

Principle of Succession in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, The: Wilme

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The Introduction to the Most Holy Book includes the all-important matter of the successorship. The House of Justice writes, (p. 3)

The Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice can thus be seen to be, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, the "Twin Successors" of Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá.

This was something that was unclear to me earlier in my Bahá'í life. I would typically say:

"Bahá'u'lláh made a written Covenant, in His own hand, designating `Abdu'l-Bahá His Successor in the Aqdas and the Kitáb-i-Ahd. `Abdu'l-Bahá likewise unmistakably designated His Chosen Successor, Shoghi Effendi, in His own hand, in His Will and Testament. And then the Hands of the Cause led the Faith for six years. And, then, the House of Justice was elected, and is our supreme Body and is guaranteed infallibility."

Generally, I would make no mention of the place of the Universal House of Justice in the scheme of Bahá'í Successorship, and also not speak with as much conviction regarding the soundness of the Bahá'í Covenant.

The Universal House of Justice is not the successor to Shoghi Effendi.

The authority of the House of Justice was not bestowed upon it by Shoghi Effendi. The authority of the House of Justice comes from Bahá'u'lláh and the Master.

The last words in the Master's Will (p. 26) designate His two Successors — one hereditary, the other elected:

"All must seek guidance and turn unto the Center of the Cause and the House of Justice.

And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error."

The House of Justice is, like Shoghi Effendi, the co-successor to the Master and the Manifestation. In the words of Shoghi Effendi that may be the source of the language the House of Justice uses in the Introduction:

"They have also, in unequivocal and emphatic language, appointed those twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship as their chosen Successors . . . "

(The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 19-20)

I think that this is a most beautiful point, and one that is so important to a fuller understanding of the station of the Universal House of Justice. It is not only endowed with authority, and with divine guidance. It is in the line of succession from the Manifestation and the Center of the Covenant. It is the co-sharer as `Abdu'l-Bahá's immediate successor, with the other

twin pillar of the Administrative Order, the Guardianship.

In another sense, the House of Justice, together with the Institution of Guardianship, is the Center of the Covenant of `Abdu'l-Bahá.

There is a principle in the Bahá'í Faith that some things in the Revelation are hidden, and some are manifest. The Hidden Words, for example, lend themselves to layers of meaning, which we discover as we gain in spiritual experience. This is an example of the principle that every Word "has seventy meanings." (Íqán 255)

... the Words of God have innumerable significances and mysteries of meanings — each one a thousand and more. (`Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 155)

Myriads of mystic tongues find utterance in one speech, and myriads of hidden mysteries are revealed in a single melody..."

(Bahá'u'lláh, Persian Hidden Words #16)

However, the appointment of the Successor is one area where multiplicity of meanings has no place. Variety of interpretations in this one area is not a desirable form of "diversity," but the cause of destructive "differences."

Observe the tone in this passage:

The point at issue is clear, direct and of utmost brevity. Either Bahá'u'lláh was wise, omniscient and aware of what would ensue, or was ignorant and in error. He entered, by His supreme pen, into such a firm Covenant and Testament with all the Bahá'ís, first with the Aghsan, the Afnán and His kindred, and commanded them to obey and turn toward Him. By His supreme pen He hath explicitly declared that the object of the following verse of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is the Most Great Branch: [Then quoting Aqdas paragraph 121) (Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 213)

Though in the Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh does not identify who this One is, He does so in His Will and Testament; what was hidden at the beginning was made manifest when the time for guidance came.

This part of the Revelation is open and manifest. Sometimes the Author specifically prohibits individual interpretation of a given verse, (for example on p. 132 of "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh," and at pp. 25-26 of the Master's Will). Well aware that people sometimes take literally what should be understood symbolically, and take symbolically what should be understood literally, He has made His point clear.

Should a man appear ere the lapse of a full thousand years — each year consisting of twelve months according to the Qur'an, and of nineteen months of nineteen days each, according to the Bayán — and if such a man reveal to your eyes all the signs of God, unhesitatingly reject him!

(Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh," p. 132)

Bahá'u'lláh's appointment of His immediate Successor, His eldest son `Abdu'l-Bahá, was in writing, in His own hand, specifically identifying Him by His title, "Ghusn-i-Azam," "The Most Mighty Branch," by which title He was up to that point universally known among the Bahá'ís. This document,

Bahá'u'lláh's Will and Testament, directs the Bahá'ís to "turn" to the Most Mighty Branch, who shortly thereafter assumed the title "Abdu'l-Bahá," "the Servant of Bahá'u'lláh." The successorship in the Bahá'í Faith is not a matter for "seventy meanings," nor for hints, allusions, or mysteries.

Abdu'l-Bahá said that the Successor is not hidden, He is manifest:

... For Christ has said that no one hides the lamp under a bushel.... Praise be to God! Bahá'u'lláh left nothing unsaid.... To protect and safeguard the religion of God from this and all other attack, the Center of the Covenant has been named and appointed by Bahá'u'lláh. Therefore, if anyone should set forth a statement in praise or recognition of another than this appointed Center, you must ask him to produce a written proof of the authority he follows.

(Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 456)

Likewise, the Will and Testament of Abdu'l-Bahá is in His own hand, and specifically identifies His Twin Successors, the Institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice.

... that conclusive Text, the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, was given us, and what had been hidden at the beginning was made known at the end. His infinite grace became clearly manifest, and with His own mighty pen He made a perfect Covenant, naming Shoghi Effendi the Chosen Branch and Guardian of the Faith. Thus, by God's bounty, what had been a concealed mystery and a well-guarded secret, was at last made plain. (From a letter by the Greatest Holy Leaf, "Bahiyiyih Khánum," p. 177)

Abdu'l-Bahá comments on the clarity of the second part of His Will, which deals solely with the elected membership of the Universal House of Justice and that the decisions of that Body will be "the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself," with these words which close that Second Part (p. 22):

O God my God! I call Thee, Thy Prophets and Thy Messengers, Thy Saints and Thy Holy Ones, to witness that I have declared conclusively Thy Proofs unto Thy loved ones and set forth clearly all things unto them, that they may watch over Thy Faith, guard Thy Straight Path and protect Thy Resplendent Law.

At the close of this Document He again declares that His Successors are the House of Justice and the Guardian, and He commands the believers to "turn" to them, forbidding us to express our "opinions" as well as our "convictions" on the matter (pp. 25-26).

Those who laid claim to be Shoghi Effendi's successor Guardian had first stated that there was no successor. Then, later, they decided that certain actions of Shoghi Effendi were hints or implicit declarations of his appointment of them as his successor Guardian. No such claimant has ever produced a single word from the pen of Shoghi Effendi naming him as his successor. There is no such statement from Shoghi Effendi, because he was unable to name a successor Guardian. Had he been able to, he would have done so in the manner of his Predecessors, clearly, openly, in writing. He would have, as specified by the Master's Will (p. 12), presented the identity of his successor to the nine Hands of the Cause who were the closest aides to the Guardian. In this way, so

that differences would not arise, the Hands of the Faith would, after the Guardian's passing, be the first to announce their acceptance of the new Guardian, and lead all the people to turn to him. The Hands all certified that the Guardian had no heir and appointed no successor.

The Universal House of Justice, by virtue of the written Covenants of both Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá, is the Successor to Them (The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 20.) Bahá'u'lláh and the Master have, with divine clarity, shown us where to turn.

— Principle of Succession in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, The: Wilmette Institute faculty notes (Used by permission of the curator)