

The Inseparability and Complementarity of the Book and the Universal House of Justice as Illustrated Through the 26 November 2018 Message

Sana Rezai
30 Nov 2018

The language of the Universal House of Justice is divinely inspired and confirmed directly by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, just as the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi are, which results in indirect similarities between the language of the House of Justice and the language of Bahá'u'lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi. Additionally, however, the language of the Universal House of Justice is at times more directly referencing certain writings of Bahá'u'lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, as their Words constitute “the binding terms of reference of the Universal House of Justice and are its bedrock foundation.”¹ This can be seen all throughout the messages of the Universal House of Justice, at times in the form of direct quotations, and at times in the form of indirect references. The recent message dated 26 November 2018 provides an exemplary case study of this phenomenon, as it is filled with rather direct references to the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi yet without any actual quotations. These references will be reviewed in this paper.

INTRODUCTION

In the Bahá'í Faith, there are two sources of divine guidance: one is “the Book”, which includes Interpreters of “the Book”, and the second is the Universal House of Justice. The Bahá'í Faith is unique in religious history with regard to both of these sources. Firstly, although humanity has been guided by a series of “Books” revealed by Manifestations of God over the millennia, yet never before have any of these Manifestations, such as Muhammad, Jesus, Moses, and including the Báb, appointed an authorized interpreter to provide continuity of divine guidance after the passing of the Manifestation; Bahá'u'lláh is the first, appointing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the Interpreter of the Word, who in turn appointed Shoghi Effendi as the Interpreter. With the passing of Shoghi Effendi, the body of authorized interpretation in the Faith was complete², and the final pages of the “Book”, we could in a sense say, had been written for this Dispensation.³

Secondly, never before has humanity had a means of continuity of divine guidance throughout a Dispensation. In the institution of the Universal House of Justice, we have an

¹ The Constitution of The Universal House of Justice

² Ruhi Book 8, Unit 2, Section 46

³ Ibid, Section 8

entity, inspired directly by Bahá'u'lláh Himself⁴, alive in the world through which guidance will continue to flow to humanity. It, and it alone, is invested with the authority to decide on all matters not explicitly revealed in the Text, to elucidate questions that are obscure, and to settle all disputes. It was created by Bahá'u'lláh in such a way that it is, at all times, in complete and utter harmony with His Revelation; it is impossible for its guidance to depart from God's Will or to veer from the path that leads to the achievement of His purpose for humanity. In this way, then, the establishment of that Divine civilization, ushered in by Bahá'u'lláh, is assured.⁵

The Universal House of Justice describes these two sources of divine guidance as two authoritative centers to which we turn:

In the Bahá'í Faith there are two authoritative centers appointed to which the believers must turn, for in reality the Interpreter of the Word is an extension of that center which is the Word itself. The Book is the record of the utterance of Bahá'u'lláh, while the divinely inspired Interpreter is the living Mouth of that Book—it is he and he alone who can authoritatively state what the Book means. Thus one center is the Book with its Interpreter, and the other is the Universal House of Justice guided by God to decide on whatever is not explicitly revealed in the Book. This pattern of centers and their relationships is apparent at every stage in the unfoldment of the Cause. In the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* Bahá'u'lláh tells the believers to refer after His passing to the Book, and to “Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.” In the *Kitáb-i-'Ahdí* (the Book of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant), He makes it clear that this reference is to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In the *Aqdas* Bahá'u'lláh also ordains the institution of the Universal House of Justice, and confers upon it the powers necessary for it to discharge its ordained functions. The Master in His Will and Testament explicitly institutes the Guardianship, which Shoghi Effendi states was clearly anticipated in the verses of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, reaffirms and elucidates the authority of the Universal House of Justice, and refers the believers once again to the Book: “Unto the Most Holy Book everyone must turn, and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice,” and at the very end of the Will He says: “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.”⁶

⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes: “Let it not be imagined that the House of Justice will take any decision according to its own concepts and opinions. God forbid! The Supreme House of Justice will take decisions and establish laws through the inspiration and confirmation of the Holy Spirit, because it is in the safekeeping and under the shelter and protection of the Ancient Beauty, and obedience to its decisions is a bounden and essential duty and an absolute obligation, and there is no escape for anyone.”

⁵ *Ruhi Book 8, Unit 3, Section 8*

⁶ *The Universal House of Justice, 7 December 1969*

Since its inception, the Universal House of Justice has functioned without a living Interpreter, yet there is still a profound relationship between the Universal House of Justice and “the Book with its Interpreter” through the body of the Writings and the authorized interpretations that have been left. The Universal House of Justice writes that when it legislates or makes a decision it “observes the greatest care in studying the Sacred Texts and the interpretations of the Guardian”⁷ and “a careful study of the Writings and interpretations on any subject on which the House of Justice proposes to legislate always precedes its act of legislation.”⁸ Furthermore,

It should be understood by the friends that before legislating upon any matter the Universal House of Justice studies carefully and exhaustively both the Sacred Texts and the writings of Shoghi Effendi on the subject. The interpretations written by the beloved Guardian cover a vast range of subjects and are equally as binding as the Text itself.⁹

Not only is the complete harmony between “the Book with its Interpreters” and the Universal House of Justice manifest in the act of legislation of the House of Justice, but it can be seen in general in their messages. The Universal House of Justice draws from and quotes from “the Book” often, especially from Shoghi Effendi. It is striking how similar is the language used by the Universal House of Justice and the Guardian. Apart from direct quotations, which are obvious, the inseparability and complementarity between these twin successors of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá¹⁰, and between the “Book” in general and the Universal House of Justice, can be seen in the general language of the House of Justice. On the one hand, there are phrases in which words in common are used, yet which may not be a reference to each other; on the other hand, the spirit of the language may be identical though with completely different word use. However, there are also many cases in which the words and phrases that the House of Justice uses are referencing certain writings of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi.

The following message from the Universal House of Justice is analyzed below as an example to illustrate this point. This message, written to the Bahá’is of the World, is dated 26 November 2018, just after the halfway point of the Five Year Plan from 2016 to 2021, the final in the series of Plans from 1996 to 2021 all focused on the single aim of advancing the process of entry by troops.¹¹ The message is three paragraphs, the final one being a one sentence assurance of prayers often given at the close of its messages to the Bahá’í world.¹² Thus, the first two paragraphs will be the object of the analysis below.

⁷ The Universal House of Justice, 7 December 1969

⁸ The Universal House of Justice, 27 May 1966

⁹ The Universal House of Justice, 9 March 1965

¹⁰ Century of Light, Chapter 7

¹¹ The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2007

¹² Ruhi Book 8, Unit 3, Section 28

In the first paragraph, three sentences long, the Universal House of Justice calls to remembrance ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and acknowledges our tireless labors in response to His Divine Plan and Will and Testament. In the second paragraph, two sentences long, the Universal House of Justice notes the three brief years remaining until the centenary of the ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s passing, closing the first century of the Formative Age, and express its hope that His loved ones will increasingly embody His counsels, nine of which they proceed to list.

Below is the text of the two paragraphs.¹³

In this season, from the Day of the Covenant to the commemoration of the Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, every Bahá’í heart is stirred by remembrance of Him Who is the Mystery of God, the Centre of Bahá’u’lláh’s impregnable Covenant, the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the embodiment of every Bahá’í ideal, the Most Mighty Branch of God whereunder all can find shelter. May His boundless love and tender solicitude give you reassurance and sustenance as you strive to fulfill the trust He bestowed upon you in His Testament and His Divine Plan. At night in that hallowed room in His home where He departed this life for reunion with His beloved Lord, we will testify to your fidelity to His call, evident in your tireless labors to create a refuge for humanity at this moment of increasing injustice and affliction.

Three brief years remain until the centenary of the Master’s passing, when Bahá’ís the world over will gather and take account of the distance traversed over the first century of the Formative Age. May His loved ones, individually and collectively, little by little and day by day, increasingly embody His counsels: to be united in the Cause and firm in the Covenant; to avoid calumny and never speak ill of others; to see no strangers but regard all as members of one family; to set aside divergent theories and conflicting views and pursue a single purpose and common goal; to ensure that the love of Bahá’u’lláh has so mastered every organ, part, and limb as to leave no effect from the promptings of the human world; to arise with heart and soul and in one accord to teach the Cause; to march in serried lines, pressed together, each supporting the others; to cultivate good character, perseverance, strength, and determination; to know the value of this precious Faith, obey its teachings, walk in this road that is drawn straight, and show this way to the people.

¹³ The Universal House of Justice, 26 November 2018

ANALYSIS

Below are each of the five sentences from the two paragraphs and corresponding quotations from the Writings as well as some thoughts and explanations.

Paragraph 1, Sentence 1:“In this season, from the Day of the Covenant to the commemoration of the Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, every Bahá’í heart is stirred by remembrance of Him Who is the Mystery of God, the Centre of Bahá’u’lláh’s impregnable Covenant, the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the embodiment of every Bahá’í ideal, the Most Mighty Branch of God whereunder all can find shelter.”

The titles of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the first sentence are drawn from Shoghi Effendi’s description of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from *The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh*. Here again is the line from the House message with each title numbered: “**Him Who is the Mystery of God [1], the Centre of Bahá’u’lláh’s impregnable Covenant [2], the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity [3], the embodiment of every Bahá’í ideal [4], the Most Mighty Branch of God [5] whereunder all can find shelter.**” Below is the paragraph from Shoghi Effendi, with the referenced phrases bolded and numbered correspondingly:

He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the **Center and Pivot of Bahá’u’lláh’s peerless and all-enfolding Covenant [2]**, His most exalted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the **embodiment of every Bahá’í ideal [4]**, the incarnation of every Bahá’í virtue, the **Most Mighty Branch [5]** sprung from the Ancient Root, the Limb of the Law of God, the Being “round Whom all names revolve,” the **Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity [3]**, the Ensign of the Most Great Peace, the Moon of the Central Orb of this most holy Dispensation—styles and titles that are implicit and find their truest, their highest and fairest expression in the magic name ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He is, above and beyond these appellations, the “**Mystery of God**” [1]—an expression by which Bahá’u’lláh Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us to assign to Him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized.¹⁴

The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh is one of the letters written by Shoghi Effendi and addressed to the Bahá’ís of the United States and the West between 1929 and 1938, which are

¹⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, emphasis added

included in the volume *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. Shoghi Effendi did not title these letters; it was Horace Holley, who was then the secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'is of the United States and Canada and later elevated to the rank of Hand of the Cause of God, who suggested the title of each of the letters and the book as a whole, which was approved by the Guardian. In *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*, which sets out in uncompromising terms that basic truths that lie at the core of the Faith¹⁵, Shoghi Effendi includes a section on each of the “Three Central Figures”¹⁶ as well as a section on the Administrative Order, which explains how the administrative order will, as it begins to function with efficiency and vigour, come to be understood as the nucleus and pattern of a new world order.¹⁷ As we know, Shoghi Effendi did not leave a will and did not appoint a Guardian to replace him. Given the explicit conditions in the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá regarding the appointment of a second Guardian and the reality that none of the criteria were present, that Shoghi Effendi did not appoint a successor was a sign of his strict adherence to the provisions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will.¹⁸ However, *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* fulfills some of the functions of a will. Hand of the Cause of God Mr. Zikrullah Khadem¹⁹ has said that Shoghi Effendi once told him that he considered *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* as his last Will and Testament²⁰; and Shoghi Effendi’s wife, Hand of the Cause of God Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum²¹ wrote that “However Shoghi Effendi felt in his inmost heart about his other writings, I know from his remarks that he considered he had said all he had to say, in many ways, in the Dispensation.”²² Finally, Shoghi Effendi himself recommends the study of *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* supplementary to the Will of Bahá'u'lláh and of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, listing the three together:

“He feels, indeed, that the time has come for the German believers to acquire a thorough knowledge as well as a full understanding of such important Tablets as Bahá'u'lláh’s “Book of My Covenant” and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament, both of which constitute the very bedrock upon which the entire administrative system of the Faith has been raised and established. As to the “Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh” it also constitutes an invaluable supplement to these aforementioned Tablets.”²³

¹⁵ Ruhi Book 8, Unit 2, Section 41

¹⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*

¹⁷ <https://www.bahai.org/beliefs/essential-relationships/administrative-order/articles-resources/from-dispensation-bahaullah>

¹⁸ Ruhi Book 8 Unit 2 Section 38. Also, The Universal House of Justice wrote in 27 May 1966: “The fact that Shoghi Effendi did not leave a will cannot be adduced as evidence of his failure to obey Bahá'u'lláh—rather should we acknowledge that in his very silence there is a wisdom and a sign of his infallible guidance.”

¹⁹ 1904-1986, appointed a Hand of the Cause 29 February 1952, in the second contingent of Hands

²⁰ <http://covenantstudy.org/questions/shoghi-effendi-will.1.html>

²¹ 1910-2000, married Shoghi Effendi on 25 March 1937, appointed a Hand of the Cause 26 March 1952 after the passing of her father, Hand of the Cause William Sutherland Maxwell

²² Rúhiyyih Khánum, *Priceless Pearl*, Chapter 10

²³ On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 10 January 1935

Paragraph 1, Sentence 2: “May His boundless love and tender solicitude give you reassurance and sustenance as you strive to fulfill the trust He bestowed upon you in His Testament and His Divine Plan.”

In the second sentence, the House of Justice expresses hope that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s “**boundless love and tender solicitude**” gives us reassurance and sustenance. Regarding “boundless love”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá used this phrase in Paris, October 24th and November 15th, 1911. He says that many kinds of love are limited, are bound, such as family love, racial love, national love. However, divine love is unlimited, boundless. “When you love a member of your family or a compatriot, let it be with a ray of the Infinite Love! Let it be in God, and for God! Wherever you find the attributes of God love that person, whether he be of your family or of another. Shed the light of a **boundless love** on every human being whom you meet, whether of your country, your race, your political party, or of any other nation, colour or shade of political opinion.”²⁴ Then He says, “May this **boundless love** so fill your hearts and minds that sadness may find no room to enter and may you with joyful hearts soar like birds into the Divine Radiance.”²⁵ Regarding “**tender solicitude**”, days after the United States formally entered the Second World War, Shoghi Effendi sends a cablegram to America and placed this world conflagration in the greater historical context of America’s spiritual destiny; in this cable, Shoghi Effendi mentions that America is “the object of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s **tender solicitude** and ardent prayers, the center of His hopes, the recipient of His promises and the beneficiary of His blessings”.²⁶ The Universal House of Justice is reiterating ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s tender solicitude for us all.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s boundless love and tender solicitude gives us reassurance and sustenance as we strive to “**fulfill the trust**” bestowed upon us. This phrase was also used in a letter dated 22 April 1926 from Shoghi Effendi written to the “beloved of the Lord and the handmaids of the Merciful through the West” in which he informs his “fellow-laborers in the Divine Vineyard” of the martyrdom of twelve Persian brethren²⁷, reminds the “dearly beloved friends of the West”,

²⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Paris Talks, emphasis added

²⁵ Ibid, emphasis added

²⁶ Shoghi Effendi, Cablegram December 13, 1941, emphasis added

²⁷ In response to this tragedy, a few months later, on 16 July 1926, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada, through its secretary Horace Holley, wrote a lengthy and stirring appeal addressed to His Imperial Majesty Reza Shah Pahlavi, who just became Shah months earlier in December 1925, petitioning him to initiate whatever measures are necessary to terminate these bitter persecutions. They begin the letter by recounting this incident, mentioning by name eight of the victims slain in Jahrum; then proceed to mention the history of the Bábí and Bahá’í martyrs in Persia, the principle of religious freedom, and some Bahá’í principles and history; and that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who achieved so much honor in the West is from Persia, which should be appreciated as a glory to that land. The government still proved intransigent, and periodic recurrences of anti-Bahá’í violence continued to plague the Bahá’í community; and six years later, in 1932, the Guardian called upon Keith

the “standard-bearers of the emancipation and triumph of the Bahá’í Faith”, that the “afflicted brethren of the East have turned their expectant eyes” to them, “confident that the day cannot be far-distant when, in accordance with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s explicit utterance, the West will “seize the Cause” from Persia’s fettered hands and lead it to glorious victory”, and that “Ours is this supreme opportunity; may we **fulfill our trust.**”²⁸

As we are reminded by both Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, we are striving to fulfill the trust bestowed upon us by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá “**in His Testament and His Divine Plan**”. This is referring to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s “*Will and Testament*” and “*Tablets of the Divine Plan*”, two “Charters” of the Bahá’í Faith.²⁹ His *Will and Testament* is a document written in three parts between 1901 and 1908, and was read officially in the Holy Land on 3 January 1922³⁰, just a month after His passing. Shoghi Effendi calls the *Will and Testament* the “Charter of the New World Order”³¹, writes that “the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá...together with the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, constitutes the chief depository wherein are enshrined those priceless elements of that Divine Civilization, the establishment of which is the primary mission of the Bahá’í Faith.”³² The *Tablets of the Divine Plan* were described by the Universal House of Justice in a letter on the centenary of the first of the Tablets as that “sublime series of letters addressed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the Bahá’ís of North America between 26 March 1916 and 8 March 1917”³³ which

“constitutes one of the mighty Charters of His Father’s Faith. Set forth in those fourteen Tablets, Shoghi Effendi explains, is “the mightiest Plan ever generated through the creative power of the Most Great Name.” It is “impelled by forces beyond our power to predict or appraise” and “claims as the theatre for its operation territories spread over five

Ransom-Kehler, an American Bahá’í woman, to undertake a special mission to Iran, to personally petition the Shah to remove the injustices afflicting the Iranian Bahá’ís. She met with multiple ministers and wrote many letters, but never heard from the Shah personally. After 15 months of toil and sacrifice, she died of smallpox in Isfahan, and was buried in the Bahá’í cemetery near the graves of two distinguished brothers, Mírzá Muhammad Hasan and Mírzá Muhammad Husayn, executed for their faith in 1879, whom Bahá’u’lláh had designated the King of Martyrs and the Beloved of Martyrs. Shoghi Effendi named Keith the first American Bahá’í martyr and posthumously appointed her a Hand of the Cause of God, the first woman and the second westerner to achieve that distinction.

²⁸ Shoghi Effendi, letter dated April 22nd, 1926, emphasis added

²⁹ Shoghi Effendi, in April 1955, identifies three Charters and their three respective processes: “the Tablet of Carmel by Bahá’u’lláh and the Will and Testament as well as the Tablets of the Divine Plan bequeathed by the Center of His Covenant—the three Charters which have set in motion three distinct processes, the first operating in the Holy Land for the development of the institutions of the Faith at its World Center and the other two, throughout the rest of the Bahá’í world, for its propagation and the establishment of its Administrative Order”. Furthermore, of note, in *God Passes By*, Shoghi Effendi describes The Kitáb-i-Aqdas as “the Charter of His New World Order” and the “Charter of the future world civilization”.

³⁰ <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/will-testament-abdul-baha/>

³¹ Shoghi Effendi, *The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh*, February 8, 1934

³² Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*

³³ The Universal House of Justice, 26 March 2016

continents and the islands of the seven seas.” Within it are held “the seeds of the world’s spiritual revival and ultimate redemption.”³⁴

Paragraph 1, Sentence 3: “At night in that hallowed room in His home where He departed this life for reunion with His beloved Lord, we will testify to your fidelity to His call, evident in your tireless labors to create a refuge for humanity at this moment of increasing injustice and affliction.”

Of course, the concept of reunion with the Beloved is common in the Writings: “For the true lover desireth naught save reunion with his beloved and the seeker hath no goal but to attain unto the object of his quest”³⁵ and “Whither can a lover go but to the land of his beloved? and what seeker findeth rest away from his heart’s desire? To the true lover reunion is life, and separation is death.”³⁶ Particularly, however, Shoghi Effendi, in *God Passes By*, described the moment of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Ascension with these similar words: “His spirit had winged its flight to its eternal abode, to be gathered, at long last, to the glory of His **beloved** Father, and taste the joy of everlasting **reunion with Him**.”³⁷

Finally, the Universal House of Justice encouragingly acknowledges the Bahá’í World’s “fidelity” to the call of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in these two Charters, evident in our “tireless labors to create a **refuge for humanity** at this moment of increasing injustice and affliction.” In a cablegram to the American Bahá’ís, written towards the end of the Second World War, Shoghi Effendi calls them to “unrelaxing vigilance, continued heroism, redoubled efforts, renewed dedication by rank and file of the community enjoying preponderating share alike in the erection, the defense, and the consolidation of the worldwide Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh since the passing of the Center of His Covenant.”³⁸ He then urges their attention to form, sustain, and multiply Assemblies and groups, to a wider dissemination of literature, to a more audacious proclamation of the Faith, and a more effective coordination of activities that aim at a “fuller demonstration of the rights and claims of the Faith to be regarded as sole **refuge of humanity** in its hour of bitterest agony.”³⁹ This sentiment -- building a refuge for an afflicted and agonized humanity -- is recalled by the Universal House of Justice in its 29 December 2015 message that outlined the current Five Year Plan. They write “The urgency to act is impelled by the world’s desperate condition”⁴⁰. And in acknowledging that the Plan’s objectives are “truly formidable”, requiring “a herculean labour” and “many sacrifices”, they then state plainly: “But

³⁴ The Universal House of Justice, 26 March 2016

³⁵ Bahá’u’lláh, *Súriy-i-Mulúk*

³⁶ *Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh*, from the Persian, #4

³⁷ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, emphasis added

³⁸ Shoghi Effendi, Cablegram November 21, 1944, in *Messages to America*, emphasis added

³⁹ *Ibid*, Emphasis added

⁴⁰ The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015

faced with the plight of a world that suffers more each day bereft of Bahá'u'lláh's elixir, we cannot, in conscience, ask anything less of His devoted followers.”⁴¹

Paragraph 2, Sentence 1: “Three brief years remain until the centenary of the Master’s passing, when Bahá’ís the world over will gather and take account of the distance traversed over the first century of the Formative Age.”

The Universal House of Justice begins by marking time, by placing progress in the context of historical time, as the Guardian so often did. The year 2021 is significant in that it is the Centenary of the Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, which will close the first century of the Formative Age. Shoghi Effendi divided the Bahá’í Era into three ages: the Heroic Age, “impregnated, from its inception to its termination, with the creative energies generated through the advent of two independent Manifestations and the establishment of a Covenant unique in the spiritual annals of mankind”⁴², is associated with the Bábí Dispensation and the ministries of Bahá'u'lláh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá; the Formative Age, the hallmark of which will be the rise and establishment of the Administrative Order according to the precepts laid down in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament and which proceeds through a series of epochs⁴³ ; and the Golden Age, which will represent the “consummation of this glorious Dispensation”⁴⁴. Interestingly, the Heroic Age corresponds exactly to the lifespan of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as He was born on the Declaration of the Báb in 1844 and His passing in 1921 represents the close of the Heroic Age; and the Formative Age is also associated with 'Abdu'l-Bahá as all the Plans are chapters of His Divine Plan.

We are currently in the last Five Year Plan in a series of Plans that began in 1996 and will proceed to 2021, all with the single aim of advancing the process of entry by troops. This quarter-century endeavor will close the first century of the Formative Age and open the second. The first century of the Formative Age is significant because Shoghi Effendi has stated that “The contents of the Will of the Master is far too much for the present generation to comprehend. It needs at least a century of actual working before the treasures of wisdom hidden in it can be revealed.”⁴⁵ The Guardian indicates that it is not only the passage of time which increases our understanding, but the guidance of the Universal House of Justice over time, which applies to both the Will and Testament and the Divine Plan. He writes,

“We are called upon by our beloved Master in His Will and Testament not only to adopt it unreservedly, but to unveil its merit to all the world. To attempt to estimate its full value,

⁴¹ The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015

⁴² Shoghi Effendi, Citadel of Faith

⁴³ The Universal House of Justice, 5 February 1986

⁴⁴ Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, February 8, 1934

⁴⁵ From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, March 25, 1930

and grasp its exact significance after so short a time since its inception would be premature and presumptuous on our part. We must trust to time, and the guidance of God's Universal House of Justice, to obtain a clearer and fuller understanding of its provisions and implications. But one word of warning must be uttered in this connection. Let us be on our guard lest we measure too strictly the Divine Plan with the standard of men."⁴⁶

This century of actual working is, at minimum, “**three brief years**” away and it is extremely exciting to be able to look back over the century -- which witnessed the rise and evolution of the administrative order, the establishment of the Universal House of Justice, the systematic implementation of the Divine Plan under the guidance of first the Guardian and now the Universal House of Justice, and the development of the spiritual and administrative World Centre of the Faith -- and recount what magnificent progress has been made under the Master's sheltering care.

Regarding “**the distance traversed**”, the House of Justice has recently used words such as these to convey a sense of progress, of movement, of journeying across vast terrain⁴⁷. The Ridván 2001 message that announces the occasion of the opening of the terraces on Mount Carmel states, “The significance of the occasion lies principally in the pause it will allow for a review of the remarkable **distance** the Cause has covered in its development during the twentieth century.”⁴⁸ The 2 March 2013 message provides a stunning vision of the harmonious relationships between the individual, the institution, and the community under the influence of Baha'u'llah's Revelation, yet “The Bahá'í community readily acknowledges that it has a considerable **distance to traverse** before its growing experience yields the necessary insights into the workings of the desired set of interactions.”⁴⁹ And finally, in the Ridván 2016 message, the House of Justice reminds us that “Small steps, if they are regular and rapid, add up to a great **distance travelled**”.⁵⁰

Paragraph 2, Sentence 2: “May His loved ones, individually and collectively, little by little and day by day, increasingly embody His counsels...”

⁴⁶ Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration, letter dated February 23, 1924.

⁴⁷ The Ridván 2015 message of the Universal House of Justice states: “The resplendent season of Ridván is at hand, and from the heights to which the community of the Greatest Name has attained, bright prospects are visible on the horizon. A vast terrain has been traversed: new programmes of growth have appeared, and while hundreds more must still emerge in the next twelve months, efforts to set in motion the necessary pattern of activity have already begun in almost every one of the clusters required to reach the 5,000 called for in the Five Year Plan.”

⁴⁸ The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2001, emphasis added

⁴⁹ The Universal House of Justice, 2 March 2013, emphasis added

⁵⁰ The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2016, emphasis added

This is the longest sentence with the most direct references to the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá; only the first part of the sentence was re-quoted above. The Universal House of Justice starts by expressing its hope that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s loved ones increasingly embody His counsels, both individually and collectively, and this they do “**little by little and day by day**”. This phrase comes from a well-know story told about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The story was first told by Florence Breed Khan, who was an American Bahá’í married to Ali-Kuli Khan, a Persian Bahá’í and one of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s secretaries and translators. Their marriage was likely the first Bahá’í Persian-American marriage, and their daughter, Marzieh Gail, was an eminent Bahá’í translator.⁵¹ Florence recounts that in response to someone expressing discouragement to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá “saying that they could not possibly acquire all the qualities and virtues that Bahá’ís are directed to possess, the Master replied, “Kam Kam. Ruz bih ruz” – **little by little; day by day**.”⁵²

The remainder of the sentence includes nine phrases, each of which are ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s counsels and can be found in His writings and talks. They are included one by one below followed by the corresponding quotations. Of the nine phrases, some are nearly word-for-word, some are adapted. Of the ten quotations below (one phrase had two corresponding quotations), six are from *Selections From the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, one from *The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, one from *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, one from *Tablets of Abdul-Bahá Abbas*, and one from *Paris Talks*.

- **“to be united in the Cause and firm in the Covenant”**

“O Lord, O Lord, render us successful through Thy conquering power, in that which Thou lovest and approvest, so that we may become standards of guidance, signs of Thy Kingdom, the All-Glorious [and that we may] adore Thee, supplicate before the Kingdom of Thy mercy, beseech Thy realm of might, be submissive to Thy servants, humble before Thy maid-servants, severed from aught else save Thee, sincerely turned unto Thy face, aflame with the fire of Thy love, diffusing Thy fragrances, **united in Thy Cause**, of one accord in Thy religion, **and firm in Thy Covenant**. O God, strengthen us through the fragrances of Thy sanctity, that we may become sanctified from the stain of egotism and lust, baptized with Thy Holy Spirit, with the fire of Thy love and the water of Thy bounty.”⁵³

- **“to avoid calumny and never speak ill of others”**

⁵¹centenary.bahai.us/photo/abdul-baha-ali-kuli-khan-florence-breed-khan-home-saffa-vaffa-kinney-new-york-city

⁵² Honnold, Annamarie, *Vignettes from the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, emphasis added

⁵³ *Tablets of Abdul-Bahá Abbas*, emphasis added [translation most likely needs to be updated]

“I hope that each one of you will become just, and direct your thoughts towards the unity of mankind; that you will **never harm your neighbours nor speak ill of any one**; that you will respect the rights of all men, and be more concerned for the interests of others than for your own. Thus will you become torches of Divine justice, acting in accordance with the Teaching of Bahá’u’lláh, who, during His life, bore innumerable trials and persecutions in order to show forth to the world of mankind the virtues of the World of Divinity, making it possible for you to realize the supremacy of the spirit, and to rejoice in the Justice of God.”⁵⁴

“The individual must be educated to such a high degree that he would rather have his throat cut than tell a lie, and would think it easier to be slashed with a sword or pierced with a spear than to utter **calumny** or be carried away by wrath.”⁵⁵

- **“to see no strangers but regard all as members of one family”**

“O ye lovers of this wronged one! Cleanse ye your eyes, so that ye behold no man as different from yourselves. **See ye no strangers; rather see all men as friends**, for love and unity come hard when ye fix your gaze on otherness. And in this new and wondrous age, the Holy Writings say that we must be at one with every people; that we must see neither harshness nor injustice, neither malevolence, nor hostility, nor hate, but rather turn our eyes toward the heaven of ancient glory. For each of the creatures is a sign of God, and it was by the grace of the Lord and His power that each did step into the world; therefore **they are not strangers, but in the family**; not aliens, but friends, and to be treated as such.”⁵⁶

- **"to set aside divergent theories and conflicting views and pursue a single purpose and common goal"**

“It behoveth all the beloved of God to become as one, to gather together under the protection of a single flag, to stand for a uniform body of opinion, to follow one and the same pathway, to hold fast to a single resolve. Let them **forget their divergent theories and put aside their conflicting views since, God be praised, our purpose is one, our goal is one**. We are the servants of one Threshold, we all draw our nourishment from the same one Source, we all are gathered in the shade of the same high Tabernacle, we all are sheltered under the one celestial Tree.”⁵⁷

⁵⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Paris Talks, November 17th, 1911, emphasis added

⁵⁵ Selections From the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, #111, emphasis added

⁵⁶ Ibid, #8, emphasis added

⁵⁷ Ibid, #193, emphasis added

- **“to ensure that the love of Bahá’u’lláh has so mastered every organ, part, and limb as to leave no effect from the promptings of the human world”**

“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. Each one is holding in his hand a trumpet, blowing the breath of life over all the regions. They are delivered from human qualities and the defects of the world of nature, are characterized with the characteristics of God, and are attracted with the fragrances of the Merciful. Like unto the apostles of Christ, who were filled with Him, these souls also have become filled with His Holiness Bahá’u’lláh; that is, **the 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.**”⁵⁸

- **“to arise with heart and soul and in one accord to teach the Cause”**

“O ye that stand fast in the Covenant! When the hour cometh that this wronged and broken-winged bird will have taken its flight into the Celestial Concourse, when it will have hastened to the Realm of the Unseen and its mortal frame will have been either lost or hidden neath the dust, it is incumbent upon the Afnán, that are steadfast in the Covenant of God and have branched from the Tree of Holiness; the Hands, (pillars) of the Cause of God (the glory of the Lord rest upon them), and all the friends and loved ones, one and all to bestir themselves and **arise with heart and soul and in one accord, to diffuse the sweet savors of God, to teach His Cause and to promote His Faith.** It behooveth them not to rest for a moment, neither to seek repose. They must disperse themselves in every land, pass by every clime, and travel throughout all regions. Bestirred, without rest, and steadfast to the end, they must raise in every land the triumphal cry “Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá!” (O Thou the Glory of Glories), must achieve renown in the world wherever they go, must burn brightly even as a candle in every meeting and must kindle the flame of Divine love in every assembly; that the light of truth may rise resplendent in the midmost heart of the world, that throughout the East and throughout the West a vast concourse may gather under the shadow of the Word of God, that the sweet savors of holiness may be diffused, that faces may shine radiantly, hearts be filled with the Divine spirit and souls be made heavenly.”⁵⁹

- **“to march in serried lines, pressed together, each supporting the others”**

⁵⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Tablets of the Divine Plan, #8, emphasis added

⁵⁹ The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, emphasis added

“O ye beloved of the Lord! This day is the day of union, the day of the ingathering of all mankind. ‘Verily God loveth those who, as though they were a solid wall, do battle for His Cause **in serried lines!**’ Note that He saith ‘**in serried lines**’—**meaning crowded and pressed together, one locked to the next, each supporting his fellows.** To do battle, as stated in the sacred verse, doth not, in this greatest of all dispensations, mean to go forth with sword and spear, with lance and piercing arrow—but rather weaponed with pure intent, with righteous motives, with counsels helpful and effective, with godly attributes, with deeds pleasing to the Almighty, with the qualities of heaven. It signifieth education for all mankind, guidance for all men, the spreading far and wide of the sweet savours of the spirit, the promulgation of God’s proofs, the setting forth of arguments conclusive and divine, the doing of charitable deeds.”⁶⁰

- **“to cultivate good character, perseverance, strength, and determination”**

“This gathering must be completely spiritual. That is, the discussions must be confined to marshalling clear and conclusive proofs that the Sun of Truth hath indeed arisen. And further, those present should concern themselves with every means of training the girl children; with teaching the various branches of knowledge, good behaviour, a proper way of life, **the cultivation of a good character**, chastity and constancy, **perseverance, strength, determination**, firmness of purpose; with household management, the education of children, and whatever especially applieth to the needs of girls—to the end that these girls, reared in the stronghold of all perfections, and with the protection of a goodly character, will, when they themselves become mothers, bring up their children from earliest infancy to have a good character and conduct themselves well.”⁶¹

- **“to know the value of this precious Faith, obey its teachings, walk in this road that is drawn straight, and show this way to the people”**

“The Faith of the Blessed Beauty is summoning mankind to safety and love, to amity and peace; it hath raised up its tabernacle on the heights of the earth, and directeth its call to all nations. Wherefore, O ye who are God’s lovers, **know ye the value of this precious Faith, obey its teachings, walk in this road that is drawn straight, and show ye this way to the people.** Lift up your voices and sing out the song of the Kingdom. Spread far and wide the precepts and counsels of the loving Lord, so that this world will change into another world, and this darksome earth will be flooded with light, and the dead body of mankind will arise and live; so that every soul will ask for immortality, through the holy breaths of God.”⁶²

⁶⁰ Selections From the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, #207, emphasis added

⁶¹ Ibid, #94, emphasis added

⁶² Ibid, #1, emphasis added

CONCLUSION

The most clear references to the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá are from the last sentence, from the list of His nine counsels that the House wishes us to increasingly embody. And the most direct references to the words of the Guardian are from the first sentence, the titles of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Yet one can find interconnections with the words of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi throughout this entire message and throughout all the messages of the Universal House of Justice. When one dives into both the Ocean of the Revelation and the guidance of God’s Universal House of Justice, one can see that they are, of course, of the same source, speaking the same voice, inspired by the same Divine Will. This exercise, writing this paper, has been helpful for me to consider with closer regard and pay greater heed to the words of the Universal House of Justice as I read their messages, and appreciate with what care they take in choosing every phrase and with what wisdom and love they express in every letter.

In its Constitution, the Universal House of Justice writes that the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh “continues to fulfill its life-giving purpose through the agency of the Universal House of Justice whose fundamental object, as one of the twin successors of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is to ensure the continuity of that divinely- appointed authority which flows from the Source of the Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers, and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings.”⁶³

How else to express profound appreciation for the Universal House of Justice -- “ordained as the source of all good and freed from all error”⁶⁴, “the last refuge of a tottering civilization”⁶⁵, the “crowning glory” of the administrative institutions of Bahá’u’lláh⁶⁶, through which “the hopes of the people of Baha” would be fulfilled⁶⁷, and through which the establishment of a Divine civilization, ushered in by Bahá’u’lláh, is assured -- than to cite the words ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and Testament:

The sacred and youthful branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God, as well as the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of the Exalted One (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God.⁶⁸

⁶³ The Constitution of The Universal House of Justice

⁶⁴ The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

⁶⁵ Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh

⁶⁶ The Constitution of The Universal House of Justice

⁶⁷ Ruhi Book 8, Unit 3, Section 25

⁶⁸ The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá