

The Spiritual Conquest of the Planet

Our Response to Plans

Melanie Smith and Paul Lample



Part of a Series on Major Themes of the Creative Word

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

In this series:

The Word of God

*The Covenant: Its Meaning and Origin
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*The Spiritual Conquest of the Planet
Our Response to Plans*

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The Spiritual Conquest of the Planet

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Preface

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

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

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

- Introduction** An introduction to the lesson.
- Overview** A general presentation of new information.
- Explanation** Details of the “Overview” with quotes and examples.
- Readings** Quotations from the writings on the lesson topic.
- Illustration** Excerpts on the lesson topic, usually from books by Bahá’ís; often includes stories of Bahá’í history.
- Further Study** Three ways to explore the lesson topic in more depth.
- Questions** Questions that review the lesson material.
- Answers** Answers to the questions.
- Discussion** Questions for group discussion.
- Exercise** An exercise that explores the topic in more depth.
- Feedback** Suggested answers for the exercise.

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

¹ *The Importance of Deepening* 45–46

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

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

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

Beyond personal and group deepenings, this book can be used as a resource for preparing for firesides, public talks, or seminar work at Bahá’í schools. It would also be useful as a study tool for local assemblies in preparation for developing plans. We hope you find it useful, educational, and uplifting.

*“May His Spirit guide you, sustain you and protect you
in all your endeavors, and make of you the vanguard of
His Host that shall conquer the world.”*

—Shoghi Effendi

1

Systematic Execution of the Divine Plan

Introduction

Near the end of His ministry, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá left two important legacies to the Bahá’í world. One was His Will and Testament, which “delineated the features”¹ and “set in motion the processes” of the administrative order.² The second was the Tablets of the Divine Plan, fourteen Tablets addressed to the North American Bahá’í community that provided “explicit and detailed instructions”³ and set in motion a process for the propagation of the Faith throughout the world.

When Shoghi Effendi became Guardian in 1921 after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s passing, he set about the tasks entrusted to him. Beginning with a handful of loosely organized Bahá’ís in twenty countries, he labored for sixteen years to build the administrative machinery of the Cause; by 1937 the administrative order was sufficiently established that he could, through the first Seven Year Plan in North America, initiate the systematic execution of the Divine Plan outlined by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

The purpose of this book is to explore the nature of systematic plans as presented by Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice and to determine what the response of the believers to these plans should be—as individuals, communities, and institutions. The first chapter offers an introduction to the execution of the Divine Plan through the series of plans that have extended to the present day.

1 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 268

2 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 325

3 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 92

Overview

The Cause of Bahá'u'lláh is destined to spread throughout the world, transforming the individual and collective lives of peoples and eventually establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. The impulse from which “God’s own Plan”⁴ for the spiritual conquest of the planet originated, was from one of the earliest Tablets of the Báb, who called upon “the ‘peoples of the West’ to ‘issue forth’ from their ‘cities’ and aid His Cause.”⁵

This impulse was greatly reinforced and “more specific direction given”⁶ by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. It was accelerated even further and clarified “in a language still more graphic and in terms more definite than those used by either the Báb or Bahá'u'lláh”⁷ in the Tablets of the Divine Plan by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

The Divine Plan is steadily achieved through a series of systematic plans, first initiated by Shoghi Effendi in 1937. Every believer has the privilege and the bounty of participating in the achievement of these plans, thereby contributing to the building of a world civilization and experiencing the joy of service to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.

Explanation

In the darkest days of World War I, near the close of His ministry, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote the Tablets of the Divine Plan—His “grand design for the spiritual conquest of the planet.”⁸ This Plan, “divine in origin,”⁹ “the mightiest Plan ever generated through the creative power of the Most Great Name,” holds within it “the seeds of the world’s spiritual revival and ultimate redemption.”¹⁰

The Divine Plan, “impelled by forces beyond our power to predict or appraise,”¹¹ is sweeping across the “five continents of the globe,” gathering “within the field of its operations nation after nation.”¹² The implementation of this Plan will lead to the “enlargement of the limits of the Faith and the multiplication of its institutions over the face of the planet” and the “acceleration of the construction and completion of the administrative framework of Bahá'u'lláh’s embryonic World Order.”¹³

4 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 17

5 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 90

6 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 90

7 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 91

8 The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 49

9 Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 7

10 Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 62

11 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 101

12 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 97

13 Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 7

The Divine Plan was “held in abeyance” for twenty years until the institutions of the Faith—the “agencies for its efficient and systematic prosecution”—were firmly established.¹⁴ In 1937, the first Seven Year Plan was initiated at the direction of the Guardian by the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada. This first plan was quickly followed by others as nation after nation adopted systematic efforts for the spread of the Cause, first within their own borders, then to those countries and territories around them.

The adoption of a plan marked the coming of age of a national Bahá’í community, served as a foundation for progress in future Plans, and was tied to the achievement of the spiritual destiny of each nation. Under Shoghi Effendi’s guidance, national plans multiplied, and regional and international plans emerged joining national communities in collaborative efforts, until finally, in 1953, the first global plan, the Ten Year Crusade, was initiated linking all twelve existing national assemblies in one united effort. Five additional global plans, including the Three Year Plan in 1993, have been initiated under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.¹⁵

The Divine Plan will continue to unfold through “numerous crusades of successive epochs” that will reach “as far as the fringes” of the “Golden Age.”¹⁶ The following appeal of Shoghi Effendi to one community stands as an invitation to every Bahá’í to arise and persevere, thereby winning new victories in each succeeding plan:

“There can be no doubt whatever that with every turn of the wheel, as a result of the operation of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Plan, and with every extension in the range of its evolution, a responsibility of still greater gravity and of wider import will have to be shouldered by its divinely chosen executors wherever its ramifications may extend and however oppressive the state of the countries and continents in which they may have to labor. They must strive, ceaselessly strive, ready for any emergency, steeled to meet any degree of opposition, unsatisfied with any measure of progress as yet achieved, prepared to make sacrifices far exceeding any they have already willingly made, and confident that such striving, such readiness, such resolution, such high-mindedness, such sacrifice will earn them the palm of a victory still more soul-satisfying and resounding in its magnificence than any as yet won since the inception of their mission.”¹⁷

abeyance: temporary suspension, postponement

systematic: a group of interacting elements functioning as a complex whole; methodic, orderly procedure or arrangement, building consistently on what has come before

14 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 78
15 See a summary of the plans on pp. 18-19

16 Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 21
17 Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 62-63

Readings

1. “. . . the Tablets of the Divine Plan, that sublime series of letters addressed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the North American Bahá’í’s . . . constituting one of the mighty Charters of His Father’s Faith”

—The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 216

2. “. . . the Great Design unfolded by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for the promulgation of the Faith of His Father. . . .”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 78

3. “. . . the Plan . . . is divine in origin, is guided by the explicit and repeated instructions that have flowed from the pen of the Center of the Covenant Himself, is energized by the all-compelling will of its Author, claims as the theater for its operation territories spread over five continents and the islands of the seven seas, and must continue to function, ere its purpose is achieved, throughout successive epochs in the course of the Formative Age. . . .”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 7

4. “. . . a Plan destined to reveal the full measure of its potentialities, not only throughout the successive epochs of the Formative Age of the Faith, but in the course of the vast reaches of time stretching into the Golden, the last Age. . . .”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 114

5. “However familiar we may be with its origin, however conscious of its magnitude and bold character, however cognizant of the signal success that has attended its initial operation . . . we find ourselves nevertheless incapable of either grasping the import of its tremendous potentialities, or of correctly appraising the significance of the present phase of its development. Nor can we assess its reaction, as the momentum of the mysterious forces driving it onward augments, on the fortunes of the divers communities whose members are consciously laboring for the achievement of purposes akin to the high aims that animate its promoters, or estimate its impact, as its scope is further enlarged and its fruition is accelerated, on the immediate destinies of mankind in general.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 90

6. “. . . this Plan . . . will be increasingly regarded as an agency designed not only for the enlargement of the limits of the Faith and the multiplication of its institutions over the face of the planet, but for the acceleration of the construction and completion of the administrative framework of Bahá’u’lláh’s embryonic World Order, hastening thereby the advent of that Golden Age which must witness the proclamation of the Most Great Peace and the unfoldment of that world civilization which is the offspring and primary purpose of that Peace.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 7

The Tablets of the Divine Plan

promulgation:
proclamation; promotion

explicit: clearly defined

epoch: a particular period of history marked by certain important events; an era; in a Bahá’í context, epochs are distinct periods in the unfoldment of the Heroic, Formative, and Golden Ages as well as in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan (see a letter written by the research department of the Universal House of Justice, 2-5-86); as of the Holy Year, we are in the fourth epoch of the Formative Age (*A Wider Horizon* 41) and the second epoch of the Tablets of the Divine Plan (*Wellspring of Guidance* 14)

Formative and Golden Ages: Shoghi Effendi refers to three major evolutionary stages through which the Faith must pass—the Apostolic or Heroic Age (1844-1921) associated with the Central Figures of the Faith; the Formative or Transitional Age (1921-), the “hall-mark” of which is the rise and establishment of the Administrative Order, and, the Golden Age which will represent the “consummation of this glorious Dispensation”

cognizant: aware;
conscious

signal (adjective):
remarkable, conspicuous

augments: makes larger;
increases

7. “. . . the beloved Guardian’s Ten Year Crusade, the current Nine Year Plan, other plans to follow throughout successive epochs of The Formative Age of the Faith, are all phases in the implementation of the Divine Plan. . . .”

—*Messages from the Universal House of Justice* 69

8. “In carrying out the Plans of God we are strengthened, blessed and purified; we attract the loving attention of Bahá’u’lláh; our efforts are confirmed; and we are enabled through His power to achieve great victories for His Faith.”

—on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day* 160

9. “Now that the structural basis of the Bahá’í Administrative Order has been firmly and definitely laid . . . a systematic effort must be exerted to widen the basis of that Order, by multiplying the Administrative institutions . . . which, as they develop and are consolidated, will have to be utilized as the divinely ordained and most effectual instruments for the proclamation of the Faith to the masses.”

—on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Letters to Australia and New Zealand* 67

10. “Their period of adolescence in the Faith has passed; they are now adults, and they must face the problems involved in fulfilling their Plan squarely and with maturity. The pleasant period of youthful irresponsibility, when they could look on the work of the American and Persian Communities as the feats of the strong, which they were not called upon to emulate, being too young, is now passed forever.”

—on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Letters to Australia and New Zealand* 97

11. “The consummation of the Plan already initiated would constitute the best preparation for the . . . discharge of still weightier responsibilities. . . .”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day* 156

12. “The successful carrying out of our various plans is the greatest sign we can give of our faith and inner assurance, and the best way we can help our fellow-men out of their confusion and difficulties.”

—on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny* 225

13. “In every continent of the globe . . . this mighty Plan, devised for the systematic execution of the Design conceived by the Center of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant for the propagation of His Father’s Faith, is forging ahead, gaining momentum with every passing day, tearing down barriers in all climes and amidst divers peoples and races, widening irresistibly the scope of its beneficent operations, and revealing ever more compelling signs of its inherent strength as it marches towards the spiritual conquest of the entire planet.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World* 76

The Nature and Purpose of Plans

phase: a distinct stage of development

emulate: to strive to equal or surpass, particularly through imitation

consummation: completion, conclusion

climes: climate

divers: various, sundry

irresistibly: too strong, powerful, or compelling to be resisted

beneficent: having positive affects

14. “From the beginning of this Dispensation the most urgent summons of the Word of God, voiced successively by the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, has been to teach the Cause. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in His own words, ‘spent His days and nights in promoting the Cause and urging the peoples to service.’ Shoghi Effendi, discharging the sacred mission laid upon him, raised the Administrative Order of the Faith, already enshrined within the Sacred Writings, and forged it into a teaching instrument to accomplish through a succession of plans, national, international, and global, the entire Divine Plan of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and he clearly foresaw . . . a series of plans to be launched by the Universal House of Justice, extending over ‘successive epochs of both the Formative and Golden Ages of the Faith.’”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 22–23

15. “O friends! Be not careless of the virtues with which ye have been endowed, neither be neglectful of your high destiny. . . . Ye are the stars of the heaven of understanding, the breeze that stirreth at the break of day, the soft-flowing waters upon which must depend the very life of all men, the letters inscribed upon His sacred scroll. With the utmost unity, and in a spirit of perfect fellowship, exert yourselves, that ye may be enabled to achieve that which beseemeth this Day of God. . . . Should the greatness of this Day be revealed in its fullness, every man would forsake a myriad lives in his longing to partake, though it be for one moment, of its great glory—how much more this world and its corruptible treasures!”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 196–97

16. “The blessed Person of the Promised One is interpreted in the Holy Book as the Lord of Hosts—the heavenly armies. By heavenly armies those souls are intended who are entirely freed from the human world, transformed into celestial spirits and have become divine angels. Such souls are the rays of the Sun of Reality who will illumine all the continents [T]he love of Bahá’u’lláh has so mastered every organ, part and limb of their bodies, as to leave no effect from the promptings of the human world.

“These souls are the armies of God and the conquerors of the East and the West. Should one of them turn his face toward some direction and summon the people to the Kingdom of God, all the ideal forces and lordly confirmations will rush to his support and reinforcement. . . . Singly and alone he will attack the armies of the world, defeat the right and left wings of the hosts of all the countries, break through the lines of the legions of all the nations and carry his attack to the very center of the powers of the earth. This is the meaning of the Hosts of God.”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan* 47–48

Our Opportunity to Participate in the Unfoldment of the Divine Plan

enshrined: preserved as sacred

forged: to give form to, devise; to form metal by heating and hammering; to advance gradually but steadily

celestial: heavenly

promptings: urges, desires

17. “The constant progress of the Cause of God is a source of joy to us all and a stimulus to further action. But not ordinary action. Heroic deeds are now called for such as are performed only by divinely sustained and detached souls. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Commander of the hosts of the Lord . . . uttered this cry: ‘Oh! that I could travel, even though on foot and in the utmost poverty, to these regions and, raising the call of Yá-Bahá’u’l-Abhá in cities, villages, mountains, deserts, and oceans, promote the Divine Teachings. This, alas, I cannot do. How intensely I deplore it.’ And He concluded with this heart-shaking appeal, ‘Please God, ye may achieve it.’”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 80

18. “. . . to each and every believer, . . . I feel moved, . . . to address my plea, with all the fervor that my soul can command and all the love that my heart contains, to rededicate themselves, collectively, and individually, to the task that lies ahead of them.”

“Under whatever conditions, the dearly loved, the divinely sustained, the onward marching legions of the army of Bahá’u’lláh may be laboring, in whatever theater they may operate, in whatever climes they may struggle, . . . I direct my impassioned appeal to obey, as befits His warriors, the summons of the Lord of Hosts, and prepare for that Day of Days when His victorious battalions will, to the accompaniment of hozannas from the invisible angels in the Abhá Kingdom, celebrate the hour of final victory. . . .

“No matter how long the period that separates them from ultimate victory; however arduous the task; however formidable the exertions demanded of them; however dark the days which mankind, perplexed and sorely-tried, must, in its hour of travail, traverse; however severe the tests with which they who are to redeem its fortunes will be confronted; however afflictive the darts which their present enemies, as well as those whom Providence, will, through His mysterious dispensations raise up from within or from without, may rain upon them, . . . I adjure them, by the precious blood that flowed in such great profusion, by the lives of the unnumbered saints and heroes who were immolated, by the supreme, the glorious sacrifice of the Prophet-Herald of our Faith, by the tribulations which its Founder, Himself, willingly underwent, so that His Cause might live, His Order might redeem a shattered world and its glory might suffuse the entire planet—I adjure them, as this solemn hour draws nigh, to resolve never to flinch, never to hesitate, never to relax, until each and every objective in the Plans to be proclaimed, at a later date, has been fully consummated.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’i World* 36-39

deplore: to express deep sorrow about; lament

theater: a setting for dramatic event

arduous: demanding great effort; difficult

formidable: difficult to overcome

traverse: to travel across, over or through

afflictive: causing distress or trouble

adjure: to ask or urge earnestly

profusion: great quantity or amount

immolated: killed, destroyed; be killed as a sacrifice

suffuse: to spread through or over

*consummated: completed, perfected in every way
inextricably: cannot be untangled or loosened*

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 91.

Illustration

“In making any attempt to give a coherent picture of what Shoghi Effendi called the first epoch in the evolution of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Divine Plan—an epoch which he stated began in 1937 and would end in 1963, and comprised “three successive” crusades—one must go back and study his writings chronologically, for in them the clear reflection of his mind and the emergence of the scheduled pattern of his plans can be discerned. Ever since the passing of his beloved Master the whole object of the Guardian’s existence was to fulfill His wishes and complete His works. The Divine Plan, conceived by Him, in one of the darkest periods in human history was, Shoghi Effendi stated, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s unique and grand design,’ embodied in His Tablets to the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada, with which the destinies of the followers of Bahá’u’lláh in the North American Continent would ‘for generations to come remain inextricably interwoven’; for twenty years it had been held in abeyance while the agencies of a slowly emerging Administrative Order were being created and perfected for ‘its efficient, systematic prosecution. . . .’

“If we view aright what happened in 1937 at the beginning of the first Seven Year Plan, we see that Shoghi Effendi, now in his fortieth year, stepped out as the general leading an army—the North American Bahá’ís—and marched off to the spiritual conquest of the Western Hemisphere. While other generals, famous in the eyes of the world, were leading vast armies to destruction all over the planet, fighting battles of unprecedented horror in Europe, Asia and Africa, this unknown general, unrecognized and unsung, was devising and prosecuting a campaign more vital and far-reaching than anything they could ever do. Their battles were inspired by national hates and ambitions, his by love and self-sacrifice. They fought for the preservation of dying concepts and values, for the past order of things. He fought for the future, with its radiant age of peace and unity, a world society and the Kingdom of God on earth. Their names and battles are slowly being forgotten, but Shoghi Effendi’s name and fame is rising steadily, and his victories rise in greatness with him, never to be forgotten. The sun of his genius and achievements will shine for a thousand years as part of the light of the Bahá’í Dispensation.”

—Ruḥíyyih Khánúm, *The Priceless Pearl* 381-82

*inextricably: cannot be
untangled or loosened*

“The first seventy-seven years . . . constituting the Apostolic and Heroic Age of our Faith, fell into three distinct epochs, of nine, of thirty-nine and of twenty-nine years’ duration, associated respectively with the Bábí Dispensation and the ministries of Bahá’u’lláh and of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. . . .

“The last twenty-three years of that same century coincided with the first epoch of the second, the Iron and Formative, Age of the Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh—the first of a series of epochs which must precede the inception of the last and Golden Age of that Dispensation—a Dispensation which, as the Author of the Faith has Himself categorically asserted, must extend over a period of no less than one thousand years, and which will constitute the first stage in a series of Dispensations, to be established by future Manifestations, all deriving their inspiration from the Author of the Bahá’í Revelation, and destined to last, in their aggregate, no less than five thousand centuries.

“We are now entering the second epoch of the second Age of the first of these Dispensations. The first epoch witnessed the birth and the primary stages in the erection of the framework of the Administrative Order of the Faith—the nucleus and pattern of its World Order—according to the precepts laid down in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament, as well as the launching of the initial phase of the world-encompassing Plan bequeathed by Him to the American Bahá’í Community. That epoch was characterized by a twofold process aiming at the consolidation of the administrative structure of the Faith and the extension of the range of its institutions. It witnessed on the one hand, the emergence and the laying of the groundwork of that embryonic World Order whose advent was announced by the Báb in the Bayán, whose laws were revealed by Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and whose features were delineated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and Testament. It was marked on the other hand by the launching, in the Western Hemisphere, of the first stage of a Plan whose original impulse was communicated by the Herald of our Faith in His Qayyúmu’l-Asmá’, to whose implications the Author of the Bahá’í Revelation alluded in His Tablets, and whose Charter was revealed by the Center of His Covenant in the evening of His life.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 4-5

see page 20

Bayán (buy-awn): one of the central books of the Báb, containing the laws of the Bábí Dispensation

Kitáb-i-Aqdas (ket-awb-ehack-dass): the “Most Holy Book,” Bahá’u’lláh’s book of laws and the Charter of His World Order

Qayyúmu’l-Asmá’ (guyyoom-eh-a-smaw): the Báb’s commentary on the Súrih of Joseph (from the Qur’án); one of the earliest Tablets of the Báb, partially revealed to Mullá Husáyn at his first meeting with the Báb (see *The Dawnbreakers* 61); the quote referred to is on page 56 of *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*

Further Study

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

What does the passage say?	In what specific ways can this passage be applied in your life?
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List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 91 and the additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

- 1.
- 2.

Tablets of the Divine Plan, by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Fourteen Tablets to North America outlining a charter for the spiritual conquest of the planet.

Messages to America, Citadel of Faith, Messages to the Bahá’í World, Dawn of a New Day, Letters to Australia and New Zealand, Lights of Divine Guidance, Letters to Canada, and Unfolding Destiny by Shoghi Effendi

Books containing messages by the Guardian to various national communities that address the presentation and execution of plans.

Wellspring of Guidance, Messages of the Universal House of Justice, The Five Year Plan, The Seven Year Plan, and A Wider Horizon, by the Universal House of Justice

Books containing messages by the House of Justice that address the progress of the Nine, Five, Seven, and Six Year Plans.

A Compendium of Volumes of the Bahá’í World I-XII, pp. 385-416
The Bahá’í World, Volume 13, pages 459-78.

Two reviews of the progress of plans from 1937 to 1963.

Personal Reflection

Remaining Questions

Additional Reading and Resources

Questions

The following questions review parts of the content of the lesson for use in individual study. Refer to the Discussion section on the next page for questions to consider in group study.

1. (Circle all that apply.) The Divine Plan:
 - a. originated only in the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
 - b. is a plan for the propagation of the Bahá’í Faith
 - c. will reveal its potentialities in the Formative & Golden Ages
 - d. is a plan for the spiritual conquest of the planet
 - e. is not concerned with the administrative order

2. (Circle all that apply.) The adoption and execution of systematic plans by national communities:
 - a. is a sign of maturation
 - b. attracts spiritual power
 - c. is part of the implementation of the Divine Plan
 - d. prepares the way for future progress

3. (The last two questions refer to information provided in the tables on pages 17-18.) List three national or international plans executed from 1937-53. Briefly describe the focus of each:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

4. List the six global plans initiated since 1953:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____
 - f. _____

Answers

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

1. **b, c, and d.** See page 6, first paragraph of the Explanation, and #2 and #4 on page 8. Regarding “a,” Shoghi Effendi explained that the impulse for the Divine Plan originates in the Writings of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh (see page 6). Regarding “e,” the Divine Plan affects the unfoldment of Bahá’í administration (see #6 on page 8, and *Messages to America* 97).
2. **a, b, c, and d.** See #6-13 on page 9.
3. See page 18. The answers can include any of the plans from the first three boxes, up until the Ten Year Crusade, which constituted the first global plan.
4. See page 18-19. The answers are the Ten Year Crusade (1953-63); the Nine Year Plan, (1964-73); the Five Year Plan (1974-79); the Seven Year Plan, (1979-86); the Six Year Plan (1986-92); and the Three Year Plan (1993-96).

Discussion

What is the relationship between spiritual forces and the Divine Plan, and the systematic plans that make of distinctive phases in the implementation of the Divine Plan? (Refer to pages 6-9.)

What is the role of the individual in the execution of the Divine Plan? (Refer to pages 10-11.)

Discuss the framework of the unfoldment of the Faith described on pages 13 and 20.

Discuss the implementation of the Divine Plan through the specific plans presented on pages 18-19. When did the growth of the Faith start to accelerate, in terms of the number of national territories, national or local assemblies, localities, and number of new believers? In what plans were new developmental issues introduced?

Exercise

The best way to gain an understanding of the impact of the systematic plans designed to accomplish the Divine Plan of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is to read these plans and letters tracing their unfoldment for yourself. If you are studying this material in a summer school or study class, each individual or a small group can adopt a separate plan, do some research, then report to the entire class.

The plans to be explored include the first and second Seven Year Plans of North America, the Ten Year Crusade, the Nine Year Plan, the Five Year Plan, the Seven Year Plan, and the Six Year Plan. In addition, if the resource materials are available and there are enough class members, you may wish to examine the national plans of different communities or the African Campaign, an international collaboration of five national assemblies initiated by Shoghi Effendi in 1950.

A starting point for resource materials for the study of the plans can be found under “Additional Reading and Resources” on page 14. Note that there is currently no book of letters of the Universal House of Justice that covers the period of the Five and Seven Year Plans. Booklets introducing these plans (*The Five Year Plan* and *The Seven Year Plan*) were produced, and other letters of the Universal House of Justice may be accessible to the group. The Persian, Iraqi, and Egyptian plan letters are not published in English.

Among the topics for examination of the plans are the dates, the statistics related to community’s size and development at the beginning and end of the plan, the major objectives of the plan, and the major activities and accomplishments of the plan. The spread of the Faith, the development of the institutions, and the progress of the Faith at the World Centre can be traced through each plan. The next three pages offer tables that provide a brief orientation to the plans.

This exercise can be extended throughout most of the chapters of this book. The individual or group reporting on a specific plan can explain to the class the way that the specific theme of each chapter applies to that plan.

Systematic Unfoldment of the Divine Plan

First Epoch of the Divine Plan 1937-1963

Plan	Date	Objectives	Outcome	References
1st Seven Year Plan	1937-44	Spread of the Faith throughout North America and into South America and completion of the exterior ornamentation of the House of Worship.	LSAs in every province of Canada, every state of US, and 14 republics of Latin America. Exterior of House of Worship completed. 136 LSAs, 197 groups, 1300 localities on homefront.	<i>The Advent of Divine Justice</i> <i>Messages to America</i> 7-75
2nd Seven Year Plan	1946-53	Consolidate victories won; complete interior ornamentation; form 3 NSAs in Canada, Central and South America; support spread of Faith into Europe; supplemental goals to support Africa.	NSAs in Canada, Central and South America; assist systematic spread of Faith in Europe, incl. forming 10 LSAs in goal cities; interior ornamentation complete; support building the Shrine of the Báb; expansion and more LSAs on homefront.	<i>Messages to America</i> 76-110 <i>Citadel of Faith</i> 1-106
Other National and International Plans African Campaign (involved 5 NSAs) Australia-New Zealand Britain	1938-53 1950-53 1947-53 1944-50 1951-53	Spread of the Faith on the homefronts and in international regions. Expansion of the Faith in Africa. Homefront goals. Homefront goals. Homefr. and African campaign goals.	Spread of Faith to a total of 2500 localities, incl. North America. Sent pioneers, teaching, basis laid for 10YC; by 1954: 600 believers, 60 tribes, 190 loc. 7 LSAs and 21 groups; > doubled believers. 24 LSAs, proclamation, great inc. believers. Strengthen LSAs inc. literature, pioneers.	<i>The Bahá'í World</i> , Vol. 8-12 <i>Letters to Australia and New Zealand</i> <i>Unfolding Destiny</i>
Canada Central Am. Egypt-Sudan Germany-Austria India, Burma, and Pakistan	1948-53 1948-53 1952-53 1948-53 1948-53 1948-53 1938-44 1946-50 1951-53 1950-53 1946-50	Homefront goals. Homefront goals. Homefr. and African internat. goals. Homefront goals. Homefront goals. Homefr. and African internat. goals. Homefront goals. Homefront goals. Homefr. and int'l. goals (incl. Africa). Homefront goals. Homefr. and int'l. (later incl. Africa).	30 LSAs, 100 localities, NSA incorporation. Expand teaching; lit. trans., Fund increase. 3 LSAs, African pioneers, women on LSAs. 14 LSAs, translation of lit., Hazira obtained. LSA formations, literature translations. Over 26 LSAs formed, Hazira purchased. Pioneers to 8 countries, 12 homefront LSAs. Raised LSAs, built national headquarters. Int: 160 pio. fam. 4 LSAs; Nat: 93 LSAs, 37 gr.	<i>Messages to Canada</i> <i>Lights of Divine Guidance</i> <i>Dawn of a New Day</i> (See also <i>A Compendium of Volumes of the Bahá'í World I-XII 1925-1954</i> , pp. 385-416)
Iraq Persia Ten Year Crusade	1953-63	Simultaneous initiation of 12 national plans in the first global plan; the 10YC aimed to develop the Faith in the Holy Land, consolidate the 12 homefront areas, consolidate opened territories, and open the remaining virgin territories on the planet.	131 countries opened, incl. 100 virgin territories in first year; 47 national assemblies formed & 33 incorporated; lit. trans. into 220 more languages; completion of Temples in Africa and Australia, started Temple in Europe; acquired endowments worldwide; > 1,000 localities; about 5000 LSAs, with > 350 incorp.; start of mass conversion.	<i>The Bahá'í World</i> , Vol. 13 <i>Messages to the Bahá'í World</i> <i>Citadel of Faith</i> 104-58

Second Epoch of the Divine Plan 1963-

<i>Plan</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>References</i>
Nine Year Plan	1964-73	69 national plans aimed at developing the World Centre, consolidating opened territories, open virgin territories, and worldwide proclamation in 1967-68. The twin objectives were expansion and universal participation.	44 NSAs (113 total), 12,000 LSAs (17,000 total), 54,000 localities (69,500 total); literature translated into 225 lang. (571 total); many properties acquired; 3553 pioneers sent out; worldwide proclamation of Bahá'í 'Iláh's claim to rulers; Boards of Counsellors created.	<i>Wellspring of Guidance</i> (esp. pages 12-27) <i>Messages of the Universal House of Justice 1988-73</i> (esp. pages 113-120)
Five Year Plan	1974-79	Preservation of victories, vast and widespread expansion, and development of Bahá'í life/communities; strengthening of Local Spiritual Assemblies.	Total of 96,000 localities, > 25,000 LSAs; 18 new NSAs (125 total); operation of International Teaching Centre since 1973); progress in spiritual dev., maturation of assemblies, and dev. of Bahá'í community life; construction seat UHJ begun; initiation of Indian and Samoan Temples.	Letter of the Universal House of Justice, Naw-Rúz 1974 Letter of the Universal House of Justice, Naw-Rúz 1979
Seven Year Plan	1979-86	Continue expansion and consolidation process; achieve remaining 5YP goals. Work to financial independence, continue construction projects, develop institutions, promote spiritual, intellectual and community life.	Completion of seat UHJ and Samoan Temple, approval of plans for Arc and Terraces, expansion of ITC and Counsellors; creation of Social and Economic Dev. Office and SED projects; 8000 new LSAs; 16,000 new localities; 300 new tribes; 2196 new publications (898 of Holy Text); maturation of institutions and community life.	Letter of the Universal House of Justice, Naw-Rúz 1979
Six Year Plan	1986-92	Formation of goals by Counsellors and NSAs; seven major objectives: carrying the Message to mankind; involvement in the life of society; increase in literature; maturation of communities; universal participation and spiritual enrichment of ind.; extension of Bahá'í education and strengthening of family life; and pursuit social and economic dev. projects.	1 1/2 million new Bahá'ís; not just numerical victories, but mature development: Faith spread to all countries; worldwide proclamation from <i>The Promise of World Peace</i> and persecutions; completion Indian Temple with 20,000 daily visitors; emergence from obscurity reflected in unprecedented contacts with leaders of thought, media, and public; social and economic dev. projects greatly multiplies and attracting attention of world; youth activities, esp. period of service; dev. of institutions; initiation of Arc and Terraces projects.	<i>A Wider Horizon</i> (esp. pages 39-44, 95-109, 181-188)
Three Year Plan	1993-96	Same objectives as the Six Year Plan, with a focus on enhancing the faith of individuals, developing human resources, and fostering the functioning of local and national institutions.	Enriched capacity of community for expansion and consolidation; progress in Arc and Terraces projects; increase in SED projects; indigenous believers assume greater responsibility; youth contributions teaching rise; 12 new NSAs; Kitáb-i-Aqdas published, Law of Huqúq 'u'lláh instituted.	<i>A Wider Horizon</i> 109, 195-6 Letter of the Universal House of Justice, 9-30-92 1993, 1996 Ridvan message

Second Epoch of the Divine Plan 1963- (continued)

Plan	Date	Objectives	Outcome	References
Four Year Plan	1996-2000	Single aim: a significant advance in the process of entry by troops through marked progress in the activity and development of the individual believer, the institutions, and the local community; prepare for large scale sustained growth; establish networks of training institutes to systematically develop resources for expansion and consolidation—large numbers of believers trained to foster and facilitate the process of entry by troops with efficiency and love; integration of arts into expansion and consolidation activities; near completion of ARC buildings and terraces; expand SED and external affairs endeavors.	World-wide system of training institutes established; emergence of a culture of learning, resulting in a high degree of integration of thought and action; increase in individual initiative; growth in institutional and community functioning and capacity; appreciation for role of systematization in growth and dev.; est. Regional Bahá'í Councils; 3,300 long/short term pioneers; 5 mil visit Temple in India; Bahá'í world web-site launched; 8 new NSAs.	Letters of the Universal House of Justice: 12-26-95 to Counselors; 12-31-95 to Bahá'ís of World; Ríqvan 2000; 1-9-01 to Counselors
Twelve Month Plan	2000-01	Continue the single aim of advancing the process of entry by troops: raise institutes to full operation; more systematic education of children and jr. youth; “Area Growth Programs” established in selected sites on all continents.	Enter 5th Epoch of Formative Age; 300+ training institutes; nurturing and integration of children and junior youth in Bahá'í community life; institutes emphasize training of children's teachers; experience gained from Area Growth Programs for next Plan.	Letters of the Universal House of Justice: Ríqvan 2000; 1-9-01 to Counselors; 1-16-01 to Bahá'ís of the World; Ríqvan, 2001
Five Year Plan	2001-06	Continue to pursue the single aim of advancing the process of entry by troops through two movements: guiding a growing number of individuals through the sequence of institute courses and advancing clusters from one stage of development to the next; systematization of teaching efforts through the establishment of intensive programs of growth in clusters that have achieved certain prerequisites; establish 3 core activities open to all: study circles, devotional gatherings, children's classes; periodic reflection meetings to foster learning in the cluster; begin Chilean Temple.	Increasing capacities of individuals, institutions and communities; over 230,000 in Book 1 and 30,000 in Book 7; over 16,000 clusters mapped; combination of core activities and institute courses creates coherent pattern of action leading to intensive programs of growth in more than 200 clusters; devotional meetings increase sixfold; children and junior youth classes sixfold and study circles surpass 11,000; completion of current phase in the development of the buildings on the Arc; Inauguration of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb; <i>Summons of the Lord of Hosts, Gems of Divine Mysteries</i> published; Chilean Temple design chosen; NSA of Iraq restored.	Letters of the Universal House of Justice: 1-9-01 to Counselors; 1-16-01 to Bahá'ís of the World; Ríqvan 2001; 1-17-03 to Bahá'ís of the World; Ríqvan 2001; 12-27-05 to Counselors; 12-28-05 to Bahá'ís of the World; Ríqvan 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006

Second Epoch of the Divine Plan 1963- (continued)

<i>Plan</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>References</i>
Five Year Plan	2006-11	<p>Continue to pursue the single aim of advancing the process of entry by troops through two movements; guiding a growing number of individuals through the sequence of institute courses and advancing clusters from one stage of development to the next; bring hundreds of thousands more into the institute process; establish intensive programs of growth in 1500 clusters; increasing teaching by reaching receptive populations; emphasis on the role of the tutor; classes for Jr. youth as 4th core activity; mobilize pioneers and direct them toward support for cluster development; enhance the culture of learning; strengthen institutional support at all levels for the movement of clusters.</p>		<p>Letters of the Universal House of Justice: 12-27-05 to Counselors; 12-28-05 to NSAs; 12-31-05 to Bahá'ís of the World; Ridvan 2006</p>

Unfoldment of the Bahá'í Faith¹

Bahá'í Cycle (destined to last for 500,000 years)

Bahá'í Era (comprising the Dispensations of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh)

Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh (destined to last at least 1000 years)

Heroic Age²

The Primitive, the Apostolic Age

1st
The Báb

2nd Epoch
The Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh

3rd Epoch
The Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Formative Age³

The Transitional, the Iron Age

1st⁴

2nd

3rd⁵

4th⁶

5th⁹

Golden Age

Also involving
"numerous crusades"
and "successive
epochs"

Tablets of the Divine Plan⁷

1st Epoch

Plans:

7YP

10YC

Other Plans⁸

2nd Epoch⁵

9YP

5YP

7YP

6YP

3

4

15YP

5YP

1953

1963

1937

1921

1892

1853

1993

01

06

11

2021¹⁰

1 This chart was adapted from a previously published source. For a description of the concepts see *Citadel of Faith* 4-5 (page 17 in this book) and *God Passes By* xiii-xv.

2 The passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá marks the close of the Heroic Age and the beginning of the Formative Age (*God Passes By*, xiv); however, the Guardian also indicated that the Heroic Age concluded with the passing in 1932 of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sister, Bahíyyih Khánum (*The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 98).

3 The epochs of the Formative Age are described in a letter written by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice dated February 5, 1986.
4 Shoghi Effendi placed the end of the first epoch of the Formative Age between the years, 1944 (*Citadel of Faith* 5) and 1946 (*Messages to the Bahá'í World* 89).

5 The third epoch of the Formative Age and second epoch of the Divine Plan were announced by the Universal House of Justice in 1963 (*Wellspring of Guidance* 12-18).

6 The fourth epoch was entered at the start of the Six Year Plan (see *A Wider Horizon* 41).

7 Shoghi Effendi foresaw "the penetration of that light" of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, "in the course of numerous crusades and of successive epochs of both the Formative and Golden Ages"

(*Messages to the Bahá'í World* 155). The first epoch of the Divine Plan ended with the Ten Year Crusade (*Messages to the Bahá'í World* 41). While a specific time is not given for completion of the Divine Plan, the Guardian noted there would be "successive epochs reaching as far as the fringes of that Golden Age" (*Citadel of Faith* 20).

8 Other plans held at this time were "national" and "international" (*Messages to the Bahá'í World* 17) as opposed to global plans that began with the Ten Year Crusade (see page 18).

9 The January 2001 entrance of the Faith into the fifth epoch of the Formative Age was announced by the Universal House of Justice in its letter of 16 January 2001 at the close of the Counselors' conference.

10 The Universal House of Justice in its 26 November 1999 message stated that a Five Year Plan launched at Ridván 2001 will "initiate a series of worldwide enterprises that will carry the Bahá'í community through the final twenty years in the first century of the Faith's Formative Age. [2021] These global Plans will continue to focus on advancing the process of entry by troops and on its systematic acceleration." 2021 marks the centenary of the passing of the Master.

2

The Vision Conveyed in Plans

Introduction

“With Shoghi Effendi,” Rúhíyyih Khánum wrote, “everything was clear: there was The Plan, and then there were plans and plans! . . . But whether given by him, or spontaneously initiated by the Bahá’ís themselves, he knew where to place them in the scheme of things.”¹

The Tablets of the Divine Plan embody ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s “vision” of the unfoldment of the Cause² and are His design “for the systematic propagation of the Faith throughout the world.”³ The North American and global plans initiated under Shoghi Effendi and the plans conducted under the authority of the Universal House of Justice represent successive “stages”⁴ in the execution of this Divine Plan, while other national and international plans from 1938 to 1953 supplemented and supported it.

This chapter explores an overview of the elements found in the plan messages of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice. It will be followed by two chapters that address the unfoldment of the Divine Plan. The last three chapters of the book will explore broad principles that guide our implementation of national and local plans: chapter 5, on vision and the process of systematic planning; chapter 6, on leadership and participation in the execution of plans; and chapter 7, the characteristics of mature action called for at our current stage in the execution of the Divine Plan.

1 *The Priceless Pearl* 383-84

3 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to Canada* 40

2 Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* 63

4 *The Advent of Divine Justice* 73

Overview

Shoghi Effendi directed systematic implementation of the Divine Plan through letters written to national communities in which he called for the formation of plans, presented new plans, or commented on those already in progress. In these messages he not only explained what must be done, but placed the work of these Bahá'í communities in the context of the redemption of humanity, elevating it to the realm of the sacred.

The plans and their supporting letters have common elements that provide a framework for understanding the progress of the Divine Plan. These elements also offer assemblies a pattern for creating and implementing plans. Among the elements are:

- praise and acknowledgment of achievements;
- an analysis of spiritual and material conditions;
- a call to new achievements and directives for action;
- a reminder of fundamental processes;
- guidance to individuals and institutions; and
- encouragement and assurance.

These elements are continued in current plans through the messages of the Universal House of Justice.

Explanation

In spreading the Faith throughout the world, in building the embryonic institutions of a new world order, and in creating the pattern of life for a new world civilization, Bahá'ís are not left to their own devices. Rather, in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá lies the blueprint for a new world. In Their directives, and in the specific guidance of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice we have the detailed instructions necessary to achieve God's purpose for humanity.

It is in the form of a plan that this guidance becomes most specific. Like a course set by the captain of a ship, plan messages give us vision, orient us to what we must do, and steer us safely through unknown territory towards our God-given destination.

The elements of plans found in the messages of the Guardian—and now, the Universal House of Justice—include:

Praise and acknowledgment of achievements. Usually presented at the beginning of the messages, these passages recount the gains made during a particular time period, describe their effects in the world, and praise the believers' efforts. They impart a clear sense of our progress toward achieving the goals of the plan and offer concrete evidence of Bahá'u'lláh's power to build a new world.

Analysis of spiritual and material conditions. A common theme in plan letters is an analysis of the current status of the twin processes of integration—the building of the new world order—and disintegration—the breakdown of the old world. These passages enable us to see the spiritual significance of past efforts and current and future challenges in the context of a long-range vision of the destiny of the Faith.

Call to new achievements and directives for action. Each plan calls for new actions that build upon previous achievements and that set the stage for future development. Other messages presented in the course of a plan include additional objectives and specific directives that provide concrete ways to achieve the goals.

Reminder of fundamental processes. As the Faith develops, the range of actions that engage the community becomes broader in scope, leading, potentially to confusion about priorities and how one goal relates to another. Plan messages are filled with reminders of fundamental processes and principles that guide our actions as we work. Examples include the organic process of growth, the purpose for which we are laboring, and the importance of teaching.

Guidance to individuals and institutions. These passages acknowledge the obstacles and opportunities confronting individuals and institutions in the path of service, then provide detailed guidance for systematically addressing the challenges.

Encouragement and assurance. Ultimately, the work of the Faith depends on spiritual forces that can be tapped through perseverance, selfless action, unity, and sacrifice. The messages are filled with assurances that potent spiritual forces will reinforce our efforts if we arise to do our part.

Readings

1. “. . . I am filled with a sense of happiness and gratitude for these incessant evidences of your zeal and united endeavors. I am truly impressed by the sound progress and expansion of the activities in which the believers of India and Burma are so earnestly and devotedly engaged. The institutions you have recently initiated, the plan of teaching you have launched, the degree of unity, of consecration and solidarity you have attained, the measures for internal consolidation you have devised, the support you have consistently and cordially extended to our dear Martha, all proclaim the depth of your devotion and attest the nobility and staunchness of your faith.”

—Shoghi Effendi, India’s Six Year Plan, *Dawn of a New Day* 71

2. “For there can be no doubt that the entire community, limited as is its numerical strength and circumscribed as are its meager resources, in comparison with the vastness of the field stretching before it, the prodigious efforts demanded of it, and the complexity of the problems it must resolve, stands at a most critical juncture in its history.

“Moreover, the country of which it forms a part is passing through a crisis which, in its spiritual, moral, social and political aspects, is of extreme seriousness—a seriousness which to a superficial observer is liable to be dangerously underestimated.

“The steady and alarming deterioration in the standard of morality . . . is no doubt the most arresting and distressing aspect of the decline that has set in, and can be clearly perceived, in the fortunes of the entire nation.

“Parallel with this . . . is the crass materialism, which lays excessive and ever-increasing emphasis on material well-being, forgetful of those things of the spirit. . . .

“No less serious is the stress and strain imposed on the fabric of American society through the fundamental and persistent neglect, by the governed and governors alike, of the supreme, the inescapable and urgent duty . . . of remedying, while there is yet time, through a revolutionary change in the concept and attitude of the average white American toward his Negro fellow citizen. . . .

“The American nation, of which the community of the Most Great Name forms as yet a negligible and infinitesimal part, stands, indeed, from whichever angle one observes its immediate fortunes, in grave peril. The woes and tribulations which threaten it are partly avoidable, but mostly inevitable and God-sent, for by reason of them a government and people clinging tenaciously to the obsolescent

Praise and Acknowledgment of Achievements

zeal: enthusiastic, often intense, interest or devotion

endeavors: efforts; undertakings

Martha: Hand of the Cause of God Martha Root

Analysis of Conditions

circumscribed: confined within bounds; limited

prodigious: impressively large in size, force or extent

juncture: a point in time in which circumstances change

crass: crude and indiscriminating

negligible: amounting to very little

infinitesimal: extremely small; minute

tenaciously: holding firmly; unyielding, doggedly

obsolescent: no longer useful

doctrine of absolute sovereignty and upholding a political system, manifestly at variance with the needs of a world already contracted into a neighborhood and crying out for unity, will find itself purged of its anachronistic conceptions, and prepared to play a preponderating role, as foretold by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in the hoisting of the standard of the Lesser Peace, in the unification of mankind, and in the establishment of a world federal government on this planet. . . .

“The American Bahá’í Community, the leaven destined to leaven the whole, cannot hope, at this critical juncture in the fortunes of a struggling, perilously situated, spiritually moribund nation, to either escape the trials with which this nation is confronted, nor claim to be wholly immune from the evils that stain its character. . . . They now stand at the crossroads, unable to relax for a moment, or hesitate as to which road they should tread, or to allow any decline in the high standard they have, for no less than six decades, undeviatingly upheld.”

—Shoghi Effendi, Second Ten Year Plan, *Citadel of Faith* 124-27

3. “Feel moved to appeal to gallant, great-hearted American Bahá’í Community to arise on the eve of launching the far-reaching, historic campaign by sister Community of the British Isles to lend valued assistance to the meritorious enterprise undertaken primarily for the illumination of the tribes of East and West Africa, envisaged in the Tablets of the Center of the Covenant revealed in the darkest hour of His ministry.

“I appeal particularly to its dearly beloved members belonging to the Negro race to participate in the contemplated project marking a significant milestone in the world-unfoldment of the Faith, supplementing the work initiated fifty years ago on the North American continent, forging fresh links binding the American, British and Egyptian Communities and providing the prelude to the full-scale operations destined to be launched at a later period of the unfoldment of the Divine Plan aiming at the conversion of the backward, oppressed masses of the swiftly awakening continent.

“Though such participation is outside the scope of the Second Seven Year Plan, I feel strongly that the assumption of this added responsibility for this distant vital field at this crucial challenging hour, . . . will . . . constitute a worthy response to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s insistent call raised on behalf of the race He repeatedly blessed and loved so dearly and for whose illumination He ardently prayed and for whose future He cherished the brightest hopes.”

—Shoghi Effendi, The African Campaign, *Citadel of Faith* 87-88

anachronistic: out of its proper time; out of date

moribund: at the point of death

undeviatingly: not varying from the accepted norm

Call to New Achievements

campaign: the African campaign (see page 18), called for by Shoghi Effendi in 1950; this international collaboration of five national assemblies (Britain, Egypt, India, Iran, and North America) was designed to systematically spread the Faith in Africa (see A Compendium of Volumes of the Bahá’í World I-XII, 1925-1954, pages 414-16)

envisaged: pictured in mind

4. “The great projects already launched must be pursued to their completion. The Terraces below and above the Shrine of the Báb and the Arc on Mount Carmel must be completed, fulfilling the glorious vision of the efflorescence of God’s holy mountain; the second World Congress must be held in the City of the Covenant to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the inauguration of that Covenant; the steadily advancing work on the translation and annotation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book, must be brought to publication; the interest shown by the friends in the Law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh must be cultivated; the pioneers and traveling teachers must go forth; the expenses of the Cause must be met; all objectives of the Six Year Plan must be achieved.

“But the paramount purpose of all Bahá’í activity is teaching. All that has been done or will be done revolve around this central activity, the ‘head corner-stone of the foundation itself,’ to which all progress in the Cause is due. The present challenge calls for teaching on a scale and of a quality, a variety, and intensity outstripping all current efforts.”

—The Universal House of Justice, Six Year Plan, *A Wider Horizon* 57

5. “Upon the extent to which these basic requirements are met, and the manner in which the American believers fulfill them in their individual lives, administrative activities, and social relationships, must depend the measure of the manifold blessings which the All-Bountiful Possessor can vouchsafe to them all. These requirements are none other than a high sense of moral rectitude in their social and administrative activities, absolute chastity in their individual lives, and complete freedom from prejudice in their dealings with peoples of a different race, class, creed, or color.

“The first is specially, though not exclusively, directed to their elected representatives, whether local, regional, or national. . . . The second is mainly and directly concerned with the Bahá’í youth, who can contribute so decisively to the virility, the purity, and the driving force of the life of the Bahá’í community. . . . The third should be the immediate, the universal, and the chief concern of all and sundry members of the Bahá’í community, of whatever age, rank, experience, class, or color, as all, with no exception, must face its challenging implications, and none can claim, however much he may have progressed along this line, to have completely discharged the stern responsibilities which it inculcates.”

—Shoghi Effendi, First Seven Year Plan, *The Advent of Divine Justice* 22

Reminder of Fundamental Processes

efflorescence: a time of flowering; the highest point, culmination

inauguration: beginning; formal initiation

paramount: of greatest concern or importance; supreme in rank

Guidance to Individuals and Institutions

manifold: of many kinds

vouchsafe: granted

rectitude: moral goodness

chastity: moral purity; virtuousness

virility: having or showing strength, vigor, energy

inculcates: instills

6. “The settlement of these virgin areas is of such an emergency nature, that he feels pioneering in one of them takes precedence over every other type of Bahá’í service—whether it be in the teaching or administrative fields of the Faith. So important is it that the National Assembly may delay initiation of steps to fulfill other phases of the Plan, until all these areas are conquered for the Faith. Nothing, absolutely nothing, must be allowed to interfere with the placing of pioneers in each of the 131 goal countries. . . .

—on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Ten Year Crusade, *Unfolding Destiny* 303-04

7. “The tasks facing this community in the course of this second and future phases of a world-encircling Crusade are admittedly vast, complex and challenging. The resources at the disposal of its doggedly persevering, wholly dedicated members are, alas, circumscribed and inadequate. The Mission, however, to which its Founder is calling it, is unspeakably glorious. . . .

“Every ounce of energy its members can muster must unhesitatingly be expended to further the supreme end for which so sacred, so formidable and so momentous a Plan has been devised. With every sacrifice that is made, with every forward step that is taken along the toilsome and long road they are destined to tread, with every victory dearly and laboriously won . . . , a measure of blessing from on high will undoubtedly be vouchsafed, in order to reinforce the exertions, cheer the hearts, and stimulate the march of all those enlisted in the service of so glorious a Cause.

“The hour is propitious for a concerted effort which in its scope and intensity will surpass any united action of which the British followers of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh have proved themselves capable in the past.”

—Shoghi Effendi, Role in Ten Year Crusade, *Unfolding Destiny* 339-340

8. “Beloved Friends—you who are addressed by the Best Beloved, the Blessed Beauty, as ‘the solace of the eye of creation,’ as ‘the soft-flowing waters upon which must depend the very life of all men’—we urge you, with all earnestness from the utter depths of our conviction as to the ripeness of the time, to lay aside your every minor concern and direct your energies to teaching His Cause—to proclaiming, expanding and consolidating it. . . .

“Have no fear or doubts. The power of the Covenant will assist you and invigorate you and remove every obstacle from your path. ‘He, verily, will aid everyone that aideth Him, and will remember everyone that remembereth Him.’”

—The Universal House of Justice, Six Year Plan, *A Wider Horizon* 59

Encouragement and Assurance

*doggedly, stubbornly
tenacious*

*vouchsafed: granted or
given, often as a favor*

*propitious: favorable,
auspicious*

*invigorate: to fill with
energy or strength*

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 91.

Further Study

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

What does the passage say?	In what specific ways can this passage be applied in your life?
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List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 91 and the additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

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

Messages to America, Citadel of Faith, Messages to the Bahá'í World, Dawn of a New Day, Letters to Australia and New Zealand, Lights of Divine Guidance, Letters to Canada, and Unfolding Destiny by Shoghi Effendi

Books containing messages by the Guardian to various national communities that address the presentation and execution of plans.

Wellspring of Guidance, Messages of the Universal House of Justice, and A Wider Horizon, by the Universal House of Justice

Books containing messages by the House of Justice that address the progress of the Nine and Six Year Plans.

**Personal
Reflection**

**Remaining
Questions**

**Additional
Reading and
Resources**

Questions

The following questions review parts of the content of the lesson for use in individual study. Refer to the Discussion section on the next page for questions to consider in group study.

1. List at least three of the elements found in the plan letters.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

2. State the purpose of each of the following passages:

“The stage is set for universal, rapid and massive growth of the Cause of God. The immediate and basic challenge is pursuit of the goals of the Six Year Plan The all-important teaching work must be imaginatively, persistently and sacrificially continued, ensuring the enrollment of ever larger numbers who will provide the energy, the resources and spiritual force to enable the beloved Cause to worthily play its part in the redemption of mankind. To reinforce this process the international goals of the Plan have been adopted calling for the undertaking of many hundreds of inter-assembly assistance projects . . . and the establishment, in the course of the Plan, of new National Spiritual Assemblies”

—The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 47-48

a. _____

“They cannot, however, ensure the success of the Plan they have devised, unless the unity and solidarity of those who are participating in its execution, and above all the harmony of the body directing its operation, are safeguarded, maintained and consolidated.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day* 150

b. _____

“The fate-laden world ordeal is moving in steady, pre-ordained crescendo. The blaze of a seemingly uncontrollable fire is leaping, ravaging last remaining great Power on European continent. Shadows of God’s retributive act are fast gathering. As the arena of world convulsing contest broadens; as wounds it inflicts deepen; as issues it raises aggravate and multiply, so will the operation of the spiritual forces, destined to cast the burden of a travailing age, be accelerated. As the old world sinks beneath the weight of a crumbling old order, so must new world exponents of Bahá’u’lláh’s nascent, integrating World Order climb loftier summits of their sublime calling.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 48

c. _____

Answers

The following are suggested answers. Depending on your understanding of the quotations, you may have different answers.

Consider the suggested answers a starting point for thought and discussion.

1. The elements of the plans include: praise and acknowledgment of achievements, analysis of material and spiritual conditions, a call to new achievements, reminders of fundamental processes, guidance to individual, communities and institutions, and encouragement and assurance.
- 2
 - a. A call to new goals.
 - b. Guidance to a community. It could also be considered as a reminder of the fundamental importance of unity.
 - c. An analysis of material and spiritual conditions.

Discussion

Assign individuals or groups to review various plans, as in the exercise in chapter 1 on page 17. Identify various passages from the different letters that match the elements described in this chapter. Discuss your findings.

What can we learn by studying past plan letters? What insights does such study offer for the study of a new plan?

How can the information and guidance in the plan messages make individuals, communities and institutions more effective in teaching? What lessons can an assembly draw for creating, presenting, and implementing a local plan?

Discuss ways in which the information in the plans can be used to give people hope.

How can the plan messages be used to build unity within the community?

3

The Process of Organic Unfoldment

Introduction

God has sent Bahá'u'lláh as the “Supreme Redeemer”¹ to regenerate the peoples of the world. God’s “design for the redemption of mankind” has two interrelated parts. The first is a “Major Plan” that operates “mysteriously” in the world at large using “both the mighty and the lowly as pawns in His world-shaping game, for . . . the eventual establishment of His Kingdom on earth.” The second part is a “clearly devised” “Minor Plan,” that operates according to “orderly and well-known processes” through the efforts of the Bahá'ís, who are consciously laboring to implement its provisions.²

The processes of the minor plan work to enlarge the limits of the Faith, multiply its institutions, build the administrative order³ and, eventually, suffuse the entire planet with the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.⁴

The purpose of this chapter is to gain a better understanding of the processes by which the Faith unfolds—how they evolve and what drives them forward—so that we will be able to interact with them in a harmonious way. In this way we can hasten the development of the Cause and ensure that the full-measure of its potentialities is revealed.

1 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 169

2 Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 140

3 Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 7

4 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World* 156

Overview

God's Plan for humanity has unfolded progressively since the beginning of creation. This "majestic process"⁵ has been greatly accelerated with the advent of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. "Let us turn our eyes away from empty fantasies of this world's divergent forms," 'Abdu'l-Bahá urged us, "and serve instead this pre-eminent purpose, this grand design."⁶

The process by which the Plan of God gradually unfolds and moves toward its destined outcome is characterized by certain principles that dynamically interact with one another. These include the organic nature of the Cause, the operation of spiritual forces that propel this organic growth, and the emergence of critical periods—stages in the growth of the Faith in which the timeliness of certain actions have a profound effect on its progress and future potentialities.

Explanation

The Cause of God is embodied in an organic system. Such systems evolve, over time, through a series of developmental stages toward maturation, or fruition—its destined goal from the beginning. Within each stage are certain requirements that must be completed before the organism can advance to the next stage, where new powers and abilities are realized, enabling it to function at a higher level. For example, a baby must stand up before it can walk. In the process of struggling to stand it develops the powers needed for walking. Each stage thus builds on the previous one.

As an organism matures, its full potential becomes manifest. The component parts of the organism function harmoniously. More complex tasks can be performed. Consider for example, the relationship between the cells, organs, and systems of the human body.

Each global plan is part of a systematic effort that is "designed to foster" the Faith's "organic development."⁷ Through the plans, we learn about our developmental tasks. By striving to achieve the goals, the community's powers and abilities multiply and it progresses toward maturity. As a result, the Cause moves forward with increasing speed to exercise its spiritualizing influence on humanity.

Organic Growth of the Cause

5 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World* 153 7 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to Canada* 29
6 *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 263

The Influence of Spiritual Forces

The Divine Plan derives its power from forces set in motion by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.⁸ These “creative,”⁹ “stupendous,”¹⁰ and “dynamic”¹¹ spiritual forces propel the Plan forward, direct its operation, and stimulate its processes. “Mysteriously released”¹² during each phase of the Divine Plan, these forces operate with “increasing momentum”¹³ both in the world and in the Bahá'í community.

These “inconceivably potent”¹⁴ forces are available to assist us in attaining the plan goals. Their influence, however, is dependent upon our adherence to the principles in the Writings—such as those of administration and teaching—that pertain to the unfoldment of the Faith. If we violate these principles and try to do things our own way, divine power does not reach us and our progress is retarded.¹⁵

Another important element in the process of unfoldment is time. In development, critical stages emerge with specific requirements if the full potential inherent in that stage is to be realized. For example, an infant needs extra protein for optimal development of the brain. If minimum needs are not met, the child's intelligence can be damaged.

Critical Stages of Development

The same principle applies to the growth of the Faith. For example, a major goal of the Ten-Year Crusade was to increase the number of assemblies to lay a firm foundation for the Universal House of Justice. Time was short, but the believers achieved their goals. When the Guardian suddenly passed away, the foundation was already laid and the Supreme Body could be elected. Opportunities presented by critical periods are frequently short-lived and often not repeated. Swift action can promote rapid development with minimal resources.

Organic growth, the operation of spiritual forces, and the emergence of critical periods affect not only the national and international growth of the Faith, but also local activities. Assemblies need to give careful consideration to these issues in guiding the development of any Bahá'í community. What is the current stage in the growth of the local community? What does it need, at this time, to grow? How can spiritual forces be attracted? What are the implications for local plans of critical periods identified in the global or national plan?

8 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 90

9 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World* 140

10 Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 43

11 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World* 15

12 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 28

13 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 29

14 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 108

15 *Dawn of a New Day* 129

Readings

1. “Look ye not upon the present, fix your gaze upon the times to come. In the beginning, how small is the seed, yet in the end it is a mighty tree. . . . Consider the days of Christ, when none but a small band followed Him; then observe what a mighty tree that seed became, behold ye its fruitage. And now shall come to pass even greater things than these, for this is the summons of the Lord of Hosts This most powerful of dispensations will encompass all the earth, and beneath its banner will all peoples gather and be sheltered together.”

—*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 82

2. “The Cause of God is organic, growing and developing like a living being.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 89

3. “Feeble though our Faith may now appear in the eyes of men . . . this priceless gem of Divine Revelation, now still in its embryonic state, shall evolve within the shell of His law, and shall forge ahead, undivided and unimpaired, till it embraces the whole of mankind.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* 23

4. “Sustaining all these visible achievements is a constant activity throughout the world of teaching and administration—a perpetual movement, like the ceaseless surge of the sea, within the Bahá’í community, which is the real cause of its growth. National and local spiritual assemblies facing difficult problems, devising new plans, shouldering responsibility for a community growing in numbers and consciousness, committees striving to accomplish objectives, Bahá’í youth in eager and dedicated activity, individual Bahá’ís and families making efforts for the Cause, to give the Message, or hold a fireside, these constant services attract the confirmation of Bahá’u’lláh, and the more they are supported by prayers and intense dedication and the more extensive they become, the more they release into the world a spiritual charge which no force on earth can resist, and which must eventually bring about the complete triumph of the Cause. It is this organic vitality of the Faith, so readily felt at the World Centre, whose exhilaration we wish every believer to share.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 104-05

5. “A greater measure of self-sacrifice, a greater audacity, a greater reliance on the sustaining grace of Bahá’u’lláh, are required to lend the necessary impetus to the progressive unfoldment and ultimate fruition of this dynamic process which the followers of Bahá’u’lláh . . . have set in motion.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny* 187

Organic Growth of the Cause

unimpaired: without being handicapped or damaged

perpetual: ceaselessly repeated; lasting forever; lasting for an indefinitely long time

audacity: fearlessly daring, bold

impetus: an impelling force; stimulus

6. “. . . this healing Agency, this leavening Power, this cementing Force, intensely alive and all-pervasive, has been taking shape, is crystallizing into institutions, is mobilizing its forces, and is preparing for the spiritual conquest and the complete redemption of mankind.”

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

7. “The greater their problems and anxieties and the more formidable the obstacles in their way, the more glorious and abundant will be the recompense and blessings that will be bestowed upon them by their all-seeing, their all-bountiful, all-powerful Master.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day* 98

8. “The forces mysteriously released, designed to direct the operation and stimulate the processes to insure the consummation of the second stage of the Divine Plan, are inconceivably potent. Full, rapid use of these forces, by an organized community alive to the sublimity of its mission, is imperative.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 108

9. “I fully realize how small are your numbers, how circumscribed are your means, how vast the distances that separate the centers already established. But I firmly believe that the initiation of a Plan to remedy the very deficiencies from which the infant Administrative order is now suffering, and a firm resolve to carry out its provisions, as well as a sustained effort to make the necessary sacrifices for its consummation, will set in motion forces of such magnitude, and draw upon both communities blessings of such potency, as shall excite the wonder of the believers themselves, and cause their Faith to enter an era of unprecedented expansion and marvellous and fruitful development.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Letters to Australia and New Zealand* 68

10. “This present Crusade, on the threshold of which we now stand, will, moreover, by virtue of the dynamic forces it will release and its wide repercussions over the entire surface of the globe, contribute effectually to the acceleration of yet another process . . . which will carry the steadily evolving Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, through its present stages of obscurity, of repression, of emancipation and of recognition . . . to the stage of establishment, the stage at which the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh will be recognized by the civil authorities as the state religion, . . . a stage which must later be followed by the emergence of the Bahá'í state itself, . . . a stage which, in the fullness of time, will culminate in the establishment of the World Bahá'í Commonwealth, functioning in the plenitude of its powers. . . .”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World* 155

The Influence of Spiritual Forces

pervasive: spreads through every part of

recompense: payment

sublimity: quality of being lofty or exalted

circumscribed: restricted

repercussions: indirect effects or results produced by an event or action

culminate: reach the highest point or degree: climax

plenitude; fullness, abundance

11. “The Faith advances, not at a uniform rate of growth, but in vast surges, precipitated by the alternation of crisis and victory.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 53

12. “There is no time to lose. There is no room left for vacillation. Multitudes hunger for the Bread of Life. The stage is set. The firm and irrevocable Promise is given. God’s own Plan has been set in motion. It is gathering momentum with every passing day. The powers of heaven and earth mysteriously assist in its execution. Such an opportunity is irreplaceable. . . . To try, to persevere, is to insure ultimate and complete victory.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 16-17

13. “Time is short. Opportunities, though multiplying with every passing hour, will not recur, some for another century, others never again.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 85

14. “The Plan on which the attention of the Canadian Bahá’í Community is focused and upon the success of which must depend its immediate destinies, is now entering a critical stage, demanding increasing vigilance on the part of all of its members, utter consecration to the Plan’s objectives, and a determined, inflexible resolve to carry it to a successful conclusion.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to Canada* 25

15. “To visualize, however imperfectly, the challenges that engage us now, we have only to reflect, in the light of our sacred Writings, upon the confluence of favorable circumstances brought about by the accelerated unfolding of the Divine Plan over nearly five decades, by the untold potencies of the spiritual drama being played out in Iran, and by the creative energy stimulated by awareness of the approaching end of the twentieth century.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 14

16. “The present challenge calls for teaching on a scale and of a quality, a variety, and intensity outstripping all current efforts. The time is now, lest opportunity be lost in the swiftly changing moods of a frenetic world.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 57-58

17. “. . . the twofold task they have arisen to perform will, if carried out in time, release the potentialities with which the community of the Greatest Name has been so generously and mysteriously endowed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 9

18. “To fail, at this critical juncture to rise to the height of the occasion, would jeopardize the colossal work so painstakingly achieved in the course of many long years. . . .”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 107

Critical Stages of Development

precipitated: caused to happen; brought on

vacillation: wavering back and forth from one course of action to another

irrevocable: cannot be called back

consecration: dedication to something sacred

confluence: the point where two or more streams flow together

frenetic: in a frantic or frenzied manner

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 91.

Illustration

The following story told by Hand of the Cause Leroy Ioas illustrates Shoghi Effendi's firm assurance in the unfailing guidance of God for the unfoldment of His Cause.

"I attended the first meeting of the Bahá'í Temple Unity when it was organized in 1909. . . . So I remember very clearly this development and how the Guardian built up this Cause from a shoot growing everywhere into a perfectly organized unit all over the world—it really is matchless. When people write in the future about what Shoghi Effendi did in building up the unity and the order of the friends throughout the world there will be nothing in history that will read like it. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said that we are doing in one generation what takes normally a thousand years for humanity to achieve. And Shoghi Effendi was the leader that did it.

"We were speaking one night, and I said 'Shoghi Effendi . . . I was a Bahá'í in America when the administrative order was born and grew and developed. I know what was accomplished, the matchless way you did this thing—it was almost the work of a genius—the way you accomplished and built this Cause and what it is today.' He said, 'Leroy, . . . you talk like you think I sat over here in the Holy Land and I had a blueprint of this Bahá'í World Order, and that I started to build it; as soon as I found the friends strong enough to do this, I said, build this wall, and then a little later, I said, build that wall, and then, build this wall, and then, lay that floor—if you had that idea . . . then dismiss it from your mind. When I became Guardian I did not know what the steps to be taken were. God guided me, and when He gave me guidance, I did what He guided me to do. And very often I didn't know what the next step was going to be until I got the guidance, and when I got the guidance, we did it. And then I did not know, maybe, what the next step was going to be. I may have thought I knew what it was going to be, but I did not know, until I got the guidance, then I did it. I have supreme . . . confidence that God will guide me to do whatever is necessary for the Cause whenever it should be done.' 'And,' he said, 'the Bahá'ís of the world must have exactly that same confidence. They must have confidence that God will guide the Guardian to do what should be done for the welfare of the Cause at the moment it should be done—and unless they have that confidence the Cause cannot succeed.'"

This divine guidance has not left us with the passing of the Guardian, but continues through the direction of the Universal House of Justice.

—Hand of the Cause of God, Leroy Ioas, *In the Days of the Guardian*

Further Study

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

What does the passage say?	In what specific ways can this passage be applied in your life?
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List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 91 and the additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

- 1.
- 2.

God Passes By, by Shoghi Effendi

A history of the first hundred years of the Faith by the Guardian, illustrating stages of the organic unfoldment of the Cause of God.

A Wider Horizon: Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1983-1992

Letters and extracts from the Universal House of Justice describing the organic unfoldment of the Faith from 1983-1992.

The Power of Divine Assistance and Crisis and Victory

Two compilations containing references describing the unfoldment of the Faith in relation to the influence of spiritual power.

The Forces of Light and Darkness, by Hooper Dunbar

Audio tapes of a summer school class available from the Louhelen Bahá'í School describing the impact of spiritual forces.

**Personal
Reflection**

**Remaining
Questions**

**Additional
Reading and
Resources**

Questions

The following questions review parts of the content of the lesson for use in individual study. Refer to the Discussion section on the next page for questions to consider in group study.

1. List three features of growth in an organic system:

2. Describe three characteristics of the spiritual forces involved in the unfoldment of Plans:

3. Time is a critical factor in the organic process of unfoldment because:

- a. there is never enough of it
- b. each stage of development lasts for a limited period of time
- c. opportunities may only come once
- d. failure to meet needs on time harms future development

Answers

The following are suggested answers. Depending on your understanding of the quotations, you may have different answers.

Consider the suggested answers a starting point for thought and discussion.

1. Some features of an organic system of growth are: it evolves over time, growing larger and more complex; it goes through developmental stages; new and more advanced abilities develop at each stage; one stage builds toward another; and progress is toward fruition, or maturity. See pages 32-34.
2. Among the possible answers are: spiritual forces are leavening (see #6, page 35); mysteriously released (see #8, page 35); designed to direct the operation of unfoldment (see #8, page 35); potent (see #8, page 35); and will bring blessings on a community if it arises to use them (see #10, page 35).
3. **b, c, and d.** Regarding “b,” see #17 on page 36; regarding “c,” see #13 on page 36; and for “d,” see #17 on page 36. Answer “a” is incorrect in that “never enough time” is very subjective. The Guardian wrote about time being short and limited, but assured the believers they could meet those limitations, if they acted with all due speed and made use of the forces available.

Discussion

What affects the speed of development? In a local community? In a national community? How can the process of development be hastened?

Discuss some ways in which not completing the goals of a plan can hamper further development.

Why is it important to make “full, rapid use” of the mysterious forces available to the believers?

Discuss the difference between “progress for the sake of progress” and the organic idea of progress toward maturity. How does knowing that maturity is the goal affect planning?

How is the outside world affected by the organic unfoldment of the Faith?

Exercise

The organic unfoldment of the Faith and the identification of critical stages in that unfoldment are evident in many different passages in the letters of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice. The next chapter will explore that evolution in some detail in the objectives of the plans, and in the areas of growth, development, and involvement of the Faith with society. In this exercise, however, we can begin to get a sense of how the Faith unfolds organically.

One example can be seen in the recent description of the Universal House of Justice of a critical period for the growth of the Cause. After the persecution of the believers in Iran in the early 1980s and the presentation of *The Promise of World Peace* throughout the world beginning in 1985, the House of Justice explained in its Ridvan 1987 message that “the stage is set for universal, rapid and massive growth of the Cause of God.”¹⁶ In 1988, the Supreme Body explained that “the time is now” for “teaching on a scale and of a quality, and variety, and intensity outstripping all current efforts,” “lest opportunity be lost in the swiftly changing moods of a frenetic world.”¹⁷

The response to this call by the Bahá’í world was immediate. Over a million souls entered the Faith in the next two years.¹⁸ The Universal House of Justice explained that the evidences of entry by troops, already apparent in a number of countries, are “hopeful signs of the greater acceleration in which all national communities . . . will ultimately be involved.”¹⁹ By 1990, though the opportunities and challenges of this critical period still remained, the House of Justice warned: “time is running out and we have serious commitments to keep.”²⁰

Using the study of the plan messages begun in the exercise in chapter 1, extract a series of quotations that outline some aspect of the organic unfoldment of the Faith, or a critical stage in the Faith’s development. On the next page, an example is given tracing the emergence of the institution of the International Teaching Centre over a fifty year period.

16 *A Wider Horizon* 47

17 *A Wider Horizon* 57-58

18 The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 79

19 *A Wider Horizon* 60

20 *A Wider Horizon* 79

Feedback

April 1940 (Shoghi Effendi): “that consecrated Spot [the arc on Mt. Carmel] . . . is destined to evolve into the focal center of those world-shaking, world-embracing, world-directing administrative institutions, ordained by Bahá’u’lláh and anticipated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. . . .”
—*Messages to America* 32

1964-Nine Year Plan Goal (The Universal House of Justice): “Development of the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God, in consultation with the body of the Hands of the Cause, with a view to the extension into the future of its appointed functions of protection and propagation. . . .”
—*Wellspring of Guidance* 23

June 1968: “Rejoice announce momentous decision establish eleven Continental Boards Counselors protection propagation Faith three each for Africa Americas Asia one each for Australasia Europe. Adoption this significant step following consultation Hands Cause God ensures extension future appointed functions their institution.”
—*The Continental Boards of Counselors* 3

June 1973: “Announce establishment Holy Land long anticipated International Teaching Center destined evolve into one those world shaking world embracing world directing administrative institutions ordained by Bahá’u’lláh anticipated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá elucidated by Shoghi Effendi. Membership this nascent institution comprises all hands Cause God and initially three Counselors who with Hands present Holy Land will constitute nucleus its vital operations.”
—*The Continental Boards of Counselors* 46

June 1979: “Moment propitious announce duration terms service members Continental Boards Counselors as anticipated in announcement establishment that institution and in Constitution Universal House of Justice. Decision now taken that terms will be of five years starting Day Covenant 26 November 1980.”
—*The Continental Boards of Counselors* 64

May 1983: “For ten years the International Teaching Centre has rendered invaluable services at the World Centre of the Faith, and it is with great joy that we now announce a number of major steps in the evolution of this vital institution. . . .

“We have decided to raise the number of resident members . . . to nine. . . .

“We have further decided, as foreshadowed in previous announcements, to institute a five-year term for the Counselor members of the International Teaching Centre. . . .

“. . . we have decided that the time is ripe to devolve increased responsibility upon the International Teaching Centre in the fields of protection and propagation of the Faith.”
—letter of May 19, 1983

May 1988: “Rejoice announce appointment Counselor members International Teaching Centre for five year term beginning 23 May 1988 View supreme importance acceleration teaching work this stage formative age, number Counselor members now raised to nine.”
—letter of May 30, 1988

April 1990: “Nor have the Counselor members of the International Teaching Centre been slow in responding to opportunities to foster the climate of progress now evident in all quarters of the globe. Through the unified vision of growth to which they have called the Continental Boards of Counselors and their able, hardworking and self-sacrificing auxiliaries, a new vitality can be felt in the expansion and consolidation of the Faith throughout the world.”
—*A Wider Horizon* 75

4

The Pattern of Organic Unfoldment

Introduction

With a basic understanding of the organic process of the unfoldment of the Faith, we can now begin to consider the “pattern” of that unfoldment. For example, the Nine Year Plan in 1964 contained two objectives: expansion and universal participation.¹ By the start of the Six Year Plan in 1986, the Universal House of Justice wrote:

“The organic growth of the Cause of God . . . becomes markedly apparent in the light of the main objectives and expectations of the Six Year Plan; a vast expansion of the numerical and financial resources of the Cause; enlargement of its status in the world; a worldwide increase in the production, distribution and use of Bahá’í literature; a firmer and worldwide demonstration of the Bahá’í way of life requiring special consideration of the Bahá’í education of children and youth, the strengthening of Bahá’í family life and attention to universal participation and the spiritual enrichment of individual life; further acceleration in the process of the maturation of local and national Bahá’í communities and a dynamic consolidation of the unity of the two arms of the Administrative Order; an extension of the involvement of the Bahá’í world community in the needs of the world around it; and the pursuit of social and economic development in well-established Bahá’í communities.”²

This chapter will explore the implications of this pattern of unfoldment for our work today, both nationally and locally.

¹ The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 25

² *A Wider Horizon* 40

Overview

The Universal House of Justice wrote: “if we look back at one hundred years of an unexampled history of unremitting progress, we also look forward to many centuries of unfolding fulfillment of divine purpose—fulfillment, which as experience has shown, is incrementally realized through the systematic advances of Plans and the wondrous leaps and thrusts of epochs.”³

As we come to understand how the Faith has unfolded since the adoption of systematic plans, we gain a deeper insight into the nature and purpose of our work and the tasks given to us in the course of a new plan. Each new stage of maturity has presented new responsibilities, and required greater complexity and harmony of interaction among the component parts of the Cause.

The objectives of the plans have progressed from spreading the Faith and establishing institutions, to developing the qualities and capabilities of Bahá’í institutions and community life, and, recently, to systematic involvement in the life of society. As a result, the Faith has become more powerful, more capable, and more influential as we move progressively toward the ultimate aim of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation: individual and social transformation.⁴

Explanation

If we think about the organic unfoldment of a plant, we realize that it goes through many stages before it produces its final fruit. After the seed is planted, the plant must struggle to grow. It emerges from the ground and, still growing, puts out leaves and possibly new branches that help draw power from the sun and accelerate the growth process. At a certain stage, the plant puts forth a flower, then, in the fullness of time, bears fruit. As its maturity deepens, it continues to grow in strength and to produce more fruit.

The same organic pattern is evident in the unfoldment of the Faith through the systematic execution of the Divine Plan. Beginning with the first plan in 1937, the initial objective of each country was to expand and consolidate its community and establish the framework of the administrative order. When ready, it was given the additional task of spreading the Faith to a region outside its borders.

3 *A Wider Horizon* 96

4 The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 64

For example, the first Seven Year Plan called upon the believers in North America to spread throughout its unopened regions, then move into Central and South America. Other national and international plans had similar objectives. In the Ten Year Crusade, homefront and international pioneering was taken to a new level of systematic action in a global plan to open the remaining territories of the planet.

After the growing and spreading stage in the first epoch of the Divine Plan, the Faith entered a period where growth was still accelerating, but a second, systematic process of development was more formally emphasized. The Nine Year Plan called for both a vast expansion and of the Cause and universal participation by individual believers.⁵ This trend was extended in the Five Year Plan through objectives that stressed the development of the distinctive characteristics of Bahá'í community life, including attention to women's activities, classes for children and youth, strengthening Feast, and the maturation of local assemblies.⁶

Through the Seven Year Plan and into the Six Year Plan the process of development continued to evolve, as seen in the addition of the objective of social and economic development⁷ and the formation of national plans by National Assemblies and the Counsellors.⁸ Another stage of maturation also emerged at this time, stimulated by the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran, that required a greater involvement in the life of society. This stage was characterized by the emergence of the Faith from obscurity,⁹ greater involvement in external affairs,¹⁰ and a growing emphasis on the application of Bahá'í teachings to the problems facing humanity.¹¹

The processes of growth, development, and involvement with society are inseparable and mutually reinforcing aspects of the organic unfoldment of the Cause. As we look to the future, the Universal House of Justice has explained that the next stage of our progress would "be a phase in which the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh must of necessity anticipate a deep encounter with the forces operating with such bewildering ferocity throughout the world."¹² Our response to this challenge must be a greater consciousness of our mission, an ever-increasing maturity in action, and continuing progress in the areas of growth, development, and involvement with society.

5 *Wellspring of Guidance* 23

6 letter of Naw-Rúz 1974

7 *A Wider Horizon* 7-8

8 *A Wider Horizon* 41

9 *A Wider Horizon* 119

10 *A Wider Horizon* 56

11 *A Wider Horizon* 12

12 letter of November 26, 1992

Readings

1. “. . . they must deliver the Glad Tidings of the manifestation of the Lord of Hosts to all the people.”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan* 39

2. “A systematic, carefully conceived, and well-established Plan should be devised, rigorously pursued and continuously extended Its supreme immediate objective should be the permanent establishment of at least one center in every state of the American Republic and in every Republic of the American continent not yet enlisted under the banner of His Faith. Its ramifications should gradually be extended to the European continent, and its scope should be made to include those countries . . . where no avowed believer has established any definite residence.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 7

3. “The four-fold objectives of the forthcoming Crusade, marking the third and last phase of the initial epoch of the evolution of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Divine Plan are destined to culminate in the world-wide festivities commemorating the fast-approaching Most Great Jubilee. First, development of the institutions at the World Centre of the Faith in the Holy Land. Second, consolidation, through carefully devised measures on the home front of the twelve territories destined to serve as administrative bases for the operations of the twelve National Plans. Third, consolidation of all territories already opened to the Faith. Fourth, the opening of the remaining chief virgin territories on the planet. . . .”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World* 41-42

4. “God’s infant Faith . . . only succeeded, after the lapse of three-quarters of a century, in including . . . thirty-five countries

“The subsequent quarter of a century . . . witnessed the planting of the banner of the Faith in over forty territories of the globe The nine-year interval separating the first from the second Bahá’í Jubilee was signaled by the spiritual conquest of no less than fifty countries of the globe, whilst the first year of the Ten Year Plan has been immortalized by the opening of one hundred countries. . . .”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World* 61

5. “A far greater proportion of the avowed supporters of the Faith must arise . . . for the fourfold purpose of winning over an infinitely greater number of recruits to the army of Bahá’u’lláh fighting on the home front, of swelling to an unprecedented degree the isolated centers now scattered within its confines, of converting an increasing number of them into firmly founded groups, and of accelerating the formation of local assemblies, while safeguarding those already in existence.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 148

Growth

The Divine Plan: 1916

Before the first Plan:
1936

rigorously: strictly

*ramifications: branching
out*

Calling for the
Ten Year Crusade:
1952

Ten Year Crusade:
1954

Ten Year Crusade:
1956

6. “It has been due to the splendid victories in large-scale conversion that the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh has entered a new phase in its development and establishment throughout the world. It is imperative, therefore, that the process of teaching the masses be not only maintained but accelerated.” —The Universal House of Justice, *A Special Measure of Love* 29

Nine Year Plan: 1966

7. “For more than a century we have toiled to teach the Cause Now at last, at long last, the worldwide community of the Most Great Name is called upon to launch, on a global scale and to every stratum of human society, an enduring and intensive proclamation of the healing message. . . .” —The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 106

Nine Year Plan: 1967

stratum: a level of society composed of people with similar social, cultural, or economic status

8. “The stage is set for universal, rapid and massive growth of the Cause of God.” —The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 47

Six Year Plan: 1987

9. “The Faith of Bahá’u’lláh is represented in every country on earth. . . . Figures already available to the World Centre indicate that more than one and a half million souls entered the Cause during the Six Year Plan. . . . The campaign of proclamation launched in 1967 . . . and which gathered added momentum in 1979 with the surge of the persecution of the Iranian Bahá’í community, now covered a greatly expanded range with the distribution of ‘The Promise of World Peace’” —The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 97-98

Six Year Plan: 1992

10. “The increasing instances of entry by troops . . . [draws] attention to Shoghi Effendi’s vision which shapes our perception of glorious future possibilities in the teaching field. For he has asserted that the process of ‘entry by troops of peoples of divers nations and races into the Bahá’í world . . . will be the prelude to that long-awaited hour when a mass conversion on the part of these same nations and races, and as a direct result of a chain of events, momentous and possibly catastrophic in nature, and which cannot as yet be even dimly visualized, will suddenly revolutionize the fortunes of the Faith, derange the equilibrium of the world, and reinforce a thousand-fold the numerical strength as well as the material power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.’ We have every encouragement to believe that large-scale enrollments will expand, involving village after village, town after town, from one country to another. However, it is not for us to wait passively for the ultimate fulfillment of Shoghi Effendi’s vision. We few, placing our whole trust in the providence of God and regarding as a divine privilege the challenges which face us, must proceed to victory with the plans in hand.” —The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 79-80

Into the Future

momentous: of the utmost importance or significance

derange: upset; unbalance

11. “As the processes impelling a rapidly evolving Order on the highroad of its destiny multiply and gather momentum, attention should be increasingly directed to the vital need of ensuring, by every means possible, the deepening of the faith, the understanding and the spiritual life of the individuals who, as the privileged members of this community, are called upon to participate in this glorious unfoldment and are lending their assistance to this historic evolution. . . . For upon this spiritual foundation must depend the solidity of the institutions which they are now so painstakingly erecting. Every outward thrust into new fields, every multiplication of Bahá’í institutions, must be paralleled by a deeper thrust of the roots which sustain the spiritual life of the community and ensure its sound development.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Letters to Australia and New Zealand* 75-76

12. “Expansion and universal participation are the twin objectives of this initial phase of the second epoch of the Divine Plan The process of cooperation between national spiritual assemblies, already initiated by the beloved Guardian, will, during the course of this Plan, apply to over two hundred specific projects and will further strengthen this process which may well assume great importance in future stages of the Formative Age.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 25-26

13. “This Five Year Plan must witness the development in the worldwide Bahá’í community of distinctive Bahá’í characteristics implanted in it by Bahá’u’lláh Himself The coming of age of the human race must be foreshadowed by the mature, responsible understanding of human problems and the wise administration of their affairs by these same Bahá’í communities. The practice and development of such Bahá’í characteristics are the responsibility alike of individual Bahá’ís and the administrative institutions, although the greatest opportunity to foster their growth rests with the Local Spiritual Assemblies. . . .

“Strengthening and development of Local Spiritual Assemblies is a vital objective of the Five Year Plan. Success in this one goal will greatly enrich the quality of Bahá’í life, will heighten the capacity of the Faith to deal with entry by troops which is even now taking place and, above all, will demonstrate the solidarity and ever-growing distinctiveness of the Bahá’í community, thereby attracting more and more thoughtful souls to the Faith and offering a refuge to the leaderless and hapless millions of the spiritually bankrupt, moribund present order.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Naw-Ruz* 1974

Development

Six Year Plan of
Australia and New
Zealand: 1948

*impelling: driving forward
from within*

Nine Year Plan: 1964

Five Year Plan: 1974

14. “At the heart of all activities, the spiritual, intellectual and community life of the believers must be developed and fostered, requiring: the prosecution with increased vigor of the development of Local Spiritual Assemblies so that they may exercise their beneficial influence and guidance on the life of Bahá’í communities; the nurturing of a deeper understanding of Bahá’í family life; the Bahá’í education of children, including the holding of regular Bahá’í classes and, where necessary, the establishment of tutorial schools for the provision of elementary education; the encouragement of Bahá’í youth in study and service; and the encouragement of Bahá’í women to exercise to the full their privileges and responsibilities in the work of the community. . . .”

—The Universal House of Justice, Naw-Rúz 1979

15. “. . . we can readily appreciate that although it has hitherto been impracticable for Bahá’í institutions generally to emphasize development activities, the concept of social and economic development is enshrined in the sacred Teachings of our Faith. . . .

“Now, after all the years of constant teaching activity, the community of the Greatest Name has grown to the stage at which the processes of this development must be incorporated into its regular pursuits. . . . In the process and as a consequence, the friends will undoubtedly extend the benefits of their efforts to society as a whole, until all mankind achieves the progress intended by the Lord of the Age.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 7-8

16. “Our task is to build the Order of Bahá’u’lláh. Undeflected by the desperate expedients of those who seek to subdue the storm convulsing human life by political, economic, social or educational programs, let us, with single-minded devotion and concentrating all our efforts on our objective, raise His Divine System and . . . demonstrate the Bahá’í way of life. Wherever a Bahá’í community exists, whether large or small, let it be distinguished for its abiding sense of security and faith, its high standard of rectitude, its complete freedom from all forms of prejudice, the spirit of love among its members and for the closely knit fabric of its social life. The acute distinction between this and present day society will inevitably arouse the interest of the more enlightened, and as the world’s gloom deepens the light of Bahá’í life will shine brighter and brighter until its brilliance must eventually attract the disillusioned masses and cause them to enter the haven of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh, Who alone can bring them peace and justice and an ordered life.”

—Messages of the Universal House of Justice 12

Seven Year Plan: 1979

Seven Year Plan: 1983

hitherto: before this time; previously

Into the Future

undeflected: still on course; haven't turned away from

expedients: narrow or selfish interests

convulsing: violently disturbing; rocking

abiding: long-lasting; permanent

acute: sharp; distinctive

17. “Incapable as yet, in view of the restricted size of their community and the limited influence it now wields, of producing any marked effect on the great mass of their countrymen, let them focus their attention, for the present, on their own selves, their own individual needs, their own personal deficiencies and weaknesses, ever mindful that every intensification of effort on their part will better equip them for the time when they will be called upon to eradicate in their turn such evil tendencies from the lives and the hearts of the entire body of their fellow-citizens.” —Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* 20-21

18. “A wider horizon is opening before us, illuminated by a growing and universal manifestation of the inherent potentialities of the Cause for ordering human affairs. In this light can be discerned not only our immediate tasks but, more dimly, new pursuits and undertakings upon which we must shortly become engaged. . . .”

—The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 5

19. “The emergence from obscurity, which has been so marked a feature of the Cause of God during the first five years of the Seven Year Plan, has been attended by changes, both external and internal, affecting the Bahá’í world community. Externally, there are signs of a crystallization of a public image of the Cause—largely uninformed, however friendly—while internally growing maturity and confidence are indicated by increased administrative ability, a desire for Bahá’í communities to render service to the larger body of mankind and a deepening understanding of the relevance of the divine Message to modern problems. . . .

“There can be no doubt that the progress of the Cause from this time onward will be characterized by an ever increasing relationship to the agencies, activities, institutions and leading individuals of the non-Bahá’í world.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 17-18, 22

20. “Intimations in the non-Bahá’í world of a rapidly growing realization that mankind is indeed entering a new stage in its evolution present us with unprecedented opportunities. . . .

“The time has come for the Bahá’í community to become more involved in the life of the society around it, without in the least supporting any of the world’s moribund and divisive concepts, or slackening its direct teaching efforts, but rather, by association, exerting its influence towards unity, demonstrating its ability to settle differences by consultation rather than by confrontation, violence or schism, and declaring its faith in the divine purpose of human existence.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 35

Involvement with Society

1st Seven Year Plan of North America: 1938

eradicate: get rid of

Seven Year Plan: 1983

Seven Year Plan: 1984

crystallization: to a definite form

Seven Year Plan: 1985

intimations: hints

moribund: at the point of death

divisive: creating discord or dissension

schism: separation into factions

21. “All this has kept our beloved Faith under international observation, an interest increased not only by the circulation of the Peace Statement but also by the rapidly expanding activities in the field of economic and social development. . . .

“National Bahá’í communities have organized and successfully conducted inter-religious conferences, peace seminars, symposiums on racism and other subjects on which we have a specific contribution to make, often achieving widespread publicity and the interest of highly-placed leaders of society.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 46-47

22. “The exposure of influential segments of the public to Bahá’í ideas in such areas as peace, the environment, status of women, education and literacy, has induced a response which increasingly calls upon the Bahá’ís to participate with others in a range of projects associated with governments or with non-governmental organizations.

“Moreover, such exposure is creating in the public mind the realization that the Faith has answers to current problems and thus the expectation that the Bahá’í community should take a more active part in public affairs.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 99

23. “. . . ‘when, as a result of human perversity, the light of religion is quenched in men’s hearts . . . a deplorable decline in the fortunes of humanity immediately sets in, bringing in its wake all the evils which a wayward soul is capable of revealing. . . .’

“Such, unfortunately, is the state to which institutions and individuals have come in our time. Against this background the requirements of the Covenant assume even more critical importance than before. There can be no doubt that if our community is to cope with the situation, it must advance rapidly towards the next phase in its evolution. It will be a phase in which the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh must of necessity anticipate a deep encounter with the forces operating with such bewildering ferocity throughout the world.”

—The Universal House of Justice, November 26, 1992

24. “The champion builders of Bahá’u’lláh’s rising World Order must scale nobler heights of heroism as humanity plunges into greater depths of despair, degradation, dissension and distress. Let them forge ahead into the future serenely confident that the hour of their mightiest exertions and the supreme opportunity for their greatest exploits must coincide with the apocalyptic upheaval marking the lowest ebb in mankind’s fast-declining fortunes.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 58

Six Year Plan: 1987

Six Year Plan: 1992

The Holy Year: 1992

perversity: state or condition of being corrupt

deplorable: lamentable; bad, wretched

Into the Future

apocalyptic: pertaining to the end of the world prophesied in the Bible

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 91.

Illustrations

The following report from *The Bahá'í World* tells of the impact of the initial emphasis by Shoghi Effendi on the systematic execution of the Divine Plan, and of the first fruits of that effort:

“At the center of the Bahá'í world, the Guardian of the Cause of God, foreseeing this act in the drama of the world's history, had since 1921 been training the North American believers for their part in it. In 1935 he began to enlarge their spiritual consciousness by the translation of the *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* and thereby opened to their minds the sublime potentialities of the Day of God. At the same time he announced that the first stage of the formative period had come to an end and directed their energies to a more active teaching program.

“It was not until May 1, 1936, however, while the Convention was in session, that the full extent of the program was revealed. No one who was present on that historic occasion will forget the astounding manifestation of unity between the North American Bahá'ís and the Guardian which appeared when, just after one of the delegates had proposed a rereading of the long neglected Tablets of the Divine Plan revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá twenty years before, the following cablegram from Shoghi Effendi was received:

“Convey (to) American believers abiding gratitude efforts unitedly exerted (in) teaching field. Inaugurated campaign should be vigorously pursued, systematically extended. Appeal (to) assembled delegates ponder historic appeal voiced by 'Abdu'l-Bahá (in) Tablets of the Divine Plan Opportunities (of) present hour unimaginably precious. Would to God every State within American Republic and every Republic in American continent might ere termination (of) this glorious century embrace the light (of the) Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. . . .”

“The Convention was electrified. Tardily aware of the instructions given so long ago by the Master, only half comprehending their implications, slow to believe in their own ability to pursue a teaching program so much more extensive than that of the present time, the American Bahá'ís were at first dazed and then galvanized into action by the sweeping demands of the message. . . .

“The Spiritual Assembly of Mexico City was organized at Ridván 1938. This was the greatest of those early triumphs of which the Guardian wrote: ‘Through their initial victories they (the American believers) have provided the impulse that must now surge and, with relentless force sweep over their sister communities and eventually overpower the entire human race.’”

galvanized: aroused to awareness or action

—Garreta Busey, *Uniting the Americas*,
A Compendium of Volumes of the Bahá'í World, I-XII, 385-87

After more than fifty years of the systematic execution of the Divine Plan, the Six Year Plan ended in “a triumph that has been manifested in a new variety of victories, in new beginnings, fresh initiatives and mature institutional developments.” This triumph included:

“One: The Faith of Bahá’u’lláh is represented in every country Figures already available to the World Centre indicate that more than one and a half million souls entered the Cause during the Six Year Plan. Of particular interest was the three-year special teaching project in Guyana which resulted in an increase of the size of the Bahá’í community to some six percent of the country’s population.

“Two: The proclamation of the Faith throughout the world attained an entirely new stage. . . .

“Three: The dedication in December 1986 of the Mother Temple of the Indian Subcontinent to public worship introduced a new force to the teaching and proclamation activities of the Faith. . . .

“Four: The further emergence of the Faith from obscurity is reflected in distinctive ways. . . . Altogether, the drive of the ramified proclamation campaign has produced a public resonance about the Faith, which can be said to be known to the most significant public institutions and prominent persons on earth.

“Five: Bahá’í projects of social and economic development have greatly multiplied and brought much credit to the community in the examples of the power of group initiative and voluntary consultative action that have been set in numerous places. Activities in this respect involved more than one thousand projects. . . .

“Six: Youth activities took on a special character shaped by the idea of a youth year of service. . . . They had much to do with the many victories in the former communist countries. Their work in social and economic development projects attracted, in some cases, the attention of governments and development organizations. . . .

“Seven: The advances in the consolidation of the Bahá’í administrative system are evident from the marked improvement in the internal development and collaborative efforts of its two arms. . . . Collaterally, the work of these institutions has facilitated and boosted the evolution of the Administrative Order. . . .

“Eight: The great building projects on the Mountain of God . . . entered a new stage. . . .

“All these developments have made it evident that the accumulated potential for further progress of the Bahá’í community is incalculable.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván 1992, A Wider Horizon* 97-102

ramified: divided or spread out into branchlike parts

resonance: intensification of sound by sympathetic vibrations

collaterally: in a parallel or corresponding way; accompanying or supporting

Further Study

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

What does the passage say?	In what specific ways can this passage be applied in your life?
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List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 91 and the additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

- 1.
- 2.

Messages to America, Citadel of Faith, Messages to the Bahá'í World, Dawn of a New Day, Letters to Australia and New Zealand, Lights of Divine Guidance, Letters to Canada, and Unfolding Destiny by Shoghi Effendi

Books containing messages by the Guardian to various National communities that address the presentation and execution of plans.

Wellspring of Guidance, Messages of the Universal House of Justice, The Five Year Plan, The Seven Year Plan, and A Wider Horizon, by the Universal House of Justice

Books containing messages by the House of Justice that address the progress of the Nine, Five, Seven, and Six Year Plans.

A Wider Horizon, by the Universal House of Justice, pages 95-109

The 1992 Ridvan message of the Universal House of Justice that describes in some detail the level of development of the Faith after the Six Year Plan.

**Personal
Reflection**

**Remaining
Questions**

**Additional
Reading and
Resources**

Questions

The following questions review parts of the content of the lesson for use in individual study. Refer to the Discussion section on the next page for questions to consider in group study.

1. Name at least four goals mentioned in the readings which promote the process of growth:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____

2. (Circle all that apply.) As a Local Spiritual Assembly develops it affects the development of the community. How?
 - a. frees community members to concentrate on solving personal problems
 - b. the community becomes able to handle entry by troops
 - c. the distinctiveness of Bahá'í community becomes manifest
 - d. individuals are no longer responsible for creating systematic plans to teach the Faith
 - e. the quality of life in the Bahá'í community improves

What are some of the signs of the growing maturity of the Bahá'í community and its institutions:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

Answers

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

1. Goals that promote the process of growth are: a bolder proclamation of the Faith to the masses (see #3, page 46); opening new territories and centers to the Faith (see #1, #3, and #4, page 46); teaching the masses (see #5 and #7, page 47); and a systematic, carefully conceived, well-established plan (see #2, page 46).
2. **b, c, and e.** All three are found in quote #12, page 48. Regarding “a” and “d,” individual community members still have the responsibility to nurture the growth of the community and to make individual plans to teach the Faith (see page 57).
3. Signs of the growing maturity of the Bahá’í community and its institutions include: Bahá’ís participating in the social and economic life of the countries in which they reside; the collaboration of institutions and believers to create goals of a plan; a unity of diversity of actions; a desire to render service to the larger body of mankind; increased administrative ability; and a deepening understanding of the relevance of the teachings to modern problems.

Discussion

Why is the development of distinctive Bahá’í communities so important? How is it related to growth?

What is the progress of your community in the process of growth? In the development of community life? In involvement in life of society? What is the plan for progressing in each area?

What are the characteristics of a mature human being? Think of biological development as well as intellectual and emotional. How is the maturity of the Cause similar?

Based on the passages defining signs of growing maturity, what progress toward maturity do you see in your community? What does your community need to move in that direction?

5

Vision and Systematic Planning

Introduction

At the start of the Six Year Plan in 1986, the Faith entered the Fourth Epoch of the Formative Age. This transition was marked by a new level of maturity in the institutions of the Cause¹ For the first time, the national goals of an international plan were formulated by National Assemblies in consultation with Continental Counselors.

The requirements of maturity in the approach to plans also extends to local communities. Within the context of global plans, local spiritual assemblies are called upon to foster a vision of the growth of the Faith in their region and create plans of action to contribute to the achievement of the goals. Even individuals² and families³ are called upon to adopt goals and to pursue them systematically so that they may play their part in the unfoldment of these plans.

In this chapter, we will examine general principles outlined in the Writings that contribute to the development and implementation of action plans.

1 The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 43-44

2 "It is now imperative for every Bahá'í to set for himself individual teaching goals. The admonition of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to lead at least one new soul to the Faith each year and the exhortation of Shoghi Effendi to hold a Bahá'í fireside in one's home every Bahá'í month are examples of individual goals. Many have capacities to do even more, but this alone will assure final and complete victory for the Plan." (*Messages from The Universal House of Justice* 35)

3 "As far as the teaching work is concerned, just as individuals are called upon to adopt teaching goals, the family itself could adopt its own goals. In this way the friends could make of their families strong healthy units, bright candles for the diffusion of the light of the Kingdom, and powerful centers to attract the heavenly confirmations." (on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, April 17, 1981)

Overview

Each of the global plans that make up the stages of the Divine Plan must, in their turn, be achieved through plans of action⁴ that are developed and prosecuted by national assemblies, local assemblies, and individual believers.

The successful creation of action plans requires “a clearer vision” of the “greatness of the Faith” and the “significance” of our “mission”⁵ as well as of “the requirements of the present hour.”⁶ Their successful prosecution requires “mature, systematic, energetic execution,”⁷—a process that involves devising strategies, implementing sound lines of action, and reflecting on the effectiveness of actions taken.

Explanation

The concept of systematic plans can be understood by imagining that we have decided to go on a distant journey. We travel 45 miles north the first day, 45 miles west the second day, and then 45 miles southeast the third day. Over 130 miles were traveled—but was the journey successful? To evaluate our endeavor, we need to have more information. Where are we going? Where did we begin? What was our plan to get from where we were to where we are going? Simply moving about is not enough to reach a destination.

In the same way, our efforts for the progress of the Cause are a kind of journey. We are trying to achieve Bahá’u’lláh’s new World Order and a divine civilization on earth. The Bahá’í Writings describe the goal and provide many details for achieving it. Yet, we are charged to translate that guidance into action.

Many times, our community planning is limited to the establishment of goals for a global plan and the assignment of the goals to specific regions or committees. The friends are called upon to arise and win the goals by participating in events, projects or campaigns that are conceived separately and in isolation from each other, with little sense of continuity. This can be compared to our trip when we have not planned systematically. A great deal of activity, like a great deal of traveling, occurs—but does it get us closer to our goal?

4 Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 157

5 Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day* 132

6 Shoghi Effendi, *Letters to Australia and New Zealand* 84

7 The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 218

The keys to a successful plan are the vision that underlies the framework of the plan, and its systematic nature.

The Guardian commented upon the “vision” that galvanizes Bahá’í communities into action.⁸ It consists of two aspects. The first is a vision of the nature and purpose of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh formed through a profound study of the Writings. The second is an understanding of the conditions—both within and without the Cause—under which our work is performed. An analysis of these conditions is found in the letters of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice. These two aspects of vision, together with knowledge gleaned from experience, inform our consultation, create unity of thought, and provide a basis for creating and implementing a plan of action.

Creating a systematic plan involves developing strategies to translate our vision into reality, and pursuing such strategies through lines of action. A “line of action” refers to a sequence of projects and activities aimed at an objective in which each effort builds on the previous one and sets the stage for further achievements. For example, achieving a vision of active Bahá’í communities in an area of large-scale growth might be pursued by a strategy to work with youth and children. One line of action in this strategy might include developing effective materials, training a group of children’s class teacher trainers, holding a series of courses for teachers, and then guiding the implementation and improvement of children’s classes.

In a mature national or local plan, a number of lines of action are carried on simultaneously, each reinforcing one another. This is a “unity in diversity of actions” in which “different individuals will concentrate on different activities, appreciating the salutary effect of the aggregate on the growth and development of the Faith.”⁹

Our vision, strategies, and lines of action are constantly evolving based on a growing understanding of the Faith, continued guidance from the Universal House of Justice, and our experience in action. This evolution is guided by a simultaneous process of action and reflection, where our experiences in various activities can be evaluated and revised as necessary to achieve our goals. In this way, even if we set off on our journey in the wrong direction, we can assess our progress and make the necessary changes to achieve our goals.

⁸ *Unfolding Destiny* 272

⁹ The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 80

Readings

1. “Be united in counsel, be one in thought.” —*Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 138

2. “Indeed in the estimation of men of wisdom keenness of understanding is due to keenness of vision.” —*Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 35

3. “. . . it is through them [“the Holy Words”] that the friends can get the inspiration and the vision they need for the successful accomplishment of their work for the Cause.”

—on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Meetings /The Nineteen Day Feast* 24

4. “. . . with clear vision we are enabled to struggle onward and upward, ever progressing in the paths of virtue and holiness, and becoming the means of light to the world.” —‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 82

5. “How great is the need at this moment when the promised outpourings of His grace are ready to be extended to every soul, for us all to form a broad vision of the mission of the Cause to mankind, and to do all in our power to spread it throughout the world!”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration* 18

6. “Many and grave may be the obstacles, whether from within or from without, which we shall have to encounter in the days to come, but we feel sure that if we but maintain consistently before our eyes a broad and noble vision of its significance and vital necessity in these days, and above all of its universality and all-conquering power, we shall be enabled to surmount them, one and all, and by the Power of Faith, carry the Ark of the Covenant to its Haven of Safety and Triumph.

“It is, I firmly believe, of the utmost urgent importance that, with unity of purpose and action firmly established in our midst . . . we should form one united front and combat, wisely and tactfully, every force that might darken the spirit of the Movement, cause division in its ranks, and narrow it by dogmatic and sectarian belief.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration* 45

7. “The vision now disclosed to the eyes of this community is indeed enthralling. The tasks which, if that vision is to be fulfilled, must be valiantly shouldered by its members are staggering. . . . Bahá’u’lláh Himself . . . will amply bless and repay its members if they but persevere on the long road they have so steadfastly trodden, and pursue, with undimmed vision, with unrelaxing resolve and unshakable faith, their onward march towards their chosen goal.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 105

Creating a Unified Vision of Our Mission

universality; covering the whole world

surmount: overcome

dogmatic: marked by authoritarian, often arrogant assertion of principles

sectarian: narrow in outlook; of a sect or sects

trodden: walked

Creating a Systematic Plan of Action

8. “The new hour has struck in history of our beloved Cause, calling for nation-wide, systematic, sustained efforts in teaching field. . . .”

—Shoghi Effendi, Cablegram of October 26, 1935, *Messages to America* 5-6

9. “The challenge to the local and national administrative institutions of the Faith is to organize and promote the teaching work through systematic plans”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 76

10. “The initiation of a Plan, carefully devised, universally supported, and designed to promote effectively the vital interests of the Faith, and attain a definite objective within a specified number of years, would seem, at the present hour, highly desirable and opportune, and will, as a magnet, attract, to an unprecedented degree, the blessings of Bahá’u’lláh on the members of both communities, both individually and collectively.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Letters to Australia and New Zealand* 67

11. “I would rather entreat each and every one of them to immortalize this approaching, fateful hour in the evolution of a World Spiritual Crusade, by a fresh consecration to their God-given mission, coupled with an instantaneous plan of action, at once so dynamic and decisive, as to wipe out . . . the deficiencies which have, to no small extent, bogged down the operations of the Crusade on the home-front, and tremendously accelerate, on the other, the progress of the triple task, launched, in three continents, and constituting one of its preeminent objectives.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 157

12. “Armed with the strength of action and the co-operation of the individual believers composing it, the community as a whole should endeavor to establish greater stability in the patterns of its development, locally and nationally, through sound, systematic planning and execution of its work—and this in striking contrast to the shortlived enthusiasms and frenetic superficialities so characteristic of present-day American life. A Bahá’í community which is consistent in its fundamental life-giving, life-sustaining activities will at its heart be serene and confident; it will resonate with spiritual dynamism, will exert irresistible influence, will set a new course in social evolution, enabling it to win the respect and eventually the allegiance of admirers and critics alike. These profound possibilities reside in the will of the individual to take initiative, to act in accordance with the guidance offered by Bahá’í institutions, and to maintain such action regardless of the myriad distractions posed by the disintegration of a society adrift in a sea of materialism.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 27

frenetic: frantic; full of violent excitement

resonate: vibrate

dynamism: state or quality of being energetic; vigorous

myriad: many and varied

13. “The hour is ripe for the proclamation, without fear, without reserve, and without hesitation, and on a scale never as yet undertaken, of the One Message that can alone extricate humanity from the morass into which it is steadily sinking, and from which they who claim to be the followers of the Most Great Name can and will eventually rescue it. The sooner they who labor for the recognition and triumph of His Faith in the new world arise to carry out these inescapable duties, the sooner will the hopes, the aims and objectives of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as enshrined in His own Plan, be translated from the realm of vision to the plane of actuality and manifest the full force of the potentialities with which they have been endowed.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 79

14. “. . . the adoption of a local plan by the Local Assembly can exert a far-reaching influence on its work and on the life of the community.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities* 7.14

15. “Teaching the Cause must be viewed according to the conditions of the age and of the times so as to see what course is deemed proper to take. Other matters also should be dealt with in like manner. They must, however, take care that nothing doth take place contrary to the divine verses sent down in this glorious Manifestation, inasmuch as naught but that which hath been prescribed by the True One—exalted be His glory—would serve the interests of His servants.”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities* 7.1

16. “Their function is not to dictate, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the friends whom they represent. . . . They should, within the limits of wise discretion, take the friends into their confidence, acquaint them with their plans, share with them their problems and anxieties, and seek their advice and counsel.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration* 64

17. “I would however, at this early state of our work, strongly urge, nay entreat, the friends not to dissipate their efforts, but to seek, after frank, mature and continuous deliberation to arrive at a common conclusion as to the most urgent requirements and needs of the hour, and having unified their views to strive to uphold and enforce them with promptitude, wholeheartedness and understanding.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities* 10.20

18. “. . . in all aspects of the work of the Cause . . . supervision, careful planning and lack of extravagance should be observed and be seen to be upheld.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities* 10.12

Action and Reflection

Guiding the Unfoldment of the Faith

morass: low, soggy ground; a situation that is hard to clarify or settle

endued: provided; endowed with

discretion: the exercise of caution or good judgment in speech or behavior; prudence

dissipate: to use up unwisely; squander

promptitude: performed without delay

19. “If this activity is well organized, rest thou assured that it will yield great results. Firmness and steadfastness, however, are necessary, otherwise it will continue for some time, but later be gradually forgotten.”

—*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 143-44

20. “It is not sufficient to pray diligently for guidance, but this prayer must be followed by meditation as to the best methods of action and then action itself. Even if the action should not immediately produce results, or perhaps not be entirely correct, that does not make so much difference, because prayers can only be answered through action and if someone’s action is wrong, God can use that method of showing the pathway which is right.”

—on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Individual and Teaching* 40

21. “At this stage in the development of the Faith there are many new experiments taking place in the teaching field and also in the work of consolidation. It is obvious that not all these experiments will meet with success. Many have great merit while others may have little or none. However, in the present period of transition and rapid growth of the Cause we must seek diligently for the merit of every method devised to teach and deepen the masses.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities* 7.21

22. “It is also worth remembering that projects may need amendment to or alteration of their objectives as operational experience may show. The need for such changes can only be realized if constant monitoring is carried out and is accepted as a component part of the project.”

—on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *DDBC* 13.12

23. “The periodic reevaluation of the effectiveness of the teaching work is an essential factor in promoting the growth of every community. Through this process a community would reassess its teaching program with a view to introducing improvements where necessary.”

—on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *DDBC* 7.14-15

24. “The problems which confront the believers at the present time, whether social, spiritual, economic or administrative will be gradually solved as the number and the resources of the friends multiply and their capacity for service and for the application of Bahá’í principles develops. They should be patient, confident and active in utilizing every possible opportunity that presents itself within the limits now necessarily imposed upon them.”

—Shoghi Effendi, quoted in *A Wider Horizon* 10

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 91.

Further Study

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

What does the passage say?	In what specific ways can this passage be applied in your life?
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List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 91 and the additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

- 1.
- 2.

Letters of the International Teaching Centre

A number of letters of the International Teaching Centre to Continental Counselors discuss the issue of vision and planning in light of the Writings and practical experience. Though these letters are not published, they may be accessible through your Auxiliary Board member or assistant. Useful extracts can be found in letters of December 6, 1988, May 20, 1990, September 13, 1990, October 21, 1990, November 17, 1992, and especially, a working paper entitled “Building Visions of Growth, Devising Strategies, Establishing Lines of Action, and Inspiring Dedication to Service” presented in January of 1992.

The Local Spiritual Assembly and Teaching

A module in the Assembly development program in the United States. One section of the module addresses the issue of vision, planning, and action for local assemblies.

Personal Reflection

Remaining Questions

Additional Reading and Resources

Questions

The following questions review parts of the content of the lesson for use in individual study. Refer to the Discussion section on the next page for questions to consider in group study.

1. Vision is an important element of planning. According to Shoghi Effendi, on what aspects of the Cause should our vision be based?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____

2. What are four characteristics the Universal House of Justice says will characterize a community that has established stability in its patterns of development:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____

Answers

The following are suggested answers. Depending on your understanding of the quotations, you may have different answers.

Consider the suggested answers a starting point for thought and discussion.

1. Our vision, Shoghi Effendi suggests, should encompass: the mission of the Cause; the significance of the Cause; its vital necessity; its universality; and its all-conquering power (see #5 and #6, page 60). This vision needs to encompass the work at the local level, as the Bahá'í community and assembly strive to become the means for the spiritual conquest of their region.
2. The characteristics of such a community are: it will be serene and confident; will exert irresistible influence; will resonate with spiritual dynamism; will set a new course in social evolution. This stability comes through sound, systematic planning and execution of its work. See #12, page 61.

Discussion

Why is vision so important? How does vision “galvanize” individuals, communities and institutions into action? Who is responsible for providing vision?

What is the relationship between vision and “action and reflection”?

Where does vision come from? What happens if a community does not have it? What are the obstacles that keep vision from being translated into action? How are they overcome?

What is a “line of action”? What is the relationship between vision, strategies, and lines of action?

What does it mean to create a “systematic” plan? How is this different from planning activities or events?

How do we maintain systematic and sustained efforts in the face of the “distractions posed by the disintegration of a society adrift in a sea of materialism?” (Refer to #12, page 61.)

How do the concepts discussed in this chapter apply to your local community’s efforts in the current global plan?

6

Leadership and Participation

Introduction

Once a plan of action is established, it requires, for its successful prosecution, the integrated efforts of individual believers and the institutions of the Faith as they contribute to the well-being and advancement of the community.

A letter written on behalf of the Guardian indicated: “The Guardian wishes also to express his heartfelt thanks to the Indian N.S.A. for its splendid efforts for the extension of the teaching work throughout India. The evidences of its warm and effective response to his earnest appeal for the inauguration of a new systematized and nation-wide teaching campaign in that country are indeed such as to give him fresh hopes concerning the future expansion and consolidation of the Faith. . . . Nothing short of the unity, self sacrifice and intelligent and systematized planning which the local and national assemblies and also the individual believers may show forth throughout the coming years can enable them to attain this vital teaching goal.”¹

This chapter will focus on the relationship between leadership and participation of institutions and individuals in the organic unfoldment of the Cause.

¹ *Dawn of a New Day* 63

Overview

A healthy Bahá'í community, the Universal House of Justice indicates, should demonstrate an “acute distinction” between itself and “present-day society” that will “arouse the interest of the more enlightened” and “attract the disillusioned masses and cause them to enter the haven of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh.”² Such a community will demonstrate “the power of Bahá'u'lláh to organize human affairs on a basis of spiritual unity,”³ will “exert irresistible influence,” and will “set a new course in social evolution.”⁴

A distinctive, active Bahá'í community is both an objective and a contributing element in the execution of any plan. Only as the institutions of the Faith and the individual believers and families that make up a community harmoniously fulfill their roles of leadership and participation can a strong Bahá'í community evolve.

“The whole machinery of assemblies, of committees and conventions is to be regarded as a means, and not an end in itself,” the Guardian explained. “They will rise or fall according to their capacity to further the interests, to coordinate the activities, to apply the principles, to embody the ideals and execute the purpose of the Bahá'í Faith.”⁵ At the same time, accomplishment of the objectives of any plan “should at no time be regarded as the exclusive concern or sole privilege of Bahá'í administrative institutions.” “All must participate,”⁶ Shoghi Effendi has emphatically stated.

Explanation

In a traditional model of leadership, the leader is everything. He or she is the one with authority to make decisions, the one who offers guidance and example to others on what they should do, and even is the one who has the power to make things happen. However, in the design for His world order, Bahá'u'lláh has separated these elements of leadership into various parts of the organic Bahá'í community.

Authority resides in the elected bodies. The nature of this authority is not dictatorial—it is consultative, it is trusteeship, it is exercised through divine virtues—but it is authority, absolute and binding.

2 *Wellspring of Guidance* 147
3 *A Wider Horizon* 36
4 *A Wider Horizon* 27

5 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 9
6 Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* 45

Inspiration, insights, and example are provided by the “learned.” In this age, Bahá’u’lláh has preserved the benefits which learned individuals can offer society while protecting His world order from the negative consequences of individual authority.⁷ He has provided for an appointed institution that offers counsel to individuals and assemblies, and whose members are the standard bearers of the plans.

Power, the ability to accomplish tasks, rests in the body of believers. If the individual does not arise to act, nothing is achieved. Freedom of individual action is bounded by appropriate administrative channels, but within that framework “any activity he or she deems fit to undertake” can be initiated “for the furtherance of the Plan.”⁸

Leadership in the Bahá’í community, whether from individuals or institutions, entails empowering others to participate—enabling them to play their part in the growth and life of the community.

The various dimensions of leadership and participation merge to create an environment for constructive action that contributes to the healthy organic unfoldment of each community. Assemblies, in consultation with the Auxiliary Board member or assistant, create a local plan based on the resources and opportunities available to accomplish a part of the national goals. The local plan addresses the participation of all believers, with special attention to children, youth, women and minorities, for “the best Assembly is the one that capitalizes the talents of all the members of the group and keeps them busy in some form of active participation in serving the Cause.”⁹

The Board members or assistants consult with assemblies, offering suggestions and guidance, directing their attention to the goals of the National Assembly, and, when appropriate, to passages from the Writings. They also work to release the power of individuals to accomplish the plans, and through their own actions in the teaching field, provide a model to inspire and lead others.

Each individual, through the adoption of a personal teaching plan, systematically helps to execute the plans and activities of the local and national assembly. Individuals can also initiate personal teaching activities, bringing their plans and ongoing efforts to the assembly to receive its support and encouragement.

7 The Universal House of Justice, *The Continental Boards of Counselors* 44-45

8 Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* 50

9 The Universal House of Justice, *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities* 3.14

Readings

1. “The harmonious interaction and the proper discharge of the duties of these institutions representing the rulers and the learned among the people of Bahá is the essential basis at this time for the protection of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh and the fulfillment of its God-given mandate.” —The Universal House of Justice, *The Continental Board of Counsellors* 67

2. “The Counselors, their Auxiliary Boards and their assistants on the one hand, and the National and the Local Spiritual Assemblies with their committees on the other, are all potent instruments for the teaching work. With full cooperation between them and in a spirit of unity in conducting their operations these institutions will be bountifully blessed and confirmed. The loving collaboration and dedication exemplified by these agencies and the spirit of unity they manifest in effectively reinforcing and directing the efforts of the friends will release abundant spiritual forces that will energize the body of the believers who are called upon to offer their highest service to the Faith which they have dedicated themselves to serve.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities* 7.29

3. “The local assemblies should inspire confidence in the individual believers, and these in their turn should express their readiness to fully abide by the decisions and directions of the local assembly: the two must learn to co-operate, and realize that only through such a co-operation can the institutions of the Cause effectively and permanently function. . . . The spirit of the Cause is one of mutual cooperation and not that of a dictatorship.”

—on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities* 1.7

4. “The first quality for leadership, both among individuals and Assemblies, is the capacity to use the energy and competence that exists in the rank and file of its followers. Otherwise the more competent members of the group will go at a tangent and try to find elsewhere a field of work and where they could use their energy.”

—on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities* 3.14

5. “The whole object in Bahá’í administration is not only to manage the affairs of the Cause, but to stimulate the believers to work for it and to teach it to the masses.”

—on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day* 194

6. “Authority and direction flow from the Assemblies, whereas the power to accomplish the tasks resides primarily in the entire body of the believers. It is the principal task of the Auxiliary Boards to assist in arousing and releasing this power.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *The Continental Board of Counsellors* 37

Leadership in the Bahá’í Community

*tangent: go off in a
different direction*

7. “It is the responsibility of Spiritual Assemblies, assisted by their committees, to organize and direct the teaching work. . . .”

—The Universal House of Justice, *The Continental Board of Counsellors* 37

Authority

8. “. . . every one should conscientiously take an active part in the election of these Assemblies, abide by their decisions, enforce their decree, and cooperate with them wholeheartedly in their task of stimulating the growth of the Movement throughout all regions.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration* 41

9. “. . . the Auxiliary Boards should work closely with the grass roots of the community: the individual believers, groups and Local Spiritual Assemblies, advising, stimulating and assisting them.”

—*Messages of the Universal House of Justice* 30

Inspiration, Insight,
and Example

10. “The primary tasks of the Propagation Boards, however, are to direct the believers’ attention to the goals of whatever plans have been placed before them, to stimulate and assist them to promote the teaching work in the fields of proclamation, expansion, consolidation and pioneering, to encourage contributions to the funds, and to act as standard-bearers of the teachers of the Faith, leading them to new achievements in the diffusion of God’s Message to their fellow human beings.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities* 1.14-1.15

11. “It is the bounden duty of every American believer, as the faithful trustee of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Divine Plan, to initiate, promote, and consolidate, within the limits fixed by the administrative principles of the Faith, any activity he or she deems fit to undertake for the furtherance of the Plan. . . . Let him not wait for any directions, or expect any special encouragement, from the elected representatives of his community. . . .”

—Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* 50

Power

12. “. . . the first and best way, to remedy such situations is to oneself do what is right. One soul can be the cause of the spiritual illumination of a continent. Now that you . . . see more clearly what is lacking in your own community, there is nothing to prevent you from arising and showing such an example, such a love and spirit of service, as to enkindle the hearts of your fellow Bahá’ís.

“He urges you to study deeply the teachings, teach others, study with those Bahá’ís who are anxious to do so, the deeper teachings of our Faith, and through example, effort and prayer, bring about a change.”

—on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 50

13. “Every believer has a part to play, and is capable of playing it”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 62

14. “In that same message we indicated the meaning of universal participation: ‘. . . the dedicated effort of every believer in teaching, in living the Bahá’í life, in contributing to the Fund, and particularly in the persistent effort to understand more and more the significance of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation’

“‘Regard the world as the human body,’ wrote Bahá’u’lláh to Queen Victoria. We can surely regard the Bahá’í world, the army of God, in the same way. In the human body, every cell, every organ, every nerve has its part to play. When all do so the body is healthy, vigorous, radiant, ready for every call made upon it. No cell, however humble, lives apart from the body, whether in serving it or receiving from it. This is true of the body of mankind in which God ‘has endowed each humble being with ability and talent,’ and is supremely true of the body of the Bahá’í world community. . . . Therefore, in this organic, divinely guided, blessed, and illumined body the participation of every believer is of the utmost importance, and is a source of power and vitality as yet unknown to us. . . . The Bahá’í world community, growing like a healthy new body, develops new cells, new organs, new functions and powers as it presses on to its maturity, when every soul, living for the Cause of God, will receive from that Cause, health, assurance, and the overflowing bounties of Bahá’u’lláh which are diffused through His divinely ordained Order.

“In addition to teaching, every believer can pray. Every believer can strive to make his ‘own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh.’ Every believer can contribute to the Fund. Not all believers can give public talks, not all are called upon to serve on administrative institutions. But all can pray, fight their own spiritual battles, and contribute to the Fund. If every believer will carry out these sacred duties, we shall be astonished at the accession of power which will result to the whole body, and which in its turn will give rise to further growth and the showering of greater blessings on all of us.

“The real secret of universal participation lies in the Master’s oft-expressed wish that the friends should love each other, constantly encourage each other, work together, be as one soul in one body, and in so doing become a true, organic, healthy body animated and illumined by the spirit.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 37-39

accession: acquiring more of

15. “This challenge, so severe and insistent, and yet so glorious, faces no doubt primarily the individual believer on whom, in the last resort, depends the fate of the entire community. He it is who constitutes the warp and woof on which the quality and pattern of the whole fabric must depend. . . . Without his support, at once whole-hearted, continuous and generous, every measure adopted, and every plan formulated, by the body which acts as the national representative of the community to which he belongs, is foredoomed to failure. The World Centre of the Faith itself is paralyzed if such a support on the part of the rank and file of the community is denied it. The Author of the Divine Plan Himself is impeded in His purpose if the proper instruments for the execution of His design are lacking.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 130-31

impeded: blocked

16. “Though the institutions of the Faith are responsible for planning the goals and activities of the Cause, for stimulating and encouraging the believers to arise, and for supporting and unifying them in their services, it is, in the final analysis, through the spiritual decisions and actions of the individual believers that the Faith moves forward on its course to ultimate victory. It is the ardent hope of the Universal House of Justice that every faithful follower of Bahá’u’lláh will search his or her heart and turn with full attention and loving self-sacrifice to the consideration of the goals of the Six Year Plan, and determine how to play a part in their achievement.”

—on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, February 25, 1986

17. “The Bahá’í Cause encourages community life and makes it a duty for every one of its followers to become a living, a fully active and responsible member of the world-wide Bahá’í fellowship.”

—on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance* 475-76

18. “And now as I look into the future, I hope to see the friends at all times, in every land, and of every shade of thought and character, voluntarily and joyously rallying round their local and in particular their national centers of activity, upholding and promoting their interests with complete unanimity and contentment, with perfect understanding, genuine enthusiasm, and sustained vigor. This indeed is the one joy and yearning of my life, for it is the fountainhead from which all future blessings will flow, the broad foundation upon which the security of the Divine Edifice must ultimately rest. May we not hope that now at last the dawn of a brighter day is breaking upon our beloved Cause?”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration* 67

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 91.

Illustration

“Many years ago in Baghhdad I saw a certain officer sitting upon the ground. Before him a large paper was placed into which he was sticking needles tipped with small red and white flags. First he would stick them into the paper, then thoughtfully pull them out and change their position. I watched him with curious interest for a long time, then asked, ‘What are you doing?’ He replied, ‘I have in mind something which is historically related of Napoleon I during his war against Austria. One day, it is said, his secretary found him sitting upon the ground as I am now doing, sticking needles into a paper before him. His secretary inquired what it meant. Napoleon answered, “I am on the battlefield figuring out my next victory. You see, Italy and Austria are defeated, and France is triumphant.” In the great campaign which followed, everything came out just as he said. His army carried his plans to a complete success. Now, I am doing the same as Napoleon, figuring out a great campaign of military conquest.’ I said, ‘Where is your army? Napoleon had an army already equipped when he figured out his victory. You have no army. Your forces exist only on paper. You have no power to conquer countries. First get ready your army, then sit upon the ground with your needles.’ We need an army to attain victory in the spiritual world; mere plans are not sufficient; ideas and principles are helpless without a divine power to put them into effect.”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 250

needles: pins

The following story describes the journey of newlyweds Raḥmat and Írán Muhájir, as they struggled to reach their pioneering post in the Ten Year Crusade to become Knights of Bahá'u'lláh—despite speaking only Persian and the miracle it took to find a job:

“We were informed that the only means of transportation to the Mentawai Islands was a small State-owned cargo boat. . . . The boat took 40 hours to cover the 100 miles or so that separated the Mentawai Islands from the mainland of Sumatra.

“This was our first experience of sea travel. . . . Raḥmat was seasick most of the time, and developed a severe headache. . . .

“Nothing in our life had prepared us for the Mentawai Islands. We certainly had not seen anything like them in Iran, and the four cities we had visited on our way to Indonesia were not remotely comparable to what confronted us at the moment of our arrival. . . .

“Raḥmat had a unique attitude to spiritual challenges. His only feeling on arrival in the Mentawai Islands was exhilaration that a goal assigned by the beloved Guardian had been achieved. His first thought was that we should pray constantly that we would be worthy of this great honor bestowed upon us by Bahá'u'lláh. . . .

“The indigenous Mentawais lived in scattered hamlets. . . . They had never received money, and did not know its value. I saw this place as wilderness, far from the comforts of civilization. . . .

“Prayers—and the assistance of the assembled crew—helped us slide down the side of the ship into the rowing boat. Our suitcases were lowered, and the two natives, mystified by our manner and appearance, rowed us to the shore. Word had already reached the village about us, and every one . . . had gathered to view the spectacle of our arrival. . . . Everyone was wading in mud, covering their heads with . . . banana leaves, to protect them from the downpour. Raḥmat and I were, of course, soaked to the bone. The rain and humidity posed no threat to our luggage, however, which had already fallen into the sea while being transferred from the boat.

“A narrow plank was thrown over the lake of mud for our benefit. Raḥmat just waded into the mud, while holding my hand and helping me. . . . My patent-leather high heels were not designed for this sort of thing and, after a few steps, I was flat on my back struggling with mounds of wet slippery leaves, which were mixed in with the black smelly mud. . . .

“Three final blasts of the boat's siren heralded its departure. It would not return for at least another three months.”

—Írán Muhájir, *Dr Muhájir: Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá'u'lláh* 42-45

Further Study

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

What does the passage say?	In what specific ways can this passage be applied in your life?
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List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 91 and the additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

The Secret of Divine Civilization, by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, pages 34-91

This extract addresses the qualities that must be manifested by the learned in contributing to the advancement of society.

The Continental Boards of Counselors, by the Universal House of Justice

A compilation containing extracts from messages describing the role and functions of the Counselors, the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants.

Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities, by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States

A compilation containing references on the responsibilities of assemblies, individuals, and the Auxiliary Boards.

**Personal
Reflection**

**Remaining
Questions**

**Additional
Reading and
Resources**

Questions

The following questions review parts of the content of the lesson for use in individual study. Refer to the Discussion section on the next page for questions to consider in group study.

1. (Circle all that apply.) Leadership in the Bahá'í community comes from:
 - a. assemblies
 - b. the Continental and Auxiliary Boards
 - c. individuals

2. List three aspects of the role of the assemblies in the work of the community:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

3. List three aspects of the role of the Continental and Auxiliary Boards in the work of the community:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

4. List three aspects of the role of individuals in the work of the community:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

Answers

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

1. **a, b, and c.** Individuals provide leadership through initiative because they alone have the power to translate a plan into reality through action. The Guardian indicated, however, that “the Cause must not be allowed to center around any Bahá’í personality” and that “such an individual should not only seek the approval, advice and assistance” of assemblies, but should “strive to attribute any credit he may obtain to the collective wisdom and capacity of the Assembly under whose jurisdiction he performs his services” (*Lights of Guidance* 39-40).
- 2-4. See pages 70-73. For assemblies, examples include organizing teaching efforts, protection, and involving individuals in the work of the Cause. For the appointed institutions, examples include releasing the power of individual believers, focusing the community on the goals of the plan, and acting as standard-bearers of the teaching work. For individuals, examples include initiative in teaching, contributing to the Fund, and participating in and contributing to Bahá’í community life.

Discussion

Discuss the relationship among individuals, institutions, and the community with regard to leadership and participation in the organic unfoldment of the Faith.

What is the definition of “leadership” in the Bahá’í Community? (Refer especially to #3 and #4 on page 70.)

In what way can an individual provide leadership? What are the boundaries of this leadership? (Refer to #11 and #12 on page 71.)

What are the roles of the elected and appointed institutions? How do they overlap or complement one another? Can a “strong” assembly fulfill its functions without collaboration with the Auxiliary Board member or assistant?

What is the meaning of universal participation? (Refer to page 72.)

7

Characteristics of Mature Action

Introduction

In considering the organic unfoldment of the Faith, we can liken the role of the believers to that of a farmer tending a plant. The plant has within it all the instructions it needs to progress. God has supplied it with the power of the sun, with rain, and with nutrients from the soil to ensure its growth. The farmer, through a wise understanding of the plant and the science of farming, can assist the plant's speedy progress. If the farmer violates the principles which support the plant, the progress of the plant is retarded and its fruits are delayed or diminished.

“We will ultimately succeed,” a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi explains. “But could we not through our shortcomings, failures to sacrifice and reluctance to concentrate our efforts in spreading the Cause, retard the realization of that ideal. And what would that mean? It shall mean that we will be held responsible before God, that the race will remain longer in its state of waywardness, that wars would not be so soon averted, that human suffering will last longer.”¹

In this chapter we will examine the characteristics of mature action that influence the degree to which we support or hinder the progress of the Divine Plan.

¹ *The Bahá'í Life* 4

Overview

The Universal House of Justice wrote: “The burgeoning influence of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation seemed, with the imminence of the Holy Year, to have assumed the character of an onrushing wind blowing through the archaic structures of the old order, felling mighty pillars and clearing the ground for new conceptions of social organization. . . . Even the Community of the Most Great Name itself is experiencing the rigorous effects of this quickening wind as it ventilates the modes of thought of us all, renewing, clarifying and amplifying our perspectives as to the purpose of the Order of Bahá’u’lláh in the wake of humanity’s suffering and turmoil.”²

The Supreme Body also explained that “the special occasions of the Holy Year will surely equip us to undertake the urgent tasks of the next stage in the evolution of the Divine Plan. This commemorative period provides a befitting demarcation between the glories and triumphs of the last one hundred years and the lustrous prizes yet to be garnered.”³

As we reflect upon the challenges and opportunities of the future, we can begin to consider the characteristics of mature action that must increasingly be manifested as we work for the progress of the Cause and the betterment of humanity.

Explanation

In one of his messages, Shoghi Effendi explained that the Bahá’ís had been “galvanized into action at the sight of a slowly disrupting society.”⁴ In *The Priceless Pearl*, Rúhíyyih Khánum commented that, “Had he not pointed out to them, in words that fired their imagination, the nature of their responsibilities in relation to the state of the world, they would never have been galvanized at all.”⁵

In a sense, Rúhíyyih Khánum’s observation might be extended to every statement made by the Guardian commenting on the role of the believers in the on-going drama of the Divine Plan.

2 The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 103

3 The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 104

4 *Messages to America* 26

5 *The Priceless Pearl* 387

In vivid language, Shoghi Effendi described the believers as being “galvanized into action by the mandate conferred upon them,”⁶ that their “hearts have been stirred” by the “tragic tale” of the “events immortalizing” the “early history their Faith,” and their “minds have been enriched” by a “further measure” of the “fundamental Bahá’í Teachings.”⁷ And yet, it was he who explained that mandate, it was he who translated *The Dawnbreakers* to share their inspiring example, and it was he who interpreted the Teachings and explained the verities of the Faith.

Like a loving parent, Shoghi Effendi carefully guided the infant Bahá’í communities to carry out their work while forging them into one global organism. The Universal House of Justice continues this process after the passing of the Guardian. Now, at the current stage of our development, the Fourth Epoch of the Formative Age, we are being called upon to achieve a greater maturity in our efforts. Just as a child that gains greater responsibilities as it matures, it is no longer sufficient that our parent directs all our actions. We must become more conscious of our mission and our responsibilities, and carry them out more faithfully and with wisdom.

The demands of this maturity affect every level of our community and every aspect of our work. National and local assemblies are called upon, through wise application of administrative principles, systematic planning, and empowerment of individuals, to become effective channels for the spiritual conquest of the regions they serve. Individuals and communities are called to move beyond the holding of meetings and events to become firmer in the Covenant, mirrors of divine qualities, magnets that attract the masses of humanity, and instruments that guide the transformation of society.

Achieving such a mature level in our services to the Cause requires that we come to deeper understanding and action on many of the fundamentals of our work long stressed by the Guardian. Among them are conscious realization of our mission; a serious consideration of how the Writings can be applied to the unfoldment of the Faith and the problems facing society; an instant obedience to the Center of Authority in the Cause, with an intense focus on the objectives of the plans; unwavering reliance on divine assistance; and a new level of commitment to action that manifests the vital qualities of perseverance, unity, and sacrifice.

⁶ *God Passes By* 8

⁷ *Messages to America* 13

Readings

1. “The resources at their disposal, the privileges they possess, the facilities they enjoy should, with clear vision, with confident hearts and inflexible resolve, be consecrated to the noble objectives which it is their mission to pursue. Conscious of their high calling, aware of the potentialities with which their homelands have been endowed, these communities, placing their reliance on the all-conquering power of Bahá’u’lláh must unitedly arise, however numerous the barriers imposed between them, to achieve their destiny, and contribute collectively and effectively, to the world-wide propagation, the universal recognition and ultimate world triumph of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day* 148

2. “Now is the time when every follower of Bahá’u’lláh must cling fast to the Covenant of God, resist every temptation to become embroiled in the conflicts of the world, and remember that he is the holder of a precious trust, the Message of God which, alone, can banish injustice from the world and cure the ills afflicting the body and spirit of man. We are the bearers of the Word of God in this day and, however dark the immediate horizons, we must go forward rejoicing in the knowledge that the work we are privileged to perform is God’s work and will bring to birth a world whose splendor will outshine our brightest visions and surpass our highest hopes.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Naw-Rúz* 1979

3. “. . . strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action.”

—*Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 166

4. “The Cause of God is like unto a college. The believers are like unto the students. . . . If the sciences are not therein and the scholars are not educated the object of the college is not achieved. . . . Now the friends must so live and conduct themselves as to bring greater glory and results to the religion of God. To them the Cause of God must be a dynamic force transforming the lives of men and not a question of meetings, committees, futile discussions, unnecessary debates and political wire-pulling.”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Importance of Deepening* 18-19

5. “We are striving with heart and soul, resting neither day nor night, seeking not a moment’s ease, to make this world of man the mirror of the unity of God. . . . And this cherished hope, this yearning wish of ours will be visibly fulfilled only on the day when the true friends of God arise to carry out the Teachings of the Abhá Beauty. . . .”

—*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 84

Characteristics of Mature Action

Consciousness of Our Mission

resolve: firmness of purpose, resolution

consecrated: made sacred; dedicated to some service or goal

propagation: produce new members; making known new information

embroiled: to involve or entangle in argument, contention or conflict

Studying and Applying the Word of God

6. “The Plan, on which the National elected representatives of the Bahá’í communities of Australia and New Zealand have spontaneously embarked marks a turning-point, of great spiritual significance, in the evolution of the Faith. . . . The attention of the members of both communities must henceforth be focused on the Plan, its progress, its requirements, its significance and immediate objectives. All must participate without exception, without reserve, without delay. The administrative order which they have labored to establish must henceforth, through its organs and agencies be utilized for the promotion of this vital purpose, this supreme end. For no other purpose was it created.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Letters to Australia and New Zealand* 69-70

7. “Ours is the duty to fix our gaze with undeviating attention on the duties and responsibilities confronting us at this present hour, to concentrate our resources, both material and spiritual, on the tasks that lie immediately ahead, to insure that no time is wasted, that no opportunity is missed, that no obligation is evaded, that no task is half-heartedly performed, that no decision is procrastinated.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 101-02

8. “The progress of the Cause depends upon many factors It is . . . to those factors that are directly the results of the actions of the Bahá’ís that we wish to direct our remarks, because if the Bahá’ís will but do their part—however unpromising the prospect—Bahá’u’lláh is able to open doors and change conditions in ways far beyond our understanding.

“The first is a greater realization of the power of Bahá’u’lláh to reinforce the efforts of those who serve Him, or His promise to do so, and of the impotence of all our deeds without this divine assistance. Any evaluation of a situation is entirely misleading if it does not take this supreme power into consideration; whereas constant consciousness of dependence upon Him enable the Bahá’ís to formulate audacious plans and confidently carry them through to completion in the face of seemingly insuperable obstacles.

“Armed with this consciousness, the believers should then approach the winning of the goals of the Nine Year Plan with the spirit that will achieve them The believers should consider the goals, recognize that they are intended to be won, decide what is needed to win them, and then, however hopeless the prospect may seem, set out determinedly to do whatever is needed, confident that Bahá’u’lláh will reinforce them with His Hosts and will open the doors of victory before them”

—The Universal House of Justice, January 11, 1971

Focusing Actions
on the Plan

*undeviating: without
varying from the
established path; focused*

*procrastinated: put off until
later*

Conscious
Dependence on
Bahá’u’lláh

impotence: powerlessness

*insuperable: not capable of
being overcome*

9. “Perseverance is the magnet that will, in these days, attract the promised blessings of the Almighty Author of our beloved Faith. Unity and harmony constitute the basis on which the structure of these activities can securely rest. Self-sacrifice, audacity, undeviating adherence to the essentials of the Faith, will reinforce that structure and accelerate its rise.”
—Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day* 99

10. “Perseverance is an essential condition. In every project firmness and steadfastness will undoubtedly lead to good results; otherwise it will exist for some days, and then be discontinued.”
—*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 144

11. “Though their responsibilities be pressing and heavy and the obstacles formidable and manifold, yet the spirit of our invincible Faith will enable them to conquer if they arise unitedly and determinedly and persevere till the very end.”
—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 10

12. “They cannot, however, ensure the success of the Plan they have devised, unless the unity and solidarity of those who are participating in its execution, and above all the harmony of the body directing its operation, are safeguarded, maintained and consolidated.”
—Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day* 150

13. “It is surely true that as the Cause progresses differences will more and more arise. So unless there be a meeting place where the different views are thrashed, true unity of purpose and activity will not be obtained.”
—on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day* 25

14. “With regard to the problems confronting the believers; these, the Guardian fully realizes, are by no means easy to solve. But the friends should be confident that the very progress of the Cause will enable them to find the necessary solution to the difficulties which appear now to so seriously puzzle their minds.

“There are two main principles which the Guardian wishes the friends to always bear in mind and to conscientiously and faithfully follow. First is the principle of unqualified and wholehearted loyalty to the revealed Word. The believers should be careful not to deviate, even a hair-breadth, from the Teachings. . . . It is only by this means that they can hope to maintain the organic unity of the Cause.

“Next is the principle of complete, and immediate obedience to the Assemblies, both local and national. . . . Doctrinal unity and administrative unity, these are the two chief pillars that sustain the edifice of the Cause, and protect it from the storms of opposition which so severely rage against it.”
—on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day* 60-61

Attributes of Mature Action

adherence: faithful attachment

Perseverance

perseverance: holding to a course, belief, or purpose, without giving way

formidable: difficult to overcome

invincible: too powerful to be defeated or overcome

Unity

doctrinal: according to a set of principles

15. “One of the most paramount needs of the Cause . . . is that the friends should unite, should become really keenly conscious of the fact that they are one spiritual family, held together by bonds more sacred and eternal than those physical ties which make people of the same family. If the friends will forget all personal differences and open their hearts to a great love for each other for the sake of Bahá’u’lláh, they will find that their powers are vastly increased; they will attract the heart of the public, and will witness a rapid growth of the Holy Faith. . . .” —on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day* 106

16. “We are embarked upon the greatest spiritual drama the world has ever witnessed; and it is going to require the sacrifice of every individual, every community and every Assembly, whether local or national, in order to reach the goals. The Guardian feels they can be reached if we will concentrate, and not allow our attention to be diverted for a moment for any purpose whatsoever.”

—on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to Canada* 44

17. “Great and overpowering as these sacrifices may now appear, they will, when viewed in their proper perspective, be adjudged as inconsiderable, and pale into insignificance when balanced against the inestimable advantages which must accrue to a community that has achieved total and complete victory for a Plan so epoch-making in character, and so charged with undreamt of potentialities. The sacrifices which this fateful hour calls for, are by their very nature, individual; the loss or inconvenience they entail are at most transitory in their effect, and might well be fully compensated for in the days ahead, whereas the blessings that must irresistibly flow out, as the result of the integral success of a nation-wide, historically unprecedented Plan, will enrich and ennoble the life of an entire community, exert an abiding influence on its fortunes, and empower it to launch still mightier crusades in the course of subsequent stages in its organic spiritual development. How bountiful, moreover, will be the rewards which He who watches from on high the varying fortunes of the Plan and presides over its destinies, must either in this world or in the next—and it may well be in both—choose to confer upon those, who, at the hour of the Plan’s greatest need, will fly to its succor, exhibit the rarest evidences of courage and heroism, and choose to subordinate their personal interests to the immediate needs and future glory of the community to which they belong.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny* 233

Sacrifice

adjudged: determined by law; judged

accrue: to increase or accumulate

transitory: short-lived; temporary

succor: assistance or help in time of distress

18. “The evolution of the Plan imposes a three fold obligation, which all individual believers, all local Assemblies, as well as the National Assembly itself, must respectively recognize and conscientiously fulfill. . . .

“May the all conquering Spirit of Bahá’u’lláh be so infused into each component part of this harmoniously functioning System as to enable it to contribute its proper share to the consummation of the plan.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 11, 12

19. “Beloved Friends, the Nine Year Plan is well advanced, our work is blessed by the never-ceasing confirmations of Bahá’u’lláh, and the entire Bahá’í World Community is committed to complete victory. That happy consummation, now faintly discernible on the far horizon, will be reached through hard work, realistic planning, sacrificial deeds, intensification of the teaching work and, above all, through constant endeavor on the part of every single Bahá’í to conform his inner life to that glorious ideal set for mankind by Bahá’u’lláh and exemplified by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In contemplating the Master’s divine example we may well reflect that His life and deeds were not acted to a pattern of expediency, but were the inevitable and spontaneous expression of His inner self. We, likewise, shall act according to His example only as our inward spirits, growing and maturing through the disciplines of prayer and practice of the Teachings, become the wellsprings of all our attitudes and actions. This will promote the accomplishment of God’s purpose; this will ensure the triumph of His Faith. . . .”

—*Messages of the Universal House of Justice* 25

20. “Since change, ever more rapid change, is a constant characteristic of life at this time, and since our growth, size and external relations demand much of us, our community must be ready to adapt. In a sense this means that the community must become more adept at accommodating a wide range of actions without losing concentration on the primary objectives of teaching, namely, expansion and consolidation. A unity in diversity of actions is called for, a condition in which different individuals will concentrate on different activities, appreciating the salutary effect of the aggregate on the growth and development of the Faith, because each person cannot do everything and all persons cannot do the same thing. This understanding is important to the maturity which, by the many demands being made upon it, the community is being forced to attain.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* 80

Mature Individual and Collective Action

discernible: able to be seen

expediency: acting on the basis of what is opportune at the moment

21. “The reports he received about the success of your Convention this year, the free consultation and the unity which prevailed amongst the friends, encouraged him greatly. He feels that this indicates a new maturity on the part of the German believers. They must come to realize that the Administration is a system both living and dynamic, and that, through obedience to its principles and regulations, they will gain greater strength in teaching the Faith, and be able to direct their energies as a united force into the different channels of service that lie open to them. One of the main reasons why the Faith does not advance more rapidly is because the friends have not learned to live with, and work within the framework of the Administrative Order. Either they crystallize it into too set a form, or they rebel against what they feel to be a System, and do not give it sufficient support. Both of these extremes impede the progress of the Faith, and the efficiency of the believers.”

—on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Light of Divine Guidance* 81-82

22. “. . . the believers have got to master and follow the principles of their divinely laid down Administrative Order. They will never solve their problems by departing from the correct procedure. . . . The Bahá’ís have got to learn to live up to the laws of Bahá’u’lláh which are infinitely higher, more exacting and more perfect than those the world is at present familiar with. Running away, fighting with each other, fostering dissension, is not going to advance the Indian or any other Community; all it is going to do is to bring Bahá’u’lláh’s plans and work to a standstill until such time as the believers unite to serve Him, or new and more dedicated souls arise to take their place.”

—on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day* 129

23. “As the fabric of present-day society heaves and cracks under the strain and stress of portentous events and calamities, as the fissures, accentuating the cleavage separating nation from nation, class from class, race from race, and creed from creed, multiply, the prosecutors of the Plan must evince a still greater cohesion in their spiritual lives and administrative activities, and demonstrate a higher standard of concerted effort, of mutual assistance, and of harmonious development in their collective enterprises.

“Then, and only then, will the reaction to the stupendous forces, released through the operation of a divinely conceived, divinely impelled Plan, be made apparent, and the fairest fruit of the weightiest spiritual enterprise launched in recorded history under the aegis of the Center of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh be garnered.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 43

portentous: indicating trouble or calamity; of great significance

fissures: cracks

accentuating: emphasizing; pointing up

cleavage: a split

evince: show forth

cohesion: togetherness based on attraction

aegis: sponsorship; protection

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 91.

Further Study

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

What does the passage say?	In what specific ways can this passage be applied in your life?
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List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 91 and the additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

- 1.
- 2.

Messages to America, Citadel of Faith, Messages to the Bahá'í World, Dawn of a New Day, Letters to Australia and New Zealand Lights of Divine Guidance, Letters to Canada, and Unfolding Destiny by Shoghi Effendi

Books containing messages by the Guardian to various national communities that address the presentation and execution of plans.

Wellspring of Guidance, Messages of the Universal House of Justice, The Five Year Plan, The Seven Year Plan, and A Wider Horizon, by the Universal House of Justice

Books containing messages by the House of Justice that address the progress of the Nine, Five, Seven, and Six Year Plans.

A Wider Horizon, by the Universal House of Justice, pages 95-109

This book contains letters and extracts from the Universal House of Justice that trace the maturation of the Faith from 1983-1992.

Personal Reflection

Remaining Questions

Additional Reading and Resources

Questions

The following questions review parts of the content of the lesson for use in individual study. Refer to the Discussion section on the next page for questions to consider in group study.

1. List four characteristics of mature action described in this chapter:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____

2. List three attributes of mature action as described in this chapter:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

3. (Circle all that apply.) Mature action, in part, has to do with the way that individuals and institutions work together to accomplish the objectives of a plan. Which of the following are an aspect of this mature, collaborative action?
 - a. individuals that reflect 'Abdu'l-Bahá's example
 - b. focusing on one action at a time
 - c. mastering the principles of the administrative order
 - d. strengthening the individual's spiritual life

Answers

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

1. Consciousness of our mission, study and application of the Word of God, focusing actions on the objectives of the plan, and reliance on the power of Bahá'u'lláh See pages 82-83.
2. Perseverance, unity, and sacrifice. See pages 84-85.
3. **a, c, and d.** For “a,” see #19 on page 86; for “c,” see #21-22 on page 87; for “d,” see #23 on page 87. Note that “c” and “d” are not in competition with one another. Rather, a harmonious balance and “greater cohesion” must be achieved between the two. We must remember that “Bahá'í administration” must surely mean something different than simply “administration.” It is Bahá'u'lláh's creation, and in its proper form, cannot conflict with the other requirements of His teachings. Regarding “b,” the Universal House of Justice has explained that the maturity we are being called upon to achieve requires a “unity in diversity of actions.” See #20, page 86.

Discussion

Consider your personal or local community efforts in support of the current plan. What aspects of mature action discussed in this chapter are reflected in these activities? What aspects could be added—and how? (Note that the purpose of this question is to encourage reflection and, if necessary, positive revisions in existing actions—not to create an opportunity for criticism or disharmony.)

How might our actions plans change if they were to reflect “a greater realization of the power of Bahá'u'lláh to reinforce the efforts of those who serve Him?” (Refer to #8 on page 83.)

What is meant by “a unity in diversity of actions?” (Refer to #20 on page 86.)

What is the appropriate balance between focusing on the needs of the global plan and focusing on one's personal needs? What references from the chapter support your answer?

Index for the Spiritual Conquest of the Planet

Introduction

The index provides references on topics related to plans from a wide range of Bahá'í books. Quotations used, at least in part, in this book are indicated with the corresponding page number from *The Spiritual Conquest of the Planet* in parenthesis.

Bibliography

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