hands to nineteen. After that he always kept that number, each time replacing with a new Hand a Hand who had passed away. Just before Shoghi Effendi's passing in November 1957, a final contingent of eight Hands of the Cause of God were appointed by him making the final total of twenty seven Hands of the Cause of God at his passing.

This body of the Hands of the Cause of God is under the authority of the Guardian.

"This body of the Hands of the Cause of God is under the direction of the guardian of the Cause of God. He must continually urge them to strive and endeavour to the utmost of their ability to

diffuse the sweet savours of God, and to guide all the peoples of the world, for it is the light of Divine Guidance that causeth all the universe to be illumined. To disregard, though it be for a moment, this absolute command which is binding upon everyone, is no wise permitted, that the existent world may become even as the Abha Paradise, that the surface of the earth may become heavenly, that contention and conflict amidst peoples, kindreds, nations and governments may disappear, that all the dwellers on earth may become one people and one race, that the world may become even as one home...”(12)

(Abdu'l-Baha, “Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha”, p.13)

The obligations of the Hands of the Cause of God are to:

- . *“diffuse the Divine Fragrances,”*
- . *“edify the souls of men,”*
- . *“promote learning,”*
- . *“improve the character of all men” and,*
- . *“be, at all times and under all conditions, sanctified and detached from earthly things. They must manifest the fear of God by their conduct, their manners, their deeds and their words.”*(13)

(Abdu'l-Baha, “Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha”, p.13)

The Hands of the Cause of God are the 'Chief Stewards of Baha'u'llah's embryonic World Commonwealth', a designation given to them by Shoghi Effendi in one of his last messages to the Baha'i world in October 1957. This was a very important statement Shoghi Effendi made prior to his passing in 1957 as the Faith of Baha'u'llah was later entirely under the custodianship of this loyal and faithful body. It was this loyal and selfless body of individuals who guided the Baha'i world through one of its most trying periods from 1957 up till the election of the Universal House of Justice, which took place in 1963 at the end of the Guardian's Ten Year World Crusade teaching plan.

“Following the passing of Shoghi Effendi 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 Baha'u'llah's embryonic World Commonwealth'.

“From the very outset of their custodianship of the Cause of God the Hands realised 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, and such complete self-abnegation by the leaders of religion finding themselves suddenly deprived of their divinely inspired guide. The debt of gratitude which mankind for generations, nay, ages to come, owes to this handful of grief-stricken, steadfast, heroic souls is beyond estimation.”(14)

(The Universal House of Justice, “Wellspring of Guidance”, p.45)

Institution Of Hands Of The Cause Of God Not Similar To Priesthood

The functions of the Hands of the Cause, followed by those of the Counsellors, are to propagate and protect the Cause and do not in any way constitute a form of priesthood as is found in other religions. In fact, priesthood is abolished by Baha'u'llah in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*.

“It should be apparent to the friends that, as Baha'u'llah Himself both abolished the priesthood and instituted the body of the Hands of the Cause, the Hands cannot be confused with a priesthood. There are basic differences between a priesthood and Baha'i institutions, such as the Hands of the Cause and the Continental Board of Counsellors. A priesthood is usually a profession, has sacramental functions and confers upon the individual occupant of the ecclesiastical office jurisdiction over the believers. In the Baha'i Faith, there is no profession in any of its institutions,

there are no sacraments and no individual has a sacramental function. Jurisdiction over communities and individuals are not vested in individuals. Even in the matter of teaching, the friends must realize that although a Hand of the Cause or a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors or indeed any other believer may be deeply learned in the Teachings so that one naturally gives weight to his exposition of them, no one, apart from the Master and the Guardian, is authorized to interpret the Sacred Writings.” (15)

(The Universal House of Justice, letter to a National Spiritual Assembly, May 19th, 1969, cited in “Revelation of Baha'u'llah”, vol.4, pp.288-289)

The Passing Of Shoghi Effendi

When Shoghi Effendi passed away in 1957 he did not leave an heir. Therefore, no Guardian was appointed although 'Abdu'l-Baha in His Will and Testament had made provisions for a succession of Guardians.

“O ye beloved of the Lord! It is incumbent upon the guardian of the Cause of God to appoint in his own life-time him that become his successor, that differences may not arise after his passing. He that is appointed must manifest in himself detachment from all worldly things, must be the essence of purity, must show in himself the fear of God, knowledge, wisdom and learning. Thus, should the first-born of the guardian of the Cause of God not manifest in himself the truth of the words:- 'The child is the secret essence of its sire,' that is, should he not inherit of the spiritual within him (the guardian of the Cause of God) and his glorious lineage not be matched with a goodly character, then must he, (the guardian of the Cause of God) choose another branch to succeed him.” (16)

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, “Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha”, p.12)

Shoghi Effendi did not leave a will when he passed away.

“The fact that Shoghi Effendi did not leave a will cannot be adduced as evidence of his failure to obey Baha'u'llah - rather should we acknowledge that in his very silence there is a wisdom and a sign of his infallible guidance. We should ponder deeply the writings that we have, and seek to understand the multitudinous significances that they contain. Do not forget that Shoghi Effendi said two things were necessary for a growing understanding of the World Order of Baha'u'llah: the passage of time and the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.” (17)

(The Universal House of Justice, “The Universal House of Justice: A Compilation”, p.45)

After the passing of Shoghi Effendi in London on November 4th, 1957, the Hands of the Cause of God met in the Holy Land and issued a proclamation stating that:

“(On) November 19, nine Hands of the Cause, selected from the Holy Land and the several continents of East and West, with 'Amatu'l-Baha Ruhyyih Khanum, 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 Baha'u'llah at Bahji, certified that Shoghi Effendi had left no Will and Testament. It was likewise certified that the beloved Guardian had left no heir. The Aghsan (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.” (18)

(Hands of the Cause of God, U.S. Baha'i News, December, 1959, cited in “The Covenant and Administration: A Compilation”, p. 92)

“At the time of our beloved Shoghi Effendi's death it was evident, from the circumstances and from the explicit requirements of the Holy Texts, that it had been impossible for him to appoint a successor in accordance with the provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha.” (19)

(The Universal House of Justice, "Wellspring of Guidance", p.44)

And in a message from the Universal House of Justice in October 6th, 1963:

"After prayerful and careful study of the Holy Texts bearing upon the question of the appointment of the successor to Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Cause of God, and after prolonged consultation which included consideration of the views of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, the Universal House of Justice finds that there is no way to appoint or to legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi." (20)

(The Universal House of Justice, "Wellspring of Guidance", p.11)

The Functioning Of The Universal House Of Justice Without The Guardian

The Universal House of Justice can function without the presence of a Guardian. The Universal House of Justice explains:

"The question therefore arises: In the absence of the Guardian, is the Universal House of Justice in danger of straying outside its proper sphere and thus falling into error? Here we must remember three things: First, Shoghi Effendi, during the thirty-six years of his Guardianship, has already made innumerable such definitions, supplementing those made by 'Abdu'l-Baha and Baha'u'llah Himself. As already announced to the friends, a careful study of the Writings and interpretations on any subject on which the House of Justice proposes to legislate always precedes its act of legislation. Second, the Universal House of Justice, itself assured of Divine guidance, is well aware of the absence of the Guardian and will approach all matters of legislation only when certain of its sphere of jurisdiction, a sphere which the Guardian has confidently described as 'clearly defined.' Third, we must not forget the Guardian's written statement about these two institutions: 'Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other.'" (21)

(The Universal House of Justice, "Wellspring of Guidance", pp.83-4)

The Guardianship does not lose its significance nor position with the passing of the 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 functioned without the Guardian, but the principle of inseparability remains. The Guardianship does not lose its significance nor position in the World Order of Baha'u'llah merely because there is no living Guardian. We must guard against two extremes: one is to argue that because there is no Guardian all that was written about the Guardianship and its position in the Baha'i World Order is a dead letter and was unimportant; the other is to be so overwhelmed by the significance of the Guardianship as to underestimate the strength of the Covenant, or to be tempted to compromise with the clear texts in order to find somehow, in some way, a 'Guardian'." (22)

(The Universal House of Justice, "Wellspring of Guidance", pp.86-7)

Future Guardians

"Future Guardians are clearly envisaged and referred to in the Writings, but there is nowhere any promise or guarantee that the line of the Guardians would endure forever; on the contrary there are clear indications that the line could be broken. Yet, in spite of this, there is a repeated insistence in the Writings on the indestructibility of the Covenant and the immutability of God's Purpose for this Day.

“One of the most striking passages which envisage the possibility of such a break in the line of Guardians is in the Kitab-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 Aghsan (Branches), and after them with the House of Justice - should it be established in the world by then - so that they may use these endowments for the benefit of the Sites exalted in this Cause, and for that which they have been commanded by God, the Almighty, the All-Powerful. Otherwise the endowments should be referred to the people of Baha, who speak not without His leave and who pass no judgement but in accordance with that which God has ordained in this Tablet, they who are the champions of victory betwixt heaven and earth, so that they may spend them on that which has been decreed in the Holy Book by God, the Mighty, the Bountiful.’” (23)

(The Universal House of Justice, “The Universal House of Justice: A Compilation”, p.57)

No women On The Universal House Of Justice

In the Baha'i Faith equality of opportunities and rights for men and women is taught and strongly advocated. Many Baha'i women are very active in their service as members of various Baha'i institutions locally, nationally and internationally. The only institution upon which only men serve on is the Universal House of Justice.

The Guardian in a letter written on his behalf to an individual on July 28th, 1936 wrote:

“As regards your question concerning the membership of the Universal House of Justice; there is a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Baha in which He definitely states that membership of the Universal House is confined to men, and that the wisdom of it will be fully revealed and appreciated in the future. In the local, as well as the National Houses of Justice, however, women have the full right of membership. It is, therefore, only to the International House that they cannot be elected...” (24)

(The Universal House of Justice in a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, May 31st, 1988)

The Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha referred to by the Guardian is as follows:

“The House of Justice, however, according to the explicit text of the Law of God, is confined to men; this for a wisdom of the Lord God's, which will ere long be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon.” (25)

('Abdu'l-Baha, “Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha”, p.80)

Therefore, the believers need to have faith in the Covenant of Baha'u'llah and trust in God's Will for the wisdom of His Law will be made manifest in due time.

“With regard to the status of women, the important point for Baha'is to remember is that in face of the categorical pronouncements in Baha'i Scripture establishing the equality of men and women, the ineligibility of women for membership of the Universal House of Justice does not constitute evidence of the superiority of men over women. It must also be borne in mind that women are not excluded from any other international institutions of the Faith. They are among the ranks of the Hands of the Cause. They serve as members of the International Teaching Centre and as Continental Counsellors. And, there is nothing in the Text to preclude the participation of women in such future international bodies as the Supreme Tribunal.

“Though at the present time, it may be difficult for the believers to appreciate the reason for the circumscription of membership on the Universal House of Justice to men, we call upon the friends to remain assured by the Master's promise that clarity of understanding will be achieved in due course. The friends, both women and men, must accept this with faith that the Covenant of Baha'u'llah will aid them and the institutions of His World Order to see the realization of every

principle ordained by His unerring Pen, including the equality of men and women, as expounded in the Writings of the Cause.” (26)

(The Universal House of Justice in a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, May 31st, 1988)

In the Tablet of Ahmad revealed in about 1865 by Baha'u'llah in the honour of Ahmad, a native believer of Yazd, Baha'u'llah assures us that the wisdom of His commands will be tested and distinguished from error. What is required of us is faith in His Commands and Will.

“Verily this is that Most Great Beauty, foretold in the Books of the Messengers, through Whom truth shall be distinguished from error and the wisdom of every command shall be tested. Verily He is the Tree of Life that bringeth forth the fruits of God, the Exalted, the Powerful, the Great.” (27)

(Baha'u'llah, 'Tablet of Ahmad,' cited in “Baha'i Prayers”, p.47)

LESSON 5 - QUESTIONS

- Q1. In which document was Shoghi Effendi appointed the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith?
- Q2. Who is referred to as the "*sacred and youthful branch*"?
- Q3. List the four major functions of the Guardian as stated in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha.
- Q4. When and where did Shoghi Effendi pass away?
- Q5. In which document of Baha'u'llah was the authority of Universal House of Justice revealed and in which book was it first foreshadowed?
- Q6. Which institution has been ordained as *'the source of all good and free from error'*?
- Q7. Who had the authority to appoint the Hands of the Cause of God after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Baha?
- Q8. How many Hands were there at the passing of the Guardian and when was the first contingent appointed?
- Q9. What are the obligations of the Hands of the Cause of God?
- Q10. Who are the "*Chief Stewards of Baha'u'llah's embryonic World Commonwealth*" and of what significance is this description?
- Q11. Did Shoghi Effendi leave a will or an heir?
- Q12. The Faith was in custodianship of which institution from 1957 till the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963?
- Q13. Can the Universal House of Justice function without the Guardian? Discuss.

LESSON 5 - ANSWERS

- A1. The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha. (See quotation 1).
- A2. Shoghi Effendi. (See quotation 1).
- A3. Interpreter of the Word of God; appointment of a successor; permanent Head of the Universal House of Justice; and possessor of the sole right to expel a member of the Universal House of Justice. (See quotations 3, 4, 5).
- A4. November 4th, 1957 in London, England.
- A5. The *Kitab-i-Aqdas*. The *Bayan*. (See quotation 6)
- A6. The Universal House of Justice. (See quotation 7).
- A7. The Guardian. (See quotation 11).
- A8. 27; December 24th 1951.
- A9. See quotation 13.
- A10. The Hands of the Cause of God. The Hands as a Conclave acted as Custodians for the Baha'i community until the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963.
- A11. No. (See quotations 17, 18.)
- A12. The Hands of the Cause of God. (See quotation 14).
- A13. Yes. (See quotations 21, 22, 23).

LESSON 6 - THE PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE COVENANT

The purpose and importance of the Covenant is the maintenance of unity and agreement among the followers of the Faith of Baha'u'llah and the protection of His Cause from schism and division. It has also the function of protecting the faithful from the pernicious influence of vainglorious, egoistical and insincere believers. In the Baha'i Faith this grievous problem is prevented by the Covenant of Baha'u'llah. Baha'u'llah not only gave specific guidance and provisions to the followers in the *Kitab-i-'Ahd* but this document is in writing and also approved with His seal. Therefore, the Baha'i Faith does not suffer from sectarian and disunity problems which had confronted earlier believers in previous Dispensations. The previous Manifestations of God did not leave behind a written covenant for their followers to obey. As a result, schism and division arose soon after the passing of the prophets. As discussed in previous lessons, the covenant provides infallible guidance to the believers in regard to the question of the advent of the next Manifestation of God, succession, and the maintenance of unity of the Baha'i community.

The appointment of 'Abdu'l-Baha as the Centre of the Covenant preserved the unity of the Faith of Baha'u'llah. The believers knew who to turn to for guidance and confirmations.

Source Of Unity

The purpose of the advent of Baha'u'llah is to bring forth unity and agreement amongst the people of the world.

“The aim of the appearance of the Blessed Perfection...was the unity and agreement of all people of the world. Therefore, my utmost desire, firstly, is the accord and union and love of the believers and after that of all the people of the world...” (1)

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, “Baha'i World Faith”, p.402)

The Covenant prevented differences and division within the Faith of God. Baha'u'llah also warns against such action.

“Inasmuch as great differences and divergences of denominational belief had arisen throughout the past, every man with a new idea attributing it to God, Baha'u'llah desired that there should not be any ground or reason for disagreement among the Baha'is. Therefore, 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, for, verily, He knoweth the texts of My Book. Other than He, no one doth know My Book.' The purpose of this statement is that there should never be discord and divergence among the Baha'is but that they should always be unified and agreed...Therefore, whosoever obeys the Centre of the Covenant appointed by Baha'u'llah has obeyed Baha'u'llah, and whosoever disobeys Him has disobeyed Baha'u'llah...”

“Beware! Beware! lest any one should speak from the authority of his own thoughts or create a new thing out of himself...Baha'u'llah shuns such souls...” (2)

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, “Promulgation of Universal Peace”, pp.322-23).

Therefore it is through the Covenant that unity and agreement is established.

“...To ensure unity and agreement He has entered into a Covenant with all the people of the world, including the interpreter and explainer of His Teachings, so that no one may interpret or explain the religion of God according to his own view or opinion and thus create a sect founded upon his individual understanding of the divine Words. The Book of the Covenant or Testament of Baha'u'llah is the means of preventing such a possibility, for whosoever shall speak from the authority of himself alone shall be degraded. Be ye informed and cognizant of this...” (3)

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, “Promulgation of Universal Peace”, p.456).

This Covenant of God is a lifeboat and an ark of salvation to mankind. Through it mankind is protected from discord, disagreement and dissension. It gives life to the world of humanity.

“...The Covenant of God in this day of manifestation 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. For the Blessed Perfection left no possibility for discord, disagreement and dissension. The Covenant is like the sea and the believers as the fishes in the sea. If a fish leaves the sea it cannot live. There is nothing to equal, nothing as effective as the Covenant of God to bring about and continue unity...” (4)

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “Star of the West”, vol.VIII, no.17, p.222)

Therefore the Covenant of Baha'u'llah is essential for the unity of the believers and there is no other way to achieve this..

“Therefore, the hope is entertained that thou wilt be assisted under all conditions, for today that which is most important is firmness in the Covenant and the Testament and otherwise Baha’i unity will not be preserved. If Baha’i unity could be preserved through something else, undoubtedly the Blessed Beauty would have commanded it.” (5)

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “Star of the West”, vol.X, no.14, p.268)

Maintains Order And Security

The Covenant of Baha'u'llah provides the means for the maintenance of order in the world and security for its people:

“They whom God hath endued with insight will readily recognise that the precepts laid down by God constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples...Hasten to drink your fill, O men of understanding! 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.” (6)

(Baha'u'llah, “Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah”, pp.330-31).

'Abdu'l-Baha emphasizes the importance of the Covenant to prevent division within the Faith of Baha'u'llah. Without this Covenant the Faith of God would have been divided into various denominations and sects. But today as a consequence of the power of the Covenant, there is only a single Faith of Baha'u'llah.

“Were it not for the protecting power of the Covenant to guard the impregnable fort of the Cause of God, there would rise among the Baha’is, in one day, a thousand different sects as was the case in former ages. But in this Blessed Dispensation, for the sake of the permanency of the Cause of God and the avoidance of dissension amongst the people of God, the Blessed Beauty (may my soul be a sacrifice unto Him), has through the Supreme Pen written the Covenant and the Testament; He appointed a Centre, 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. The express purpose of this last Will and Testament is to set aside disputes from the world.” (7)

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, “Baha’i World Faith”, pp.357-58).

Baha'u'llah emphatically emphasized the importance of unity to the Baha’is and that contention and conflict was detrimental to the Cause. So harmful is contention and conflict that Baha'u'llah had prohibited it in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*. The existence of the Covenant ensures the unity of the Faith.

“Every eye, in this Day, should seek what will best promote the Cause of God. He, Who is the Eternal Truth, beareth Me witness! Nothing whatever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this Cause than dissension and strife, contention, estrangement and apathy, among the loved ones of God. Flee them, through the power of God and His sovereign aid, and strive ye to knit together the hearts of men, in His Name, the Unifier, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.” (8)

(Baha'u'llah, “Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah”, pp.8-9)

So important is unity that the establishment of a permanent peace where nations will no longer be at war with each other is unattainable until the unity of mankind is established. This will then lead to a more secure world with its accompanying global civilization.

“The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established...so powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.” (9)

(Baha'u'llah, cited in “World Order of Baha'u'llah”, p.203)

The New World Order envisaged by Baha'u'llah is the unification of mankind and the Covenant is the basis for its achievements.

“...This New World Order, whose promise is enshrined in the Revelation of Baha'u'llah, whose fundamental principles have been enunciated in the writings of the Centre of the Covenant, involves no less than the complete unification of the entire human race...” (10)

(Shoghi Effendi, “World Order of Baha'u'llah”, p.162)

Protects The Faith Of God

The Covenant preserves the unity and integrity of the Cause, and protects the Faith and its followers from disruption caused by enemies of the Cause.

“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 by individuals who are convinced that only their understanding of the Teachings is the right one - a fate that has overcome all past Revelations. The Covenant is, moreover, embedded in the Writings of Baha'u'llah Himself. Thus, as you clearly see, to accept Baha'u'llah is to accept His Covenant; to reject His Covenant is to reject Him.” (11)

(Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, January 3rd, 1982, cited in “The Universal House of Justice letter to all National Spiritual Assemblies, December 25th, 1987”, p.12)

The power of the Covenant prevents corruption of the Word of God.

“The Covenant is an Orb which shines and gleams forth unto the universe. Verily, its lights will dispel darkness, its sea will cast out the froth of suspicion upon the shores of perdition. Verily, naught in the world can resist the power of the Kingdom...Everything (in the world) is subject to corruption, but the Covenant of thy Lord shall continue to pervade all regions.” (12)

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “Star of the West”, vol.VI, no.14, p.107)

And it is a refuge for mankind in the future.

“...the Testament and the Covenant...is the life-boat and the refuge of the future. It is the holy fragrance of His Holiness, the Creator, and the Breaths of Life of the garden of the Creator. It is the strong fortress; therefore it is a sure shelter for all created beings, and in brief, it is the sum of all the sacred writings, ancient and modern! (13)

('Abdu'l-Baha, cited in "Star of the West", vol.VIII, no.16, pp.213-14)

The purpose of the coming of Baha'u'llah is to bring about the unity of mankind. Baha'u'llah strongly prohibited contention and conflict in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* as it is not conducive to the establishment of unity and peace. This command is again re-emphasized by 'Abdu'l-Baha in His Will and Testament.

"O ye beloved of the Lord! In this sacred Dispensation, conflict and contention are in no wise permitted. Every aggressor deprives himself of God's grace. It is incumbent upon everyone to show the utmost love, rectitude of conduct, straight forwardness and sincere kindness unto all the peoples and kindreds of the world, be they friends or strangers. So intense must be the spirit of love and loving kindness, that the stranger may find himself a friend, the enemy a true brother, no difference whatsoever existing between them..." (14)

('Abdu'l-Baha, "Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha", p.13)

The 'Child Of The Covenant'

The Administrative Order brought forth by Baha'u'llah in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* and His various other Tablets; and further emphasized by 'Abdu'l-Baha in His Will and Testament is designated as the '*Child of the Covenant*' by Shoghi Effendi.

"...an Administrative Order - the Child of the Covenant, the Shield of that community and divinely appointed Agency for the execution of the mandate with which that community was to be invested in the second epoch of the Formative Age of the Baha'i Dispensation..." (15)

(Shoghi Effendi, "Unfolding Destiny", pp.270-71)

LESSON 6 - QUESTIONS

- Q1. Name four reasons why is the Covenant important?
- Q2. What did Baha'u'llah strongly prohibit among the believers?
- Q3. What is first required before permanent peace can be attained?
- Q4. What is designated as the '*Child of the Covenant*'?
- Q5. Is it true that because of the lack of a written Covenant has led to the Dispensations of the past being divided into different denominations?
- Q6. What is the '*New World Order*' of Baha'u'llah?
- Q7. Discuss the purpose and importance of the Covenant.

LESSON 6 - ANSWERS

- A1. It prevents schism and disunity (See quotation 7); ensures unity and agreement (See quotation 3) ; protects the Faith from Covenant-breakers and its enemies; and maintains order and security (See quotation 6).
- A2. Baha'u'llah strongly prohibited and condemned dissension and strife; conflict and contention; estrangement; and apathy. (See quotations 8, 14).
- A3. The establishment of the unity of mankind. (See quotations 9, 10).
- A4. The Administrative Order of Baha'u'llah. (See quotation 15).
- A5. Yes but in the Baha'i Faith the Covenant is written down and sealed by the Authors themselves. This has prevented schism and disunity. (See quotation 7).
- A6. *“The complete unification of the entire human race”*. (See quotation 10).
- A7. See all quotations.

LESSON 7 - POWER OF THE COVENANT

It is the power of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah that protects His Faith from schism and the believers from disunity. The power of the Covenant gives strength to the Baha'i community and guidance to the believers. This power gives life to the Baha'i community and from it the teachings of Baha'u'llah are manifested and His revelation shines forth. In order to utilize this power we must first be obedient and faithful to the Covenant of Baha'u'llah, steadfast to its teachings, and promote its Cause.

"...the power of the Covenant will protect the Cause of Baha'u'llah from the doubts of the people of error. It is the fortified fortress of the Cause of God and the firm pillar of the religion of God. Today no power can conserve the oneness of the Baha'i world save the Covenant of God; otherwise differences like unto a most great tempest will encompass the Baha'i world. It is evident that the axis of the oneness of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant and nothing else..." (1)

(Abdu'l-Baha, "Baha'i World Faith", p.425)

The Covenant protects the believers from going astray but at the same time it is also protected by God.

"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 the future it shall be made evident and manifest..."(2)

(Abdu'l-Baha, "Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha", p.228)

And yet this power of the Covenant is mysterious and beyond human comprehension.

"There is a Power in this Cause - a Mysterious Power - far, far, far away from the ken of men and angels; that Invisible Power is the Cause of all these outward activities. It moves the hearts. It rends the mountains. It administers the complicated affairs of the Cause. It inspires the friends. It dashes into a thousand pieces all the forces of opposition. It creates new spiritual worlds. This is a Mystery of the Kingdom of Abha!" (3)

(Baha'u'llah, cited in "Star of the West", vol. XI, no. 14, p.243)

The Faith of God would have been severely divided without the protective power of the Covenant.

"Were it not for the protecting power of the Covenant to guard the impregnable fort of the Cause of God, there would arise among the Baha'is, in one day, a thousand different sects as was the cases in former ages. But in this Blessed Dispensation, for the sake of the permanency of the Cause of God and the avoidance of dissension amongst the people of God, the Blessed Beauty (may my soul be a sacrifice unto Him), has through the Supreme Pen written the Covenant and the Testament; He appointed a Centre, 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. The express purpose of this last Will and Testament is to set aside disputes from the world." (4)

(Abdu'l-Baha, "Baha'i World Faith", pp.357-58)

Just as the plants need the light of the sun for energy to grow and develop, we as human beings need the Covenant to grow and develop spiritually. The Covenant gives us this power of growth.

“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.” (5)

(Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “God Passes By”, p.239)

The Covenant of Baha'u'llah is unique in its character without comparison to any in past Dispensations.

“So firm and mighty is this Covenant, that from the beginning of time until the present day no religious Dispensation hath produced its like...”

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

“Know thou, that the 'Sure Handle' mentioned from the foundation of the world in the Books, the Tablets and Scriptures of old is naught else but the Covenant and the Testament...”

“The lamp of the Covenant is the light of the world, and the words traced by the Pen of the Most High a limitless ocean.” (6)

(Abdu'l-Baha cited in “God Passes By”, p.238)

The power of the Covenant can be likened to the blood that flows within the arteries of the human body. It is this blood that gives life to the body and it is the power of the Covenant that gives spiritual life to man.

“Know this for a certainty that today the penetrative power in the arteries and the nerves of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant. The body of the world will not be moved through any power except through the power of the Covenant. There is no other power like unto this...” (7)

(Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “Star of the West”, vol.XI, no.8, p.121)

'Abdu'l-Baha again confirmed the presence of this motivating power:

“Although in the body of the universe there are innumerable nerves, yet the main artery, which pulsates, energizes and invigorates all beings, is the power of the Covenant. All else is secondary to this. Nobody is assisted and confirmed save the soul who is firm. Consider it well that every soul who is firm in the Covenant is luminous, like unto a candle which emanates its light on those around it. While every wavering soul is an utter failure, frozen lifeless, dead yet moving. This one proof is sufficient.” (8)

(Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “Star of the West”, vol. XI, No. 18, p.308)

“Today the stirring power that exhibits itself throughout all regions is the power of the Covenant which, like unto an artery, beats and pulsates in the body of the world. He who is firmer in the Covenant is more assisted, just as ye are manifestly witnessing how firm souls are enkindled, attracted and confirmed.” (9)

(Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “Star of the West”, vol. X, No.12, p.233)

The Covenant is beyond destruction and corruption. It cannot be defied by the ill-intention of man.

“Verily, God effected that which He pleaseth; naught can annul His Covenant; naught can obstruct His favour nor oppose His Cause! Everything is subject to corruption; but the Covenant of thy Lord, shall continue to pervade all regions.” (10)

(Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1968-1973”, p.42)

This power of the Covenant is always giving sustenance to the believers like 'hidden springs of celestial strength'. It is a power source for the believers to rely upon to rally forth towards their spiritual destiny.

“That the Cause associated with the name of Baha'u'llah feeds itself upon those hidden springs of celestial strength which no force of human personality, whatever its glamour, can replace; that its reliance is solely upon that mystic Source with which no worldly advantage, be it wealth, fame, or learning, can compare; that it propagates itself by ways mysterious and utterly at variance with the standards accepted by the generality of mankind, will, if not already apparent, become increasingly manifest as it forges ahead towards fresh conquests in its struggle for the spiritual regeneration of mankind.” (11)

(Shoghi Effendi, “World Order of Baha'u'llah”, pp.51-2)

The Covenant removes differences and misunderstanding among the believers.

“...Misunderstanding cannot be eliminated by any power save that of the Covenant. The power of the Covenant is all-inclusive and solves all difficulties, for explicitly and by the Supreme Pen it is declared that whatever misunderstanding takes place, ye must refer to the Centre of the Covenant for he eliminates all difficulties. Therefore, no power will do away with misunderstanding among the friends except the Covenant and the Testament of God. Encourage and draw, therefore, all friends to firmness in the Covenant and the Testament...” (12)

(Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “Star of the West”, vol.X, no.12, pp.234-35)

Firmness Of The Baha'is In Iran

During the time of 'Abdu'l-Baha, the Baha'is had to undergo various degrees of persecution and opposition and it was through the power of the Covenant that they were able to sustain their faith and steadfastness. Today the Baha'is in Iran are going through similar trials and tribulations. And again it will be the power of the Covenant that will keep them steadfast and firm.

“...in Iran the fire of revolution blazed in such wise that all communities, government and nations, became afflicted with the most severe trials; but the power of the Covenant protected the Baha'i friends to such a degree that in this turbulent storm no dust fell upon them, except in one locality, which became the cause of the spreading of the Religion of God and the diffusion of the Word of God. Now all the parties in Iran are wondering how the people of Baha were guarded and protected. Praise be to God that in Tihiran and all the provinces of Iran the Call of God has been raised, the Ensign of the Covenant has been unfurled, the cry of “Ya-Baha'u'l-Abha!” has been heard and the melody of the Kingdom of Abha has been promulgated among the people of intelligence...” (13)

(Abdu'l-Baha, “Baha'i World Faith”, p.418)

LESSON 7 - QUESTIONS

- Q1. What is the '*fortified fortress of the Cause of God and the firm pillar of the religion of God*'?
- Q2. Who is the defender of the Covenant?
- Q3. What would have happened to the Baha'i Faith if not for the protecting power of the Covenant?
- Q4. What is the '*pivot of the oneness of mankind*', the 'axis of the oneness of the world of humanity'?
- Q5. "*...the penetrative power in the arteries of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant*". Discuss.
- Q6. Can the Covenant be destroyed or corrupted? If not, why not?
- Q7. How can the Baha'is in Iran be firm and steadfast in the face of persecution and opposition?
- Q8. Discuss the power of the Covenant.

LESSON 7 - ANSWERS

- A1. The power of the Covenant. (See quotation 1).
- A2. The Lord of Hosts, Baha'u'llah. (See quotation 2).
- A3. The Baha'i Faith would have been divided into numerous different sects. (See quotation 4).
- A4. The power of the Covenant. (See quotations 1, 6).
- A5. See quotation 7.
- A6. No; see quotation 1, 6.
- A7. The power of the Covenant.(See quotation 12).
- A8. Refer to all quotations again.

LESSON 8 - COVENANT-BREAKING

Covenant-breaking is a deadly spiritual disease that attacks the very soul of the violator of the Covenant. This disease is highly contagious and likened to consumption and cancer. If left unchecked it will inflict itself upon many souls. But fortunately, through the power of the Covenant, the Faith is safeguarded and the spread of this deadly spiritual disease can be prevented.

Since the inception of the Baha'i Faith there have been many Covenant-breakers. During the lifetime of Baha'u'llah the chief Covenant-breaker who broke the Covenant of the Bab was Baha'u'llah's own half-brother, Mirza Yahya, who cowardly opposed Him. Later during the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Baha it was again some members of His own family who violated the Covenant of Baha'u'llah. The chief mischief maker and Covenant-breaker was 'Abdu'l-Baha's own half-brother, Mirza Muhammad-'Ali, 'the Greater Branch'. 'Abdu'l-Baha, 'the Most Great Branch', after many years of suffering at the hands of these covenant-breakers, declared in His Will and Testament that Mirza Muhammad-'Ali was 'the Centre of Sedition', and 'the Prime Mover of Mischief'. All the efforts of the Covenant-breakers to subvert the Cause of Baha'u'llah came to nothingness and ended in futility. The violators themselves faded into obscurity after suffering as a result of their violation of the Covenant.

“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 of 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...Break not the bond that uniteth you with your Creator, and be not of those that have erred and strayed from His ways.” (1)

(Baha'u'llah, “Gleanings from the Writing of Baha'u'llah”, p.327)

What Is Covenant-breaking?

The term, Covenant-breaking, is applied to the believers of the Faith who attack Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi or the Universal House of Justice. They are fully conscious of their hideous actions. Those who try to attack the Faith of Baha'u'llah and who are not believers are not Covenant-breakers but enemies of the Faith.

“When a person declares his acceptance of Baha'u'llah 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 Baha'u'llah 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 Baha'u'llah Himself, be shunned as a Covenant-breaker.” (2)

(The Universal House of Justice, letter to an individual believer, March 23rd, 1975, cited in “The Power of the Covenant”, Part II, pp.7-8)

The seriousness of Covenant-breaking is emphasized by the Universal House of Justice:

“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?” (3)

(The Universal House of Justice, letter to an individual, March 23rd, 1975, cited in “The Power of the Covenant”, Part II, p. 9)

The Cause Of Covenant-breaking

There are many reasons for Covenant-breaking but the chief amongst these is the human ego and self-centredness.

“...carnal desires are the cause of difference as it is the case with violators. These do not doubt the validity of the Covenant, but selfish motives have dragged them to this condition. It is not that they ignore what they do - they are perfectly aware and still they exhibit opposition.” (4)

(Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “Star of the West”, vol.X, no.13, p.246)

“Endeavour to your utmost to protect yourselves, because satan appears in different robes and appeals to everyone according to each person's own way, until he becomes like unto him (satan), then he will leave him alone...Be informed by these utterances and shun the manifestations of the people of hell,...The greatest of degradation is to leave the Shadow of God and enter under the shadow of satan.” (5)

(Baha'u'llah, cited in “Star of the West”, vol.XIII, no.1, pp.20,22)

Note that the meaning of the word satan in the Baha'i Faith is symbolic and denotes the lower nature of man, the prompting of his ego, etc..

“The references to 'Satan' or 'The Evil One' in Baha'i Scripture are symbolical and do not at all imply the existence of a personal devil. They symbolize the lower nature of man, the selfish promptings of his ego, and so forth. They are also used, sometimes, to symbolize the machinations of Covenant-breakers or the spirit of Covenant-breaking, and this is the sense of the quotation from the Words of Baha'u'llah on pages 20 to 22 of Volume XIII of The Star of the West'...” (6)

(Universal House of Justice, letter to an individual believer, March 23rd, 1975, cited in “The Power of the Covenant”, Part II, p.10)

The Role Of The Individual

To shun the Covenant-breakers at all costs.

“...one of the greatest and most fundamental principles of the Cause of God is to shun and avoid entirely the Covenant-breakers, for they will utterly destroy the Cause of God, exterminate His Law and render of no account all efforts exerted in the past.” (7)

(Abdu'l-Baha, “Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha”, p.20)

Covenant-breaking is a deadly contagious disease and should be prevented from spreading.

“Thou hadst asked some questions; that why the blessed and spiritual souls, who are firm and steadfast, shun the company of degenerate persons. This is because, that just as bodily diseases like consumption and cancer are contagious, likewise the spiritual diseases are also infectious. If a consumptive should associate with a thousand safe and healthy persons, the safety and health of these thousand persons would not affect the consumptive and would not cure him of his consumption. But when this consumptive associates with those thousand souls, in a short time the disease of consumption will affect a number of those healthy persons. This is a clear and self-evident question.” (8)

(Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “Star of the West”, vol.XII, no.14, p.233)

Baha'is should not investigate the view point of Covenant-breakers:

“Baha'is themselves are commanded by Baha'u'llah to investigate truth independently, to 'see with' their 'own eyes and not through the eyes of others'. Every Baha'i 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 Baha'i who opposes the clear Teachings of Baha'u'llah.” (9)

(The Universal House of Justice, letter to an individual believer, March 23rd, 1975, cited in “The Power of the Covenant”, Part II, p.37).

The Covenant-breaker can be recognised when he attacks the Administrative Order of Baha'u'llah and when he ...

“asserts his own opinion as an authoritative and correct interpretation of the Teachings, and attacks or opposes the very Institutions which Baha'u'llah has created to protect His Covenant.” (10)

(The Universal House of Justice, letter to an individual believer, March 23rd, 1975, cited in “The Power of the Covenant”, Part II, p.38)

The Universal House of Justice warned very strongly on the danger of reading materials written by Covenant-breakers:

“...certain believers have the unpleasant duty of having to read such works in the course of their duty to protect the Faith - but the friends are warned, in the strongest terms, of the danger of reading such literature. Unless one is very well informed of the history of the Faith and is deeply confirmed in one's belief, the calumnies and distortions of truth contained in such literature can undermine one's faith.” (11)

(The Universal House of Justice, letter to an individual believer, October 2nd, 1974, cited in “The Power of the Covenant”, Part II, p.39)

The Role Of The Institutions

The specific functions of the Hand of the Cause of God are to protect and propagate the Faith of Baha'u'llah.

“Divinely appointed Institution of the Hands of the Cause, invested by the virtue of the authority conferred by the Testament of the Centre of the Covenant with the twin functions of protecting and propagating the faith of Baha'u'llah.” (12)

(Shoghi Effendi, Messages to the Baha'i World, cited in “The Power of the Covenant”, Part. II, p.42)

The elected institutions are also responsible for protecting the Faith of God.

“In the Order of Baha'u'llah there are certain functions which are reserved to certain institutions, and others which are shared in common, even though they may be more in the special province of one or the other. For example, although the Hands of the Cause of God have the specific functions of protection and propagation, and are specialized for these functions, it is also the duty of the Universal House of Justice and the spiritual assemblies to protect and teach the Cause - indeed teaching is a sacred obligation placed upon every believer by Baha'u'llah.” (13)

(The Universal House of Justice, “Wellspring of Guidance”, p.86)

Investigations about Covenant-breaking are carried out by the Institutions or those specifically appointed by the institutions.

“...when a person evinces the Covenant-breaking spirit, the Hands of the Cause and Counsellors, and others who are appointed for the service, do all they can to rid him of it.” (14)

(The Universal House of Justice, letter to an individual believer, March 23rd, 1975, cited in "The Power of the Covenant", Part II, p.44)

The declaration of a person as a Covenant-breaker or his reinstatement as believer can only be approved by the Universal House of Justice.

"Authority for the expulsion and reinstatement of Covenant-breakers remains with the Hands of the Cause of God. All such matters will be investigated locally by the relative Continental Board of Counsellors in consultation with any Hand or Hands who may be in the area. The Continental Board of Counsellors and the Hands concerned will then make their reports to the International Teaching Centre where they will be considered. The decision whether or not to expel or reinstate will be made by the Hands of the Cause residing in the Holy Land who will, as at present, submit their decision to the Universal House of Justice for approval." (15)

(The Universal House of Justice, Message of June 8th, 1973, cited in "Power of the Covenant", Part II, p.44)

Consequences Of Covenant-breaking

The consequence of breaking the Covenant is utter deprivation of spiritual bounty. The covenant-breaker is cast out of the Faith. The warnings against Covenant-breaking are strong and emphatic.

"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 shall cast ashore those dead bodies for it cannot contain them. Thus it is seen that the ocean of the Covenant has surged and surged until it has thrown out the dead bodies - the souls that are deprived of the Spirit of God and are lost in passion and self and are seeking leadership. In fine, this froth of the ocean shall not endure and shall soon disappear and vanish, while on the other hand the ocean of the Covenant shall eternally surge and roar." (16)

('Abdu'l-Baha, cited in "Star of the West", vol.X, no.14, p.265)

"Now some of the mischief-makers, with many kinds of tricks are seeking leadership and in order to reach his position they instill some doubts among the friends that they may cause differences, and differences may result in drawing a party to themselves. But the friends of God must be awake and must know that the scattering of these doubts have as their motives personal intentions and the realization of leadership" (17)

('Abdu'l-Baha, cited in "Star of the West", vol.X, no.14, p.272)

"Those who have broken the Covenant of God, notwithstanding His Commands, and have turned away, they are the people of error before the most Opulent, the Exalted..."

"Those who have become negligent are of the people of fire in the sight of Thy Lord, the Beloved, the Independent..."

"The Supreme Concourse will pray for the one who is adorned with the garment of faithfulness between heaven and earth; but he who breaks the Covenant is cursed by heaven and earth." (18)

(Baha'u'llah, cited by 'Abdu'l-Baha, in "Baha'i World Faith", pp.435-36)

Difference Between A Covenant-breaker And A Person Deprived Of Voting Rights

There is a very clear distinction between a Covenant-breaker and a person deprived of his voting rights. This distinction must be clearly understood by the believers. In a passage from a letter written through his secretary to a National Spiritual Assembly in April 11th, 1949:

“The Guardian, like the Master before him, has not considered it advisable to as yet permit any person or Assembly to put another person out of the Cause of God. There is a sharp distinction between depriving a believer of his voting rights, which is a severe disciplinary measure and not a spiritual sanction, and pronouncing a former believer to be a truly spiritually diseased soul, a soul in the condition the Master referred to when, in His last cable to America before His ascension, He said: 'he who sitteth with a leper catched leprosy'. The Guardian has, within the last few years, considered the National Assemblies strong enough to wield the instrument of sanction in the sense of depriving a Baha'i of his voting rights. But no one but himself can pronounce a person to be in that diseased condition we called 'Covenant-breaking', and no one but he can reinstate a Covenant-breaker. No National Assembly has been given this right and cannot, therefore, review the question or reinstate anyone. All any National Assembly can do is to report to the Guardian if they are approached by a Covenant-breaker, and then the Guardian will take action. It is a pity that some of the Western friends, with remarkable naivete, do not grasp the fact that there is absolutely nothing keeping those who have broken the Covenant, whether Baha'u'llah's or the Master's, out of the Cause of God except their 'own inner spiritually sick condition'. If they were sound, instead of diseased, and wanted to enter the service of the Faith, they would apply direct to the Guardian and he would be able to adjudge of their sincerity and, if sincere, would welcome them into the ranks of the faithful as he did with Sydney Sprague. Unfortunately, a man who is ill is not made well just by asserting there is nothing wrong with him! Fact, actual states, are what count. Probably no group of people in the world have softer tongues, or proclaim more loudly their innocence, than those who in their heart of hearts, and by every act, are enemies of the Centre of the Covenant. The Master well knew this and that is why He said we must shun their company, but pray for them. If you put a leper in a room with healthy people, he cannot catch their health; on the contrary they are very likely to catch his horrible ailment.” (19)

(Shoghi Effendi, cited in “The Covenant and Administration: A Compilation”, p.30)

LESSON 8 - QUESTIONS

- Q1. Name the half-brother of Baha'u'llah and the half-brother of 'Abdu'l-Baha who violated the Covenant?
- Q2. What constitutes Covenant-breaking?
- Q3. What causes Covenant-breaking?
- Q4. What is the symbolic meaning of the word 'satan' in Baha'i Scriptures?
- Q5. What actions should the individual take in regard to Covenant-breakers?
- Q6. Why is Covenant-breaking so serious and deadly?
- Q7. How can we recognise a Covenant-breaker?
- Q8. Are we allowed to read Covenant-breaking materials?
- Q9. Who has the sole authority to declare someone a Covenant-breaker and his expulsion?
- Q10. What is the role of the Hands of the Cause of God in regard to Covenant-breakers?
- Q11. What are the consequences of Covenant-breaking? Discuss.
- Q12. What is the difference between a Covenant-breaker and a person deprived of voting rights? Discuss.

LESSON 8 - ANSWERS

- A1. Mirza Yahya; Mirza Muhammad-'Ali.
- A2. Intentional disloyalty and disobedience to the Covenant. (See quotations 2, 4).
- A3. Carnal desires, human ego and hunger for leadership. (See quotations 4, 16, 17).
- A4. *'The lower nature of man, the selfish promptings of his ego.'* Also symbolic of covenant-breaking. (See quotation 6).
- A5. To shun Covenant-breakers at all cost. (See quotation 7).
- A6. Covenant-breaking is a deadly spiritual disease and very contagious. (See quotations 8, 19).
- A7. See quotation 10.
- A8. No, we are strongly warned against it by the Universal House of Justice. (See quotation 11.)
- A9. The Guardian and the Universal House of Justice. (See quotations 15, 19).
- A10 Protects the Faith against the attacks of the Covenant-breakers. (See quotations 14, 15).
- A11. See quotations 16, 18.
- A12. See quotation 19.

LESSON 9 - FIRMNESS AND STEADFASTNESS IN THE COVENANT

The Covenant of Baha'u'llah is our 'shield' and protects us from error. It gives us the strength and power to conquer self and passion. It gives us infallible guidance and helps us to achieve our ultimate salvation. In order to achieve this objective and to remain steadfast in the Faith and faithful to the Covenant we must firstly be firm and obedient to the Covenant; secondly we must love one another. Then will we be able to achieve our hearts' desires, and bountiful rewards and victory will be our recompense.

“O ye beloved of God, know that steadfastness and firmness in this new and wonderful Covenant is indeed the spirit that quickeneth the hearts which are overflowing with the love of the Glorious Lord; verily, it is the power which penetrates into the hearts of the people of the world! Your Lord hath assuredly promised His servants who are firm and steadfast to render them victorious at all times, to exalt their word, propagate their power, diffuse their lights, strengthen their hearts, elevate their banners, assist their hosts, brighten their stars, increase the abundance of the showers of mercy upon them, and enable the brave lions to conquer.” (1)

(Abdu'l-Baha, “Baha'i World Faith”, p.357)

The Conditions Required Of Us

The first essential condition for preserving the unity of the Faith is to be firm in the Covenant.

“The first condition is firmness in the Covenant of God. For the power of the Covenant will protect the Cause of Baha'u'llah from the doubts of the people of error. It is the fortified fortress of the Cause of God and the firm pillar of the religion of God. Today no power can conserve the oneness of the Baha'i world save the Covenant of God; otherwise differences like unto a most great tempest will encompass the Baha'i world. It is evident that the axis of the oneness of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant and nothing else...Therefore, in the beginning one must make his steps firm in the Covenant so that the confirmations of Baha'u'llah may encircle from all sides, the cohorts of the Supreme Concurrence may become the supporters and the helpers, and the exhortations and advices of 'Abdu'l-Baha, like unto the pictures engraved on stone, may remain permanent and ineffaceable in the tablets of the hearts.” (2)

(Abdu'l-Baha, “Tablets of the Divine Plan”, pp.18-9)

The second condition is to have fellowship and love amongst the believers.

“The second condition: Fellowship and love amongst the believers. The divine friends must be attracted to and enamoured of each other and ever be ready and willing to sacrifice their own lives for each other... This is the wisdom for the appearance of the Holy Manifestations! When the most great bestowal reveals itself in the hearts of the believers, the world of nature will be transformed, the darkness of the contingent being will vanish, and heavenly illumination will be obtained. Then the whole world will become the Paradise of Abha, every one of the believers of God will become a blessed tree, producing wonderful fruits.” (3)

(Abdu'l-Baha, “Tablets of the Divine Plan”, p.19)

The unity of religion is dependent on the firmness in the Covenant.

“For firmness in the Covenant will preserve the unity of the religion of God and the foundation of the religion of God will not be shaken.” (4)

(Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “Star of the West”, vol.VIII, no.17, p.242).

What Does Firmness In The Covenant Mean?

“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.”⁵

(Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “Star of the West”, vol.IV, no.10, p.174)

It must be noted that there is a clear distinction between authoritative interpretation and individual understanding.

“A clear distinction is made in our Faith between authoritative interpretation and the interpretation or understanding that each individual arrives at for himself from his study of its teachings. While the former is confined to the Guardian, the latter, according to the guidance given to us by the Guardian himself, should by no means be suppressed. In fact such individual interpretation is considered the fruit of man's rational power and conducive to a better understanding of the teachings, provided that no disputes or arguments arise among the friends and the individual himself understands and makes it clear that his views are merely his own...” (6)

(The Universal House of Justice, “The Universal House of Justice: A Compilation”, p.51).

“...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 the city may cry out and say: 'This man is unquestionably a Baha'i, for his manners, his behaviour, his conduct, his morals, his nature, and disposition reflect the attributes of the Baha'is.' 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.” (7)

(Abdu'l-Baha, “Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha”, p.71)

Necessity For Firmness In The Covenant

The Covenant preserves the unity of the Faith of God and gives guidance to the believers. At the same time the believers are promised bountiful favours, assistance and favours should they be firm and steadfast in the Covenant. All man they have to do is to be faithful to their part of the agreement or covenant made between God.

“Today the most important affair is firmness in The Covenant, because firmness in The Covenant wards off differences.” (8)

(Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “Star of the West”, vol.III, no.14, p.9)

“Be sure, therefore, that if the believers are not united in the Will of God they will not be assisted. This is especially necessary because all of them are under the tent of the Covenant in this Revelation. There is strength only in unity. Under one tent there is union and harmony. The Covenant of God in this day of manifestation 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. For the Blessed Perfection left no possibility for discord, disagreement and dissension. The Covenant is like the sea and the believers as the fishes in the sea. If the fish leaves the water it cannot live. There is nothing to equal, nothing so effective as the Covenant of God to bring about and continue unity...” (9)

(Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “Star of the West”, vol. VIII, no. 17, p.222)

It is promised by 'Abdu'l-Baha that there will be bountiful blessings and assistance if the believer is firm and steadfast in the Covenant.

“Great is thy blessedness inasmuch as thou has been faithful to the Covenant of God and His Testament...Dedicate thyself to the service of the Cause of thy Lord, cherish His remembrance in thy heart and celebrate His praise in such wise that every wayward and heedless soul may thereby be aroused from slumber.”(10)

(Baha'u'llah, “Tablets of Baha'u'llah”, p.262)

In a Tablet to Mr. Roy Wilhelm 'Abdu'l-Baha stated that there will be confirmation from God to those who are firm in the Covenant and that in the future even kings shall be cut off should they be unfaithful to it.

“The confirmation of the Kingdom of ABHA shall descend uninterruptedly upon those souls who are firm in THE COVENANT. Thou hast well observed that every firm one is assisted and aided and every violator is degraded, humiliated and lost. It is very astonishing that people are not admonished. They have observed how Mirza Mohammed Ali, on account of the violation of THE COVENANT, descended to the lowest degree of humiliation and yet they do not become mindful. They have seen how others through disobedience to the Testament, have fallen into a well of degradation, and yet they are not awakened.*

“This Covenant is THE COVENANT of His Holiness BAHÁ'ÓLLAH†. Now, its importance is not known befittingly, but in the future it shall attain to such a degree of importance that if a king violates to the extent of one atom, he shall be cut off immediately.”(11)

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “Star of the West”, vol.IV, no.14, p.241)

“Today whoever is firm in the Covenant shall become ignited like unto a candle in the assemblage of the world and the confirmations of the Kingdom of Abha shall encircle him from all directions.”(12)

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “Star of the West”, vol.VIII, no.16, p.219)

“Be ye assured with the greatest assurance that, verily, God will help those who are firm in His Covenant in every matter, through His confirmation and favour, the lights of which will shine forth unto the east of the earth, as well as the west thereof. He will make them the signs of guidance among the Creation and as shining and glittering stars from all horizons.”(13)

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “The Covenant and Administration: A Compilation”, p.26)

“...Whoever is firm in the Covenant and Testament is today endowed with a seeing eye, and a responsive ear and daily advances in the divine realm until he becomes a heavenly angel.”(14)

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, cited in “Star of the West”, vol.X, no.13, p.251)

“O party of the Covenant! Verily, the Beauty of El-Baha hath promised the most great assistance to the beloved who are firm in the Covenant and to confirm them through the mightiest power. Ye will surely find in your luminous assembly such signs as will shine within hearts and souls. Adhere to the hem of the robe of the Lofty One and do your best to spread the Covenant of God and to be kindled with the fire of the love of God...”(15)

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, “Baha'i World Faith”, pp.404-405)

Importance Of Daily Recital Of God's Holy Verses

The daily recital of God's Holy verses is essential for ones faithfulness in the Covenant. So important is this command!

“Recite ye the verses of God every morning and evening. Whoso reciteth them not hath truly failed to fulfil his pledge to the Covenant of God and His Testament and whoso in this day turneth

* As in original quote.

+ As in original quote.

away therefrom hath indeed turned away from God since time immemorial. Fear ye God, O concourse of My servants.” (16)

(Baha'u'llah, cited in “The Ocean of My Words”, p.3)

LESSON 9 - QUESTIONS

- Q1. What are the two conditions required of the believers to preserve the unity of the Faith?
- Q2. What will preserve the unity of the religion of God?
- Q3. What does firmness in the Covenant mean? Discuss.
- Q4. Is there a clear distinction between authoritative interpretation and individual understanding? Discuss.
- Q5. Why is it necessary to be firm in the Covenant?
- Q6. What is promised to the believers if they are firm and steadfast in the Covenant?
- Q7. What kind of conduct must one possess to be considered faithful to the Covenant? Discuss.
- Q8. Why is daily recital of God's Holy verses important?

LESSON 9 - ANSWERS

- A1. The first condition is firmness in the Covenant; and the second is to have fellowship and love amongst the believers. (See quotations 2, 3).
- A2. Firmness in the Covenant. (See quotation 4).
- A3. See quotation 4.
- A4. Yes. (See quotation 6).
- A5. *“Firmness in the Covenant wards off differences”*. (See quotations 8, 9).
- A6. See quotations 1, 9, 13, 14, 15.
- A7. See quotation 7.
- A8. So as to be faithful to the Covenant. (See quotation 16).

PRAYERS FOR FIRMNESS IN THE COVENANT

O Lord, my God! Assist Thy loved ones to be firm in Thy Faith, to walk in Thy ways, to be steadfast in Thy Cause. Give them Thy grace to withstand the onslaught of self and passion, to follow the light of Divine Guidance. Thou art the Powerful, the Gracious, the Self-Subsisting, the Bestower, the Compassionate, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful.

(‘Abdu’l-Baha, “Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Baha”, p.15)

Make firm our steps, O Lord!, in Thy path and strengthen Thou our hearts in Thine obedience. Turn our faces toward the Beauty of Thy Oneness and gladden our bosoms with the signs of Thy Divine Unity. Adorn our bodies with the robe of Thy bounty and remove from our eyes the veil of sinfulness and give us the chalice of Thy grace, that the essence of all beings may sing Thy praise before the vision of Thy grandeur. Reveal then Thyself, O Lord, by Thy merciful utterance and the mystery of Thy divine being, that the holy ecstasy of prayer may fill our souls - a prayer that shall rise above words and letters and transcend the murmur of syllables and sounds - that all things may be merged into nothingness before the revelation of Thy splendour.

Lord! These are servants that have remained fast and firm in Thy Covenant and Thy Testament, that have held fast unto the cord of constancy in Thy Cause and clung unto the hem of the Robe of Thy grandeur. Assist them, O Lord, with Thy grace, confirm with Thy power and strengthen their loins in obedience to Thee.

Thou art the Pardoner, the Gracious.

(‘Abdu’l-Baha, “Baha’i Prayers”, pp.104-05)

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