

Cur r

2/28/89

Dear Arthur,

more than we try to interpret SE's silence
for sample, a B.L. use even to read - C.H. 2/28
men to R.H.

I have now had time to reflect on our meeting and wish to say, whatever the outcome of our discussion it was very stimulating to visit with you. In this letter I will attempt to summarize my understanding of what your deepest questions are. I will also raise some thoughts I have had regarding the subject though I am not presenting them as direct answers to your questions.

As you pointed out yourself many of the questions you raise in your letter dated 9/88 have answers that when viewed in a particular perspective may be acceptable. We agreed that when one studies a subject a subject such as religion that there will arise points where one must weigh all the factors in order to decide. All information implying feeling, context, tradition and collaborating fact. Though these questions still beckon scholarly discussion I have not taken time in this letter to address them as I feel it will be more beneficial to define your most central question, that being the legitimacy of the Universal House of Justice.

Be assured it is not my desire to simplify your position in addressing this matter though I feel it will be more conducive to our common goal if we can distill your points to focus our investigation. It is in this spirit that I have listed and numbered what I understand to be pivotal questions you raise. As we agreed all that is written or spoken can not fully convey ones understanding of a subject.

1. The continuance of a "living Guardianship" is a central theme of the Shoghi Effendi's writings on the subject.
2. The Universal House of Justice ability to effectively operate as described in the "Writings" is in question without this "living Guardianship" or without a fuller explanation of the source of the House's understanding to do so.
3. The claim that the recognized central covenant of the Faith is "infallible" is a claim that is unsubstantiated and in fact raises questions about their ability to look objectively for the truth in the questions you pose.

I realize Arthur there are numerous quotations you have cited for these points and since they are all contained in your letter I felt no need to restate them here.

As I stated earlier you raised many other questions of but in fact if these more central areas could be dealt with they alone could shed more light on the other areas of investigation.

Arthur I would like to take this correspondence to offer forth three conceptual ideas for your consideration none of which may be fresh substance to you and yet I feel compelled to state them.

1. If a "living Guardianship" was so essential to the carrying forward of the infallibility of the Cause and the Covenant is it not strange that at least to all discovery so far that the Guardian did not layout a proper will appointing a new guardian as provided for in the provisions of Abdul'Bahas will. I recall you simply stated you felt he must of made a mistake yet does this not seem a little out of character for a man that planned to the utmost detail subsequent teaching plans for the spread of the Faith to all corners of the globe, a man who painstakingly

Handwritten notes on the left margin, including "re-...", "every...", and "me..."

SE said "essential"
all we have gathered are his words
I don't know SE's character - all I have are his words

Handwritten note: "C.H. 2/28 men he finds at yr to be"

27 March 1989

Dear ~~Mr~~

Thank you for your letter, and for the time you spent with me at the coffee shop. I do hope to meet with you again, especially now that we have some more concrete issues to focus on.

I think, in 1 and 2, you did a good job of summarizing my questions regarding the legitimacy of the Universal House of Justice. Number 3 I'm not so sure about. What do you mean by "recognized central covenant"? I'm not sure to what or to whom you are referring, exactly. The claim of infallibility has different meanings and connotations and effects when it is applied to different figures and institutions of the faith, and to different states of being of those figures and institutions (i.e. it matters, I think, whether we are talking about the *potential* UHJ as defined in Shoghi's writings, or whether we are talking about the UHJ as it exists and defines itself today; and I think it matters whether we are talking about the infallibility of a living, breathing man, or whether we are talking about the infallibility of writings no longer interacting with or subject to his living interpretations and physical presence...please see page 13 of my letter, last paragraph before the break). After all, when the term "infallible" is applied to, say, God's "Major Plan," there is, by definition, nothing that anyone can say about it. When it is applied to particular writings, however, there is, I believe, more that can--and must--be said.

Regarding the points you raise for my consideration:

1. Did I say a living Guardianship is "essential to the carrying forward of the infallibility of the *Cause* and the *Covenant*"? "Cause" and "Covenant" are rather broad terms, after all. I don't think I ever said that a living Guardian was necessary to "the Cause," whatever that might be. According to *Shoghi Effendi*, however, a living Guardian certainly seemed to be necessary: in the "Dispensation of Baha'u'llah," his language is in fact rather "clear and unambiguous," is it not? ("essential in their functions," "Acting in conjunction with each other," "inseparable," "mutilated and permanently deprived," "completely lacking," "totally withdrawn," "severed from the no less essential institution of the UHJ," "paralyzed," "powerless," etc.)

But, according to *Baha'u'llah*, neither the guardianship *nor* the UHJ seem to be absolutely essential to the survival of "the Cause". Regarding the "endowments dedicated to charity": "After Him the decision rests with the Aghsan, and *after them* with the House of Justice--should it be established in the world *by them*. *Otherwise* the endowments should be referred *to the people of Baha*." Here we have a picture of God's will being accomplished, without the benefit of any of the "salient features" to be found in Shoghi's interpretation of Baha'u'llah's words "World Order" ("To what else if not to the power and majesty which this Administrative Order...is destined to

probably was to other Baha'is of his day: he may not even have considered it as a realistic possibility (though he certainly considered it hypothetically: "Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship the World Order of Baha'u'llah would be mutilated..."). Shoghi was not ancient when he died, was he? Perhaps he thought there was still hope of having a son (after all, the Bible is full of stories about very old people having children because they were faithful). Anyway, the possible reasons for his not having left instructions regarding the Guardianship (and the UHJ in the absence of a Guardian) are many. The point is that he did *not* leave such instructions, but he *did* leave behind writings which, again (excuse my driving the point home), in "clear and unambiguous language," emphasized the essential role to be played by future guardians in the unfolding of the Baha'i plan (as interpreted by him). We have his words; the rest is speculation.

I did not mean to say that Shoghi made a mistake by not leaving a will: he could not (according to the interpretation offered by the Hands and the UHJ) have left one--at least he could not have left one in which an heir was appointed: the conditions were not met. So perhaps Shoghi himself did not know what to do about it, and so busied himself doing what he *could* do for the faith...and prayed about the rest.

One more thing occurs to me. Did Shoghi leave any kind of will at all? If he did not, then perhaps that is an indication that he--for some reason or other--really did not consider his own passing very much at all. Perhaps all his planning and translating and answering of letters and traveling kept him from attending to this particular duty. Who knows?

The UHJ, however, says, "the fact that Shoghi Effendi did not leave a will cannot be adduced as evidence of his failure to obey Baha'u'llah--rather should we acknowledge that in his very silence there is a wisdom and a sign of his *infallible guidance*"--yes, if one is pre-committed to his infallibility, obviously one *must* assume everything he does or doesn't do to be right. But, even within the Baha'i definitions of the infallibility of the Guardian, I think there is room for mistakes in terms of actions (though not in terms of interpretation of the writings), no?

However, I am not committed to the doctrine of Shoghi's infallibility. Therefore I do see Shoghi's failure to leave a will to be--at least in some sense--a "failure to obey Baha'u'llah": making a will is a Baha'i duty, right? Failure to make out a will is failure to obey Baha'u'llah, at least in this one thing, is it not? Or do laws apply differently to the leaders of the faith than they do to the other Baha'is? Shoghi was never called the Perfect Exemplar. Abdu'l Baha made out a will. Shoghi didn't. Why is it so inconceivable to consider the possibility that he made a mistake? And any way, people often make mistakes that are "out of character," do they not? (I think "mistakes" made *in* character are not usually called "mistakes"!)

the...validity of the institutions which the adherents of the Faith are building... For these lie embedded in the Teachings themselves...." I am a non-Baha'i. And I am willing to take the UHJ at their word. So let's examine the *writings*. But please, do not expect arguments depending upon things like "a sign of his infallible guidance," or "out of character," to have much weight for me. "Infallible guidance" is for believers: it is something that non-believers may (and *should*, I think) consider, and ponder, but I think that the UHJ must offer something much more substantial to the unbelieving world.

There is much more that can be said, but I want to respond to the other points you raised for my consideration. But in concluding my response to point number 1, I would like to say that there is more than one way to interpret Shoghi's "silence" (comp 45). A Bible verse comes to mind: "Let God be true though every man be false, as it is written, 'That thou mayest be justified in thy words, and prevail when thou art judged'" (Romans 3:4).

Perhaps Shoghi Effendi made some mistakes--perhaps his vision of the World Order of Baha'u'llah was in some ways in error--and perhaps the present House of Justice has tried its best to maintain the faith, and, in its zeal, has overstepped some bounds. Perhaps. I certainly do not know. But do mistakes--even mistakes on the part of figures as illustrious as the Guardian and the UHJ and Abdul Baha (and maybe even Baha'u'llah)--necessarily nullify the meaning of Baha'u'llah for the world (I am speaking as favorably to the Baha'i viewpoint as I can)? Perhaps they do: after all, as I said before, the chain of delegated "infallibilities" seems to lead from Shoghi Effendi (as you know, I think there is an obvious break between Shoghi Effendi and the UHJ) to Abdul Baha to Baha'u'llah and back again: it seems to be a circle that cannot be broken--if Shoghi makes a mistake then Abdul Baha was wrong about the Guardian's infallibility, and if Abdul Baha was wrong then Baha'u'llah was wrong about his son's perfection, and so the whole thing flops. Or does it? In the writings themselves, apart from the UHJ's and Shoghi Effendi's assertions, is the chain of infallibility forged with such rigid links? Perhaps they are. But perhaps they are not. Perhaps the truth though every man be false is just the flip side of the perfection of - God's plan.

"Only God is good," as Jesus has said. Is there really room in the universe for more than one perfect Being? As I understand it, even the weaknesses of the prophets themselves in some way serve to magnify the sanctity of God, do they not? Anyway, enough philosophising. Back to your letter.

In 2 you speak of further writings that are not yet translated. One thing I would say is that translating is itself interpretation: if you have ever translated something, then you must know what I mean. Without the Guardian can these translations--these interpretations--be considered authoritative? But that question aside, all I can say to the fact that there

6/20/89

Arthur Penn
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Dear Arthur,

Sorry for the long delay in our contact since we last contacted I have been busy with family, Baha'i National Convention and subsequent reporting to the Friends, travel to the Holy Lands in Haifa and as you know adding another daughter to my family.

Following further research, prayer, and meditation I have developed what I feel is the only realistic approach to your questions. In reality your questions are not so much a matter of missing or elusive fact, but a question of content, relativity and balance. My only ability is to offer a certain shape for your decision process that may allow you to view your faith from an alternate perspective. If we use the old analogy of the three blindfolded men who describe the elephant, one while touching the tail as "a snake", the other while touching the side as "a tent", and the other while touching the trunk as "a hose". they are all in fact "right" yet with only limited view points they are still unable to describe the whole.

Your decision is not evasive nor is it simple, but it can and must be made on fact. To do this you must decide what can be considered fact in the essentially spiritual process. Let's look at a few perspectives:

It is a fact that Shoghi Effendi made a host of statements regarding the future and actions of the Universal House of Justice.

It is a fact that these statements include clear reference to the need for the Guardianship while at the same time eluding to the possibility that this would not be the case.

It is a fact that at each transition of the Covenant there have been those who challenge it's validity, some fight it, some ignore it, some fall away, and some recognize. This is not new to this Faith.

It is a fact that both in the past and present the Covenant of the Faith has increased the ability of the Friends to serve humanity and its Institutions to help a troubled humanity see it's future course i.e. "Promise of World Peace"

It is a fact that through the power of this Covenant people of all races, creeds, cultures, economic class, education levels, and age have embraced it's tenants, sworn allegiance to it's validity and sacrificed their possessions even their very lives through free choice and based on all the same Writings, illusions, and symbolisms you have access to.

Why?

This you must decide.

It is a fact, as prophesied in the Bible, this is "the Day that will not be followed by Night." If the Universal House of Justice is not "Justly" established then this prophecy has not been fulfilled. How is it that a myriad of prophecies of God's religions should be negated by the interpretation of certain paragraph or two.

These are all points of fact that you must digest to find Truth. This does not preclude one from the further investigation of "truths".

11 July 89

Dear :

Thanks for your letter. I realize you're a busy man, and I really appreciate your taking the time to correspond with me.

One thing that you mentioned which especially interested me was the assertion that the Guardian referred to "the need for the Guardianship while at the same time alluding to the possibility that this would not be the case." That is exactly the kind of thing I want to know about, and to talk with you about: where, exactly, did Shoghi Effendi allude to the possibility that the future world order of Baha'u'llah would not need the Guardianship? I would very much like to read those passages in the writings of Shoghi Effendi which you feel represent allusions to a future world order without a Guardianship.

I would also like to know what you think the significance of such allusions are in light of other statements made by Shoghi Effendi, such as (emphasis mine): "An attempt, I feel, should at the present juncture be made to explain the character and functions of the *twin pillars that support* this mighty Administrative Structure--the institutions of the Guardianship and of the Universal House of Justice....My present intention is to elaborate certain *salient features* of this scheme which, however close we may stand to its colossal structure, are already so clearly defined that we find it *inexcusable to either misconceive or ignore*. It should be stated, at the very outset, *in clear and unambiguous language*, that these *twin institutions* of the Administrative Order of Baha'u'llah should be regarded as divine in origin, *essential in their functions* and complementary in their aim and purpose....*Acting in conjunction with each other these two inseparable institutions* administer its affairs....Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship the World Order of Baha'u'llah would be *mutilated and deprived of that hereditary principle* which...has been invariably upheld by the Law of God....Its prestige would suffer, *the means required* to enable it to take a long, an uninterrupted view over a series of generations would be *completely lacking*, and the *necessary guidance* to define the sphere of the legislative action of its elected representatives would be *totally withdrawn*....Severed from the *no less essential* institution of the Universal House of Justice this same System...would be *paralyzed*...."

I realize I have quoted from these passages before, but I believe that I have as yet not received a direct and frank response from you or other Baha'is as to how we are to understand the implications of such decidedly "clear and unambiguous language" today, when there is no living Guardian.

You assert that you have stated "objective facts." Frankly, I must disagree with you.

that people have become Baha'is. This too, it seems to me, is a matter of belief--Baha'i belief. Marxists, Freudians, Christians, and maybe even some Liberal Democrats might disagree with you. There exist other explanations for why Baha'is become Baha'is.

You say that people have become Baha'is "through free choice and based on all the same Writings, allusions, and symbolisms (I) have access to". I'm not sure I understand the significance of that statement. "The fact is," many of the Baha'is I have talked to are ignorant of many of the passages I have quoted in my letters, and fewer still seem to have given the issues I (and others) have raised serious thought. No, I cannot agree that it is a fact that people have become Baha'is "based on all the same Writings, allusion, and symbolisms (I) have access to." Quite the contrary. Each person has probably based his or her decision on very different selections of the writings. Over the last hundred years or so of Baha'i history, the writings which have been available to people has in fact varied greatly according to time and place. For example, during the time of Baha'u'llah, no one had the writings of Abdul Baha on which to base their decisions as to whether or not the faith was true, and during the time of Abdul Baha no one had the writings of Shoghi Effendi, and during the time of Shoghi Effendi no one had the writings of the UHJ. At certain times people in America had precious few adequate translations of the writings, and today there are many parts of America and the world where the Baha'i libraries are rather small. On the other hand, other people have had access to nearly all the writings that are available. ~~But~~, I really think this "fact" is more suited to introductory promotional literature than as an offering to someone who has studied the Baha'i faith in some depth already.

You say, "it is a fact, as prophesied in the Bible, this is 'the Day that will not be followed by Night.'" I hope you're right, but I cannot agree that this is a fact: it is Baha'i doctrine, and Baha'i interpretation of scripture--not fact. I am not a Baha'i. How, then, can I agree that this is "fact"? If I agreed with the Baha'i interpretation of the Bible, then obviously I would be a Baha'i. It is something for me to consider, yes, but it is not what most people would call fact. But let us assume, for a moment, that the Baha'i interpretation of that Biblical passage is correct. This interpretation, I believe, is as follows (Lights of Guidance #626): "The Guardians are the evidence of the maturity of mankind in the sense that...men have progressed to the point of having one world....They have reached the point where God could leave, in human hands (i.e. the Guardians')...the affairs of His Faith for this Dispensation. *This is what is meant by 'this is the day which will not be followed by the night.'* In this Dispensation, divine guidance flows on to us in this world after the Prophet's ascension, through first the Master, and then the Guardians." According to this interpretation, with the passing of Shoghi Effendi, the night appears to have fallen again. Perhaps elsewhere Shoghi Effendi interprets

agree or not". Well, I simply cannot agree with you at this point. But I am willing to further consider your point of view.

In various places you say things like "this is not simplistic A, B, or C in the fashion you say you seek" (I do????), and, "often we wish to break things down to simple components in our effort to understand and often it is successful but when we want to think on God's terms we must open our minds and our hearts," and, "it is a fact to make a spiritual decision based on a certain set of criteria that separated itself from spiritual reality is impossible and illogical. To form a decision from this standpoint is tantamount to reducing 'Baha'i Consultation' to a mechanical decision making process." I'm not sure why you are saying these things. In our first meeting, these were the things we covered. We both agree. If you will refer to my letter to the UHJ again, you will see that I was saying very similar kinds of things to them (e.g. pg. 2 third paragraph, pg. 23 before the break, pg. 39) for I feel that their interpretations of the doctrine of infallibility leads them, on the one hand, to attempt to make too-definite claims about their own authority and the nature of the Covenant, and, on the other hand, to be inexcusably vague and evasive about the implications of Shoghi Effendi's "clear and unambiguous language."

To be frank, the impression I get from your letter is that either you do not as yet understand the questions I am asking or you are evading (either consciously or unconsciously) the issues. That does not mean that I reject you, or that I think you have done something horrible, or that I believe that I would do any better if I were in your shoes, or that I am now 100% certain that your arguments are invalid and unsound and that the Baha'i faith is false. But it does mean that I must ask you to please face the issues directly and respond frankly, because I believe that you are not doing so. Remember, I want to know the truth about the Baha'i faith, and remember that I realize that the investigation into truth takes place on many levels (spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual). Do I really have to keep reminding you that I understand these things? It is not relativity and balance and wholeness that I find repugnant, but rather dogmatism and obscurantism, of which, at present, I find the UHJ equally as guilty as the rest of us human beings.

Questions of ultimate Cause and Effect are indeed complex. Yes, they demand a total response from the total individual. But I believe that when it comes to the question of the validity of the present UHJ's interpretations of the present Baha'i world order, there are "in fact" issues which are not so complex, not so mysterious, which can be grasped, and the implications of which are very profound for the Baha'i faith. So please let us stick to discussing those things rather than throwing "facts" and ultimatums ("whether-you-agree-or-not's") at each other--such behavior is certainly not

Good feelings and profound experiences and conviction are to found everywhere, in all sorts of different kinds of movements. Human beings seem able to exercise their great capacity for faith under many different forms of devotion. As Shoghi Effendi has said, "you yourself must surely know that modern psychology has taught that the capacity of the human mind for believing what it imagines is almost infinite." So it doesn't matter very much to me what people think they feel, or what they think they know (though I certainly take these things into consideration). In order to determine the relative veracity of different world views, I prefer to stick to things that can perhaps be considered and discussed with a greater degree of reasonableness than the slogans and propaganda thrown around by so many organizations today (including the Baha'i faith). And when an organization begins to apply pressure against the independent investigation of truth, that is when the warning lights start flashing for me. That is not to say I think that a reasonable discussion of texts is the final determiner of truth--far from it. But it is, I think, a good place to start. So, shall we start?

To put things into perspective, let me offer a hypothetical question; I want to decide if the Baha'i faith is true or false, so the question is relevant. If the Baha'i faith were in fact a false religion, how might God reveal that fact? I, of course, do not know. But I have read some of the Bible, and I often do take what it has to say into consideration (always bearing in mind, of course, that "no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation" 2 Peter 1:20). In Deuteronomy 18 it says, "How may we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?--when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously, you need not be afraid of him." As far as I know, the world order as outlined by Shoghi Effendi did not in fact come to pass. Does that mean Shoghi Effendi spoke presumptuously? I honestly do not know. The answer probably isn't that easy. But then again, maybe it is. After all, to me the disparity between reality (i.e. real facts, real events) and the words of Abdul Baha and Shoghi Effendi is sometimes quite startling. Perhaps I need not "be afraid of" them, then? Well, as a matter of fact, I'm afraid of denying anybody--I find it really difficult to accept that any person could ever be utterly and abysmally wrong. But I suppose there comes a point when, after giving someone the benefit of the doubt (or of faith) for extended periods of time, one must finally decide. In Matthew 24 I've read: "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect." Now, I do not know who "the elect" are, but it seems unlikely to me that they would be people who could be duped by someone as gross as Rajneesh, or as brutal as Stalin, or as fanatical as Khomeini. Rather, it seems to me that a false prophet would have to be far more subtle than that--would have to speak of love and brotherhood and the

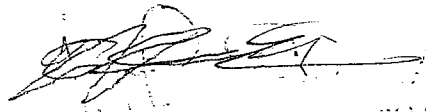
quoted at the beginning of this letter (third paragraph) might be a good place to start. How about it?

I spent literally over a thousand hours writing that letter to the UHJ. I really would appreciate some more solid response. If you do not want to really get down to examining the writings and discussing their implications, then perhaps you could recommend someone who would. But if you do-- then let's talk. Unity is important. But I don't think the appeal to unity should be used to squelch the independent investigation of truth. I'm not sure unity at all costs is really worth having. In fact, I don't think unity at all costs is really unity. It is oppression.

I have not been gentle in this letter. I have been direct. I do not value superficial politeness, and, judging from the tone of your last letter, neither do you. That's good. But I do value giving the other person space to think and I value respecting the fact that there are very few "facts" that can just be laid down for the other person to either accept or reject. I consider such an approach to be unkind. I feel you have been unkind. But I can be unkind too. Let's try not to be so in the future, OK? It hurts.

~~_____~~ I hope to see you soon.

sincerely,



Arthur