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THE COVENANT

A manuscript for recording on audio tape by Dr. Darius & Grace Shahrokh

Through this window from these windows to the past, we shall behold the majesty of the mighty ocean of the covenant. Let the sound of the awesome waves bring to mind how it has and shall continue to surge cleansing itself from all impurities. Its force irresistible, its stronghold well-guarded, and its reality the all-encompassing Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh destined to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth.

Let these admonishing words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá ring throughout this talk as they are assuring to the faithful and foreboding to the insincere. "These agitations of the violators are no more than the foam of the ocean which is one of its inseparable features, but the ocean of the Covenant shall surge and shall cast ashore the bodies of the dead for it can not retain them."

(Selection Writings 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 210)

This very unique and unprecedented feature of the Bahá'í Faith will be discussed in four parts.

- The Covenant of the Báb
- The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh
- The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,
- Covenant-breaking

- The inspiration and foundation for preparing this talk was the beautiful work of Mr. Adib Taherzadeh called The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. Other *nine* references are
- The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, - Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh ,
 - Bahá'í World Faith, - Selected Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá ,
 - 'Abdu'l-Bahá by the Hand of the Cause H. M. Balyuzi,
 - God Passes By by Shoghi Effendi,
 - Shoghi Effendi's Messages to the Bahá'í World
 - Memoirs of 9 years in 'Akká by the Herald of the Covenant (The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh p. 183) by Dr. Yúnis Khán-i-Afrúkhtih

The Priceless Pearl by Amatul-Bahá Rūhiyyih Khánum and

What is the meaning of covenant? The dictionary describes it as an agreement between persons or parties. Usually there are at least two parties involved in agreeing upon the terms of the contract. However, the terms of the Covenant of God and His Messengers with people is one sided. Does it sound unfair? By listening to the following analogy by Mr. Taherzadeh one easily can get a deeper understanding.

As soon as a child enters into a school he or she enters into a covenant with the principal. The principal draws up a program, assigns the teachers and provides the facilities. All the child has to do is to attend the classes and do the assignments. That is the only way to acquire knowledge. The terms of such an agreement ^{are} drawn by the principal alone with the student having no say in it. The principal is wise, knowledgeable and strong. The same is true in the Covenant of God and His Messengers with people. Going one step further, we can easily see that a child must attain certain degree of maturity before such cooperation could be expected of him.

It is not practical or fair to impose such an agreement upon an infant or toddler. In this dispensation mankind has matured enough to comprehend the significance of such Covenant and see himself as the beneficiary. That is why in none of the religions of the past such a well defined covenant was ever established. It is one of the unique features of the Bahá'í Faith for a maturing humanity.

In this presentation, two covenants will be discussed. One is the covenant of all prophets or Manifestations of God with people regarding the appearance of the next Manifestation. In this category only the covenant of the Báb will be discussed. The second covenant is the unprecedented covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, for the accomplishment of the following:

- Protection of the revealed Word from human interference
- Preservation of the integrity of the Faith
- Purity of its teachings, principles and laws
- Safeguarding the unity of the Bahá'í community, an absolute requirement to bring about unity of mankind.

These will guarantee the spiritualization of the human race and development of needed agencies for establishment of the Bahá'í World Commonwealth to usher in the Kingdom of God on earth.

In this second category, the covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá will be discussed.

PART I

THE COVENANT OF THE BĀB

The Báb was not just a forerunner to Bahá'u'lláh. He was an independent Manifestation of God. He abrogated the laws of Islám. No one except a Manifestation of God has the authority to abrogate the laws of a former dispensation. His ministry, though only 6 years, served the purpose of paving the way for the coming of Bahá'u'lláh. His laws were contingent on Bahá'u'lláh's acceptance (The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 45)

The most significant part of His writings were devoted to establishing a covenant with His followers concerning the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh whom He referred to as "Him Whom God shall make manifest" or Man-Yuzhirhu'lláh. He mentioned that term more than 300 times in the Persian Bayán and more than 70 times in the Arabic Bayán. (The Cov. of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 33). These two books are the mother book of the Bábi Dispensation.

In several instances, He identifies "Him Whom God shall make manifest" with the designation of Bahá'u'lláh. As you recall, at the conference of Badasht in 1848, Bahá'u'lláh assumed the title of Bahá for himself. Prior to that, the name Bahá'u'lláh had already been revealed in the Persian Bayán.

The following is a passage from the Persian Bayán: "Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the order of Bahá'u'lláh, and rendereth thanks unto his Lord."

Both the Báḅ and Bahá'u'lláh were natives of Persia, now known as Iran. They never physically met. The Báḅ was 2 years younger than Bahá'u'lláh and declared His independent religion in 1844. Six years later He was martyred by a firing squad of 750 men after the first firing failed.

The Báḅ's unique mission in the history of religions is that He stood between two religious cycles. With His appearance, the prophetic cycle ended. This cycle began with Adam as the first Manifestation of God in the recorded history and ended with Muḥammad, the founder of Islám. That is why Muḥammad was designated as the "Seal of the Prophets." At the same time the Báḅ inaugurated the Cycle of Fulfilment whose duration according to Bahá'í writings will be at least five thousand centuries as compared to sixty centuries of the Adamic cycle.

The Báḅ repeatedly gave the year nine as the date of the appearance of Bahá'u'lláh. In Islámic calendar, the years of the Declaration of the Báḅ was 1260 and ^{it} was 1269 when Bahá'u'lláh received His intimation in the Siyáh-Chál of Tehran. This was in October of 1852.

The Báḅ also made reference to number nineteen for the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Nineteen years after the declaration of the Báḅ in 1844 brings us to 1863, when in Baghdad Bahá'u'lláh declared Himself.

The Báḅ clearly told His followers that His own revelation was entirely dependent upon "Him Whom God shall make manifest" and that He was only a servant at His Threshold.

His utter humility towards Bahá'u'lláh and craving to be martyred in His path is manifest in His writings. In one example, the Báb states

"Of all the tributes I have paid to Him Who is to come after Me, the greatest is this, My written confession, that no words of Mine can adequately describe Him, nor can any reference to Him in My book, the Bayán, do justice to His Cause.

The Báb testifies in the Bayán that the greatest proof of Bahá'u'lláh is the revelation of His words and that should anyone claim this station falsely, he will not be able to sustain it. Nevertheless, in order to prevent anyone from mistakenly opposing Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb warned His followers not to oppose anyone who might claim that station. As history witnessed after the martyrdom of the Báb, twenty-five followers of the Báb claimed to be "Him Whom God shall make manifest." Two noteworthy among them were Nábíl, the great historian, and Dayyán, the prominent Bábi from Adherbáyján. However, nearly all of them after meeting Bahá'u'lláh realized their delusion and repented.

The Báb clearly stated that Bahá'u'lláh lived among them and how they should adorn themselves with good character, dress clean and tidy and avoid argument and contention to avoid offending Bahá'u'lláh. Also the Bábis were to leave a vacant chair in their meetings, a seat of honor for Bahá'u'lláh. He further mentioned that "He Whom God shall make manifest" would also leave a seat of honor vacant in His own home and that Bahá'u'lláh would be inwardly amused by those who venerate His name while remaining veiled as to His identity. The followers were to arise whenever they heard the words "Him Whom God shall make manifest."

(You should realize that Bahá'u'lláh was known as Mírzá Husayn 'Alí or Jináb-i-Bahá, until His Declaration in Baghdad.)

No Manifestation of God has ever made a covenant with His followers regarding the next Manifestation to such a degree as to regard Himself as the lowliest servant at His threshold and to recognize Him as the source of His own revelation, desiring to lay down His life in His path.

Well, you may think that it should go smoothly because the Báb's ministry was so short and the advent of Bahá'u'lláh so near. Not to mention the clarity of the Báb's prophecies such as the years 9 and nineteen, and also the name Bahá'u'lláh stated in the Báb's writings and the following statement "When the Day-Star of Bahá will shine resplendent above the horizon of eternity, it is incumbent upon you to present yourself before His throne."

We recall that two years before the martyrdom of the Báb, at the conference of Badasht, Mírzá Husayn 'Alí assumed the name Bahá; but somehow the followers did not put these two Bahás together.

The Báb never contemplated the appointment of a successor for Himself. In the Bayán, He confirms this by saying that in His Dispensation there was to be no mention of successorship. Yet as we shall see later, Mírzá Yahyá, broke the covenant of the Báb and claimed to be His successor.

Before mentioning who Mírzá Yahyá was and the course of events, let us digress to another part of history.

The fame of Bahá'u'lláh as a dynamic noble personality promoting the Faith of the Báb was spread far and wide which put His life in danger.

For example, after the conference of Badasht while Bahá'u'lláh was visiting the port town of Bandar-i-Gaz the order of the king arrived for his immediate arrest and transfer to Tehran, the capital, for execution. Later, the same day, the news of the king's death arrived so the order was not carried out. You must realize that Bahá'u'lláh was aware of His own station from childhood. In one of His tablets, He describes that when He was very young He was overcome by a condition which completely affected His manners, His thoughts and His words. A transformation occurred and the ocean of utterance began to surge within Him, and this condition, Bahá'u'lláh testifies, continued throughout His life.

During the Báb's ministry, three of His followers, who were all the Letters of the Living, recognized the station of Bahá'u'lláh. These were Mullá Ḥusayn, Quddús and Ṭahirih. Then comes the inspiring story of Shaykh Ḥasan-i-Zunúzí which in the interest of time will be mentioned briefly. Shaykh Ḥasan followed the Báb during His captivity. At the fortress of Chihriq, the Báb instructed Shaykh Ḥasan, who was advanced in age, to go to Karbilá, a holy city in Iraq. He promised him that he would attain the presence of the Promised Ḥusayn (which is the Islamic term for Bahá'u'lláh). Bahá'u'lláh visited Karbilá in 1851, one year after the martyrdom of the Báb and a year before His imprisonment in the Siyáh-chál. Bahá'u'lláh at the courtyard of the Islámic shrine approached Shaykh Ḥasan and intimated His station to Shaykh Ḥasan. Shaykh was so overwhelmed that he wanted to proclaim his discovery publicly, but Bahá'u'lláh told him to keep it secret. Now listen to this. This was a year before Bahá'u'lláh received His mission in the infested Siyáh-chál. He told Shaykh Ḥasan the hour has not struck yet and how He would declare it in Baghdad, which as we know took place eleven years later. It really staggers one's imagination.

As 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained, a Manifestation of God is always a Manifestation of God and all the powers are latent within Him. He likens it to a man who is asleep until the hour strikes for the birth of His Mission.

Other than those believers, the followers of the Báb in general were unaware of the station of Bahá'u'lláh. It is easy in retrospect to say why. Even those who witnessed the humility and reverence of Quddús and Tahírih at Badasht and Mullá Husayn at Fort Shaykh Tabarsí towards Bahá'u'lláh were veiled. It surprised them greatly to see that much reverence and humility shown to Bahá'u'lláh. Perhaps being of the class of nobility and not the ecclesiastic was the veil.

Now Mirzá Yahyá enters the scene. The unknown who was made known but through his own doing was eventually lost in the valley of ignominy. As was mentioned earlier, Bahá'u'lláh's fame put his life in danger, so to divert public, Bahá'u'lláh, through a trusted emissary, advised the Báb to nominate Mirzá Yahyá as the leader of the Bábí community. You recall that the last four years of the Báb's life were spent in captivity. That time Mirzá Yahyá was in his late teens. This enabled Bahá'u'lláh to direct the affairs of the Bábí community behind the scenes. The community was not informed of the reason for such an appointment and possibly came as a surprise to many.

A little background information on Mirzá Yahyá helps. He was a paternal half brother of Bahá'u'lláh and about thirteen or fourteen years younger than Bahá'u'lláh. When their father died, he was only 8 years old and grew up under the care of Bahá'u'lláh.

When the Báb declared His Mission in 1844, Mírzá Yahyá was 13 years old. As we know, Bahá'u'lláh soon accepted the Faith of the Báb. He helped this young brother to recognize the Báb, embrace His Cause and to read the Báb's writings. To educate him better, Bahá'u'lláh assigned him to transcribe the writings of the Báb which at that time was the only way to make additional copies. Consequently not only Mírzá Yahyá learned the style of the Báb's composition but also learned how to imitate the Báb's handwriting. When he rebelled against Bahá'u'lláh this helped him to forge the Báb's writings with his interpolation of the words in his own favor. Now that you have the picture, we can go to the Bábí community after the martyrdom of the Báb. The followers suffered terrible persecutions. Their hope for triumph was dashed as the outstanding followers were mowed down. Bahá'u'lláh, the only leader who inspired confidence, was instructed by the government to go to Karbilá which He did for almost a year. Soon after His return He was cast into the notorious Siyáh-Chál of Tehran. The totally dispirited community did not know where to turn for guidance since Bahá'u'lláh after release from the Siyáh-Chal was exiled to Baghdad in Iraq.

The only leader they were told to turn to was Mírzá Yahyá who spent most of this time in hiding roaming the countryside in disguise. Mírzá Yahyá's title from the Báb was Şubḥ-i-Azal, meaning Morning of Eternity; therefore later his few followers were called Azalís.

When Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to Baghdad, Mírzá Yahyá lost his guide and protector. He went in disguise to a western city, one of the stopping places where Bahá'u'lláh stayed on the way to His exile in Baghdad.

Bahá'u'lláh's faithful brother Mírzá Músá called on Mírzá Yahyá, now about 18 years old and advised him to visit Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'u'lláh extended his guidance and protection and responded to his request to live in Baghdad in seclusion near Bahá'u'lláh's residence. Bahá'u'lláh gave him some money.

Disguised as an Arab, ^{he} made his way to Baghdad soon after Bahá'u'lláh's arrival there. He stayed a few days as the guest of Bahá'u'lláh and not wanting to be recognized by Persians, secured a residence in the Arab quarters. He threatened to excommunicate whoever insisted on visiting him or reavealing his identity.

While they were in Persia, Bahá'u'lláh used to dictate directives to the Bábí community which Mírzá Yahyá signed and sent under his name. But he had great ambition to bypass Bahá'u'lláh and to assert himself one day as the successor to the Báb. However, it is a known fact that whenever he came face to face with Bahá'u'lláh, he could not utter a word.

The breaking of the Báb's covenant by Mírzá Yahyá and his mentor brought great test for the Bábí community and a severe crisis which was repeated a few times by other rebels in the course of the history of the Faith. However, in this Dispensation each and every time the ocean of the covenant surged powerfully and expelled the debris. What a mighty and undefilable ocean!

Mírzá Yahyá though ambitious did not have the courage to oppose Bahá'u'lláh. He was shallow, timid and jealous. As a master of disguise at one time he pretended to be a Jew and another time an Arab. In the garb of a dervish he was so well disguised that when he appeared in Baghdad at the door of

Bahá'u'lláh's house, their brother, Mírzá Músá, opening the door failed to recognize him.

He needed a catalyst or mentor which was not too far away. Siyyid Muḥammad-i-Isfahání, the embodiment of evil and knowⁿ as the antichrist of the Bahá'í Revelation found it the opportune time to step in. He was a Muslim theological student in Isfahán, Iran, but was expelled for his reprehensible conduct. In the early years of the ministry of the Báb, he became a Bábí and moved to the holy city of Karbila in Iraq. For the first time, he saw Bahá'u'lláh in 1851 (one year before Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment in the Síyah-chál).

The majesty of Bahá'u'lláh as a Bábí nobleman sparked the fire of envy in him. Two years later when Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to Baghdad, His rising prestige and popularity intensified the fire of jealousy. His satanic influence complemented Mírzá Yahyá's weakness and ambition. The two of them spread the seeds of dissension among the followers in Iraq and through their letter writing campaign confused the Bábis in Iran. The whole reason for Bahá'u'lláh's seclusion for two years in Sulaymáníyyih was their divisive activities. Just one example will give you an idea. Towards the end of Bahá'u'lláh's stay in Baghdad, they wrote that the Book of Certitude or the Kitáb-i-Íqán was written by Mírzá Yahyá but that Bahá'u'lláh published it under his own name.

When Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to Istanbul, He took Siyyid Muḥammad with Him to keep an eye on him, but Mírzá Yahyá refused to go with Him, fearing extradition to Iran or being murdered. His wives were under the protection of Bahá'u'lláh and were in His caravan. At midpoint, Mírzá Yahyá joined the caravan but insisted that his identity should not be unveiled.

This was not hard to do since not many people had met him ^{as} since he was in hiding all the time. Those who had met him, well recognized his shallowness.

During four months in Istanbul, the government had appointed a man to look after Bahá'u'lláh and His companions. Mirzá Yahyá told the man that he was one of the servants of the household and to prove it at times would sleep in the servants' quarters.

After their exile to Adrianople, he and his evil comrade felt that the danger was over and began their open opposition. The desperate Mirzá Yahyá in the first year of their stay invited Bahá'u'lláh to his house and had smeared a deadly poison on the lip of the tea cup. Miraculously, Bahá'u'lláh survived that but was left with shaking hands. With His sin-covering eyes, He kept the matter confidential but Mirzá Yahyá spread the word that it was Bahá'u'lláh who wished to poison him. Therefore the followers learned the cause of Bahá'u'lláh's serious illness which lasted a month. At one time he poisoned the family's water well and another time he asked their mutual barber, a devoted believer, to cut Bahá'u'lláh's throat with a straight edge razor. When this news was spread by the barber against the advice of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh wrote the Suriy-i-Amr (Amr means command) in His own handwriting, declaring His station to be the One promised by the Báb. (Rev. of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol. 2, p. 161) Do you think Mirzá Yahyá, the appointed leader of the Bábis whose term should have terminated with the coming of the Promised One, backed off? To your surprise, the following day Mirzá Yahyá dared to send a message to Bahá'u'lláh that he himself had become the recipient of divine revelation.

Now the two rebels began their letter writing campaign to the followers and the government officials. When Mirzá Yahya's complaint that Bahá'u'lláh was not sharing the governments allowance with him and how his children were starving was brought to Bahá'u'lláh's attention by a friendly governor, the Most Great Separation occurred.

Bahá'u'lláh moved with His family to another house and told His brother Mirzá Músá to divide everything in half and give one half to Mirzá Yahya.

Bahá'u'lláh secluded Himself for two months to give a chance to the followers to decide between Him or Mirzá Yahya. This had electrifying effect on the followers in Iran, 99% of whom rejected Mirzá Yahya. The time of the Most Great Separation was when the terms Bahá'í and Azalí began, the latter meaning followers of Mirzá Yahya.

The tragic downfall of Mirzá Yahya came through a plot masterminded by the evil Siyyid Muhammad. The scheme appeared to be ^asure fire for them. It was to hold a public confrontation between Bahá'u'lláh and Mirzá Yahya.

You might think it was a stupid idea because a quivering sparrow was no match for the falcon, but Siyyid Muhammad was sure that Bahá'u'lláh would not accept it since He usually did not seek public appearance.

Well...Bahá'u'lláh accepted the challenge and on the appointed day and time He walked among the curious crowd who were informed about it. Upon reaching the mosque, He was told that due to unforeseen circumstances Mirzá Yahya wished to postpone it. This time Bahá'u'lláh fixed a time and place but there was no reply from the two.

In 1868 when Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to 'Akka, Mirzá Yahyá was exiled to the island of Cyprus. That island was known to the ancient Turks as the Isle of Satan. Eleven of eighteen apostles of Mirzá Yahyá called "witnesses" turned in repentance to Bahá'u'lláh. Mirzá Yahyá's eldest son, his nephew and niece repented to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and became dedicated believers.

Bahá'u'lláh, in spite of all that Mirzá Yahyá did to Him, through His mercy in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas offered forgiveness should Mirzá Yahyá repent but he chose to die as a covenant-breaker with his soul in the lowest abyss. He died in Cyprus in 1912 after witnessing the triumph of two covenants, that of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. He and his mentor were nothing but a foam on the mighty ocean of the covenant, leaving no trace.

PART II

THE COVENANT OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

There could be no more befitting introduction to this part other than Bahá'u'lláh's own words forecasting the greatest crisis in the history of the Faith. "My sorrow is not for Myself, but for Him Who shall come after Me, in the shadow of My Cause, with manifest and undoubted sovereignty, inasmuch as they will not welcome His appearance, will repudiate His signs, will dispute His sovereignty, will contend with Him and will betray His Cause..." (God Passes By p. 250)

One should not question that with His foreknowledge why did He not prevent it. Friends, this was the test of fire to separate the faithful from the faithless. This was the choice for the followers and a crushing force necessary to solidify the foundation of His mighty covenant free of debris.

Due to lack of maturity of mankind none of the religions of the past left a clear document for the followers appointing an authorized successor to the Prophet Himself. In this Dispensation as Bahá'u'lláh foretold, it is "The Day which shall not be followed by night." The Báb states the day in every religion is when the founder is alive, reflecting the pure light of truth. After His passing, comes the night when only luminaries will shine. However, in the Bahá'í Faith through the unparalleled covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, there shall be no night. Presently, the infallible Universal House of Justice, the offspring of this covenant, is guided by Bahá'u'lláh in leading the whole humanity to its glorious destiny.

The utterances revealed by each Manifestation could be likened to life-giving rain. After the passing of the prophets, the reservoir of utterances was made available to all. Such were the Gospels and the Qurán. The Qurán revealed by Muḥammad within 23 years contains 6,000 verses. The downpour of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation came at the rate of 1,000 verses within one hour. Forty years of the ministry of Bahá'u'lláh did not produce a reservoir. The name ocean could possibly do it justice.

In the past, the reservoir was left open for free use by all without an authorized successor to protect its purity. With various man-made interpretations the water lost its purity, resulting in sects and divisions. However, each sect thrived and grew on its own version of interpretation. Unlike that, Bahá'u'lláh provided a guard or wall surrounding the ocean of His revelation. This is called the covenant, the center of which is 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His eldest son and appointed by Him as the authorized interpreter of His words.

The institution of Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice which succeeded 'Abdu'l-Bahá are the offspring of the covenant and not its center, as has been sometimes mentioned in some publications. There is only one Center of the Covenant, and that is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. However, it must be well understood that they are all links of the same chain of the covenant and today submission to the Universal House of Justice is the same as submission to Bahá'u'lláh Himself. Another important point is that 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi's words do not have the same rank as Bahá'u'lláh's words but the same validity. Both were appointed authorized and infallible interpreters of the Holy Words.

Only through 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the followers receive the unadulterated water of the Revelation. Those who tried to bypass Him, undermine Him or His successors, withered and died,..... a continuous cleansing process.

To discuss the affairs of the Faith after the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, we need to become familiar with the family of Bahá'u'lláh who survived Him and played a role.

Bahá'u'lláh's faithful children were the oldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá whose given name was Ábbás with many exalted titles from Bahá'u'lláh. His two years younger full sister was the Greatest Holy Leaf whose given name was Fáṭimih but was known as Bahiyyih Khanum. Three half brothers of 'Abdu'l-Bahá were Muḥammad-Álī, Dīyá'u'lláh, Badi'u'lláh and their sister Şamadiyyih who married her cousin Majdi'd-Dín, the son of Bahá'u'lláh's faithful brother Mírzá Musá. Mírzá Musá had predeceased Bahá'u'lláh.

Now we focus on 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His nine years younger half brother Muḥammad-Álī. Nearly all of these names have Mirza as a prefix meaning Mr., but for ease to the ears of the western audience, only names will be mentioned.

'Abdu'l-Bahá was highly spiritual, humble and detached. At the time when Bahá'u'lláh was released from the Siyáh-Chál in Tehran, 'Abdu'l-Bahá then almost nine years old intuitively noticed the change in His Father.

When after their arrival in Baghdaḍ, Bahá'u'lláh revealed His station to Him, He threw Himself on the feet of Bahá'u'lláh, begging to be accepted as a sacrifice. In the early years in Baghdaḍ, when barely a teenager, Bahá'u'lláh conferred the title of Master upon Him and reserved it exclusively

for Him. Any time someone referred to another son such as Muhammad-Álî as the Master, Bahá'u'lláh immediately would correct them by saying "There is only one Master, the rest have their names."

During those years in Baghdad, when a learned man asked for Bahá'u'lláh's commentary on an Islamic verse, He gave the assignment to His young son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá. What 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote evoked the admiration of the recipient and others. To some, raising a learned son like 'Abdu'l-Bahá capable of such writing was one of the proofs of the truth of the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh

In contrast was Muhammad-Álî. Witnessing the exalted qualities of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, he and his mother harbored envy and jealousy. Bahá'u'lláh conferred upon Muhammad-Álî the power of utterance, and he excelled in calligraphy. He later misused both talents against 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

During Bahá'u'lláh's 5 year stay in Adrianople, Muḥammad-Álî put a number of Arabic verses together and disseminated them among the Persian believers. This young man in his early teens introduced his verses as the verses of God and claimed that he was a partner with Bahá'u'lláh in divine revelation and that he was the sovereign ruler of all who are in heaven and on earth. Such boldness and preposterous claim evoked the wrath of Bahá'u'lláh who rebuked him in strong words and chastised him with His own hand .

Later on during 'Akká years when a book containing selected writings of Bahá'u'lláh was going to be printed in India, Bahá'u'lláh sent Muḥammad-Álî to write it in his good penmanship for reproduction. He interpolated and altered any part which alluded to the exalted station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Bahá'u'lláh wrote the following specifically about Muḥammad-Álî:

"He verily is but one of My servants. Should he for a moment pass out from under the shadow of the Cause, he surely shall be brought to naught." And in another passage He affirmed, "By God, the True One! Were We, for a single instant, to withhold from him the outpourings of Our Cause, he would wither, and would fall upon the dust." (God Passes By, p. 251)

In total contrast to that arrogance and pride was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's self-effacement. During the 'Akká years many letters from the celebrated Varqá were left unanswered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Varqá who later was martyred had the bounty of being informed by Bahá'u'lláh about the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

When no reply was received from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Varqá wrote to Bahá'u'lláh who instructed 'Abdu'l-Bahá to answer Varqá. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote a short answer stating, "While the pen of the Most High is moving upon the tablets, how could 'Abdu'l-Bahá be expected to write."

The relationship of 'Abdu'l-Bahá with Bahá'u'lláh was very different from that of the other sons. He never entered Bahá'u'lláh's room without permission. To 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh was His Lord but to the other sons He was a holy man whose influence accorded them great respect and many privileges. When Bahá'u'lláh moved to the Mansion of Bahjí, although 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the one who secured it, He did not move with the family but stayed behind in 'Akká. Knowing the envy of the half brothers and their mother, He did not wish to be the cause of dissension. He, with His mother, sister the Greatest Holy Leaf, and His family stayed in 'Akká.

To visit His Father sometimes He rode a donkey. As soon as the Mansion came to sight, He would dismount and walk the rest of the way. A servant would never ride up to the presence of his Lord. He often prostrated at the feet of Bahá'u'lláh and more than anyone else was the recipient of admiration and bounties of Bahá'u'lláh. At times when at the Mansion, Bahá'u'lláh missed 'Abdu'l-Bahá and would write in His own handwriting for Him to come for a visit.

In servitude and humility no one has ever surpassed 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Although the recipient of glowing titles from Bahá'u'lláh, He was totally empty of self and ego, capable of receiving the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh flowing from the summit of His glory.

As we get closer to the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, two other individuals enter the scene. One was Mírzá Áqá Ján, Bahá'u'lláh's secretary for forty years, and the other Majdi'd-Dín, Bahá'u'lláh's nephew and son-in-law. Before sharing some information on these two, you like to know that according to the following passage of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas revealed in 1873, nineteen years

before His ascension, there was no doubt that there would be a successor who would be a son of Bahá'u'lláh. A son of Bahá'u'lláh was referred to as Ghuṣn, meaning branch, the plural of which is Aghsán. The quotation is "When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root." (Kitáb-i-Aqdas, para. 121)

^{Mirza} Áqá Ján, who was a soap maker which was the lowly job for the uneducated, at age sixteen as a Bábí youth attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh ten years before His Declaration. (Ábdu'l-Bahá, by Balyuzi, p. 55) Bahá'u'lláh revealed to him a glimpse of His glory. Bahá'u'lláh conferred such knowledge and ability upon him that made him capable of being His secretary, servant and companion during forty years of His ministry. His knowledge of rich Arabic and Persian words uttered by Bahá'u'lláh and his speed writing were extraordinary. It is known that of all the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, he was the closest to Him. All communications to Bahá'u'lláh, gifts and contributions were channelled through him. Both Bahá'u'lláh and Ábdu'l-Bahá transcended above material wealth. However, ^{Mirza} Áqá Ján, by asking Bahá'u'lláh to have some of the precious gifts, amassed wealth and with the help of Bahá'u'lláh's three younger sons acquired some properties.

In the last year of Bahá'u'lláh's life, ^{Mirza} Áqá Ján displeased Bahá'u'lláh who towards the end dispensed with his services and dismissed him.

(Ábdu'l-Bahá by Balyuzi, p. 56) At times, ^{Mirza} Áqá Ján's behavior caused Ábdu'l-Bahá to rebuke him and even chastise him. (The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 182)

As was said earlier, 'Abdu'l-Bahá resided in 'Akká but during Bahá'u'lláh's last illness He stayed in the Mansion. Towards the end He attended Bahá'u'lláh day and night, depressed about the approach of the hour. Bahá'u'lláh's papers, tablets and seals were in the room. There were two cases in the room. Bahá'u'lláh used to place these materials in them whenever going away from the Mansion. One day He told 'Abdu'l-Bahá to gather everything and place them in the two cases. This broke His heart since it intimated the nearness of the dreaded hour. He became so distraught that He hesitated to do the task when Bahá'u'lláh ordered Him for the second time. Disabled by the mental anguish, He was slowly moving when His cousin Majdi'd-Dín came into the room. With his assistance everything was placed in the two cases. When finished, Bahá'u'lláh told 'Abdu'l-Bahá in front of Majdi'd-Dín that from now on those two cases belonged to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. As we see later, Majdi'd-Dín became the notorious brain behind Muḥammad-Áli and a formidable enemy of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Review of details of history is way beyond the scope of this talk, however it indicates that very probably the alliance of the devious individuals fomented towards the end of Bahá'u'lláh's earthly life, if not earlier. From the text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas there was no doubt in anyone's mind that the Branch mentioned meant no one else but 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The thought of this sent chills through the spines of the faithless who yearned for leadership and wealth at any cost.

Back to the two precious cases given to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. 'Abdu'l-Bahá left the cases in Bahá'u'lláh's room and in a short time on May 29, 1892 in the early hours of morning Bahá'u'lláh ascended. Before sunrise 'Abdu'l-Bahá asked Muḥammad-Áli to assist Him in preparation of the body for burial.

Muhammad 'Alí suggested that since in the process of washing, the cases might get wet and ruin the contents, they better be moved out of the room.

'Abdu'l-Bahá consented. With the help of his cousin and brother-in-law, Majdi'd-Dín, Muhammad-'Alí moved the cases to the room of Badi'ulláh, Bahá'u'lláh's youngest son. As for their approximate ages at this time, of the three sons, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was forty-eight, Muhammad-'Alí forty, and Badi'ulláh 25, Majdi'd-Dín the evil cousin in his late thirties and Bahá'u'lláh's disgraced secretary about fifty-five. You can see that Muhammad-'Alí and cousin Majdi'd-Dín were very close in age as well as treachery. Without doubt as playmates when children they planned usual childish pranks, but this plotting against 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a dangerous game. Although the two caused great suffering for 'Abdu'l-Bahá, for themselves it ended in spiritual suicide. Watch and see the crushing force of the Covenant for those who oppose it.

The sacred remains were laid to rest the same day. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that on the fourth night after the ascension, so badly grief stricken, He could not fall asleep. Around midnight He decided to walk a few steps in His room. Through the window He saw that the brothers had opened the cases and were looking through the contents. This added to His sorrow but He thought to Himself that since He was in possession of Bahá'u'lláh's Will it did not matter. How badly they wanted to put their hands on the Will and alter its contents as Muhammad-'Alí had done before to the Holy Writings.

Nine days after the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, His Will was opened. It was called by Himself the Kitáb-i-'Ahdi, meaning the Book of My Covenant, but referred to as the Kitáb-i-'Ahd or the Book of the Covenant.

In the morning in the presence of nine witnesses, including Muḥammad-ÁlÍ, the contents were read by a believer and in the afternoon at the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, Majdi'd-Dín read it in the presence of all members of the family and the believers in 'Akká and vicinity.

The following paragraph which supplemented Bahá'u'lláh's injunction in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas clearly appointed 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the successor and the authorized interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.

"The Will of the divine Testator is this: It is incumbent upon the Aghṣán, the Afnán (meaning relatives of the Báb) and My kindred to turn, one and all, their faces towards the Most Mighty Branch (a title of 'Abdu'l-Bahá). Consider that which We have revealed in Our Most Holy Book: 'When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.'

The object of this sacred verse is none except the Most Mighty Branch. Thus We graciously revealed unto you Our potent Will, and I am verily the Gracious, the All-Powerful. Verily, God hath ordained the station of the Greater Branch (meaning Muḥammad-ÁlÍ) to be beneath that of the Most Mighty Branch." (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 221-2)

No one raised any argument about the intent as well as the authenticity of the Will which was in Bahá'u'lláh's handwriting. Being so clear, how could any one challenge it. No one did, However, the treacherous allies attacked 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Will.* *but*

A few days later, a believer who had been honored with a tablet from Bahá'u'lláh asked 'Abdu'l-Bahá if He could honor him by affixing a seal of Bahá'u'lláh on that tablet. When 'Abdu'l-Bahá told the brothers to bring the seals which were in those two cases, they denied any knowledge of existence of the cases.. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states how His whole being began to tremble and He knew that great tests and trials were ahead.

Gradually the whole family of Bahá'u'lláh who resided in the Mansion went to the side of treacherous Muḥammad-ÁlÍ. When 'Abdu'l-Bahá with His sin-covering eyes ignored their clandestine activities and assured Muḥammad-ÁlÍ that he was the next in line for successorship, he boldly protested that there was no guarantee that he would outlive 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He arrogantly asserted that he was determined to usurp the position of 'Abdu'l-Bahá exactly the way 'Umar usurped the position from 'AlÍ, the true successor to the prophet Muḥammad.

For four years, 'Abdu'l-Bahá patiently concealed their seditious activities. Then after their positions were fortified by egotistical followers and bribed officials, Muḥammad-ÁlÍ openly through correspondence announced his position. His false accusations against 'Abdu'l-Bahá were intended to discredit and disqualify 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the eyes of the believers as well as the officials. He did not contest the Will, but opposed the appointee in the vain hope of replacing Him. Interestingly, a believer wrote to him that even if the impossible death of the phoenix occurs, no one will become the subservient to the owl. Owl in the East is considered the bird of darkness which is a bad omen.

‘Abdu'l-Bahá was left with no choice but to expel Muhammad-‘Alí and his allies as covenant-breakers and denounced him as the Arch-breaker of the covenant, a stigma that smeared the pages of the history. From now on at times, we may refer to him as the Arch-breaker.

The arrogant Majdi'd-Dín, that formidable enemy of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and the master mind behind Muhammad-‘Alí, was denounced by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá as the incarnation of Satan. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá once told him that he would live a long life to witness the triumph of the covenant and total frustration of his own schemes, and at that time, he would yearn for the balm of death but he will be denied. (‘Abdu'l-Bahá by Balyuzi, p. 54) It exactly happened. He lived to be one hundred years old. Miserable with paralysis and loss of speech, he witnessed the ministry of Shoghi Effendi and the rise of the Bahá'í administration. His wretched life ended in 1955, two years after the launching of the Ten Year World Crusade by Shoghi Effendi, the grandson of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, appointed by Him as the Guardian of the Faith. (Messages to the Bahá'í World, pp. 87-8)

You should also learn about the ending of the Arch-breaker before a brief account of their outrageous intrigues cause you dismay. Muhammad-‘Alí did not fare any better than Majdi'd-Dín. He died miserably in 1937, outliving ‘Abdu'l-Bahá by sixteen years. (The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 355)

Before his death, through efforts of the Guardian he was removed from the Mansion of Bahjí which due to neglect was in ruins. He also was stricken with paralysis, laid bedridden in pain before he died. He was buried according to Muslim rites. His grave remains without a tombstone.

(God Passes By, p. 320)

Now a summary of some of the events after the passing of Bahá'u'lláh.

Soon after the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, the covenant breakers decided to put ^{Mirza} Aga Ján to death under the pretext of his disrespect to Bahá'u'lláh but his wealth was needed to fund their schemes. He took refuge in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house in 'Akka. Then he was coaxed to return because they could use him for another purpose. On the fifth anniversary of the ascension, he announced his affiliation with the Arch-breaker and became a powerful tool in their hands. He pretended to receive revelations and wrote them in the manner he had written for forty years. During a scuffle, many of his so-called tablets addressed to the believers in Iran fell on the ground. They were retrieved by a believer and were given to 'Abdu'l-Bahá who displayed them. At the end of his life before his death in 1901, he resided in the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh which caused 'Abdu'l-Bahá not to enter it. At times when 'Abdu'l-Bahá was praying outside, ^{Mirza} Aga Ján would come out and in vulgar language swear at them.

Ḍi'ya'u'lláh, the younger brother of Muḥammad-'Alí, took the side of the Arch-breaker but was vacillating. He died in 1898 before he could do much harm and after his death, 'Abdu'l-Bahá forgave him.

Badi'u'lláh, the youngest brother of the Arch-breaker and the youngest son of Bahá'u'lláh who was 25 years old when Bahá'u'lláh ascended, though as treacherous as the rest, rendered a service which must be mentioned.

Due to machinations of the covenant-breakers in 1901, by the order of the Sulṭán, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was confined again with the walls of the city of 'Akka. Couple years after that, Badi'u'lláh then in his mid-thirties, began to attend the gatherings of the friends in the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

When he repented to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, he was told that his repentance would be accepted when he would write a testimony to all of the treachery committed by his commander, his deputy and himself. He left such a testimony revealing all their deeds from the fate of the two cases stolen by the Arch-breaker to the alteration of Bahá'u'lláh's writing to make it appear to condemn 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It revealed their techniques of discrediting 'Abdu'l-Bahá and expensive bribes to the officials. 'Abdu'l-Bahá knew what was in Badi'u'lláh's heart, therefore one day He told the believers that every one must write down what He had to say. Badi'u'lláh was present. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said should He die, the House of Justice should form and everyone must obey it. By this, Badi'u'lláh's hopes for successorship were dashed and he went back to his old comrades. He lived a long life and caused great harm. He died in 1950, having witnessed thirty years of the growth of the Faith under the ministry of Shoghi Effendi. (The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh p. 356)

To discredit 'Abdu'l-Bahá they had different scenarios for the Bahá'is and the officials. Bahá'is were told that 'Abdu'l-Bahá, against the injunction of Bahá'u'lláh, claimed to be a Manifestation of God. Their letters to the Persian believers was that their cause was to purify the Faith. This scenario was their justification for the attempt on His life. Twice the jug of His drinking water was poisoned. Once a covenant breaker carried a dagger and another time in Haifa, before His second re-incarceration, in the middle of the night when returning home after seeing the pilgrims, three shots were fired at Him but none hit Him. (Memoirs of Dr. Yunis Khán p. 163)

Another time they falsified that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had claimed to be partner with God so they called themselves Muvahidin, meaning monotheists and the followers of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Mushrikin, meaning polytheist. ('Abdu'l-Bahá by Balyuzi p.61)

Muhammad-ÁlÍ would send his children dressed in rags to the influentials of Ákká pretending starvation due to Ábdu'l-Bahá withholding their share of the funds. Once it backfired because the receipt of his cashing a large sum credited to him by Ábdu'l-Bahá came to open. Actually they indicted Ábdu'l-Bahá with a number of complaints. The first item shows their understanding of the station of Bahá'u'lláh. It stated that their father was a holy mystic man who lived mostly in seclusion and meditation and that for political advantage Ábdu'l-Bahá had claimed that Bahá'u'lláh was the Supreme Manifestation of God. Other complaints were that Ábdu'l-Bahá deprived them of inheritance and funds coming from the believers.

Ábdu'l-Bahá appeared in the court with Bahá'u'lláh's Will in His hand. It answered every false accusation and the case was dismissed. Their expensive bribing was costly. They exhausted the wealth of ^{Mirza} Áqá Ján, then for their deadly strike, they sold one third of the Mansion and Majdi'd-Dín took the bribe to the Governor of the Province of Syria which included Ákká with a demand for the deportation of Ábdu'l-Bahá. After a short digression, you will learn about the preposterous basis for his demand. You should study Ábdu'l-Bahá's history to learn how these disbelievers in God and Bahá'u'lláh tried to block the purchase of needed land for the Shrine of the BáB. For many years until they were cast out, Ábdu'l-Bahá supported them financially while they lived in luxury at the Mansion yet pretended to be starving and demanded more money. They wished to bankrupt Him. They wrote to the Persian believers that Ábdu'l-Bahá's seal for Huqúqu'lláh receipts was stolen by His followers who were pocketing the proceeds. This lie was not effective and the flow of Huqúqu'lláh continued.

In the early part of 1900, 'Abdu'l-Bahá began the foundation of the Shrine of the Báb. The purpose of the visit of Majdi'd-Din ^{to the governor} was to alarm the government with false accusations that 'Abdu'l-Bahá with the help of foreign advisors was building a fortress on Mt. Carmel. Well, this plan back fired. In August 1901 when 'Abdu'l-Bahá returned from celebrating a Holy Day at the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, He learned that His half brothers and Majdi'd-Din were taken away from the Mansion of Bahjí in the countryside to be confined to 'Akká and 'Abdu'l-Bahá was also given the Sulṭán's edict for reconfinement within the city walls. You cannot believe that the Exemplar of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh interceded on behalf of the covenant breakers who were released and returned to the Mansion.

The construction of the Shrine of the Báb was not interrupted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reincarceration which lasted seven years. The greatest thing 'Abdu'l-Bahá missed during those years was not being able to visit the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. Though the friendly governor of 'Akká advised 'Abdu'l-Bahá to feel free to go, He would not, preferring to obey the government. Twice the governor asked 'Abdu'l-Bahá to accompany him to visit the Shrine which 'Abdu'l-Bahá accepted. The second time the governor had arranged for other dignitaries to accompany them. Near the shrine they all as a sign of respect walked a few steps behind 'Abdu'l-Bahá. You can see how the covenant breakers were aggravated by watching this procession through the windows of the Mansion.

Throughout those years 'Abdu'l-Bahá communicated with the believers by writing as many as ninety tablets a day. The first section of His Will and Testament was written during those years when His life appeared to be in danger.

In this Will, He appointed His grandson, Shoghi Effendi, then a child, as the Guardian of the Cause of God. (God Passes By, p. 238)

In 1904 another document of accusations about 'Abdu'l-Bahá's activities was sent by the covenant breakers which brought the Commission of Inquiry to 'Akka. 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited them several times. With His explanations the case was dismissed. With the political situation in the capital rapidly becoming unstable and the Sulṭán becoming fearful, the covenant breakers took advantage of it and sent a new petition accusing 'Abdu'l-Bahá of condemning 'Umar and Sunnī Islām as well as preparing to take over the government.

A new hostile Commission of Inquiry was dispatched to 'Akka in 1907.

They dismissed the friendly governor, closed the telegraph office except for their own use and established direct contact with Muḥammad-Álī the Arch-breaker. Spies were posted everywhere and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house was under constant surveillance. While they received lavish hospitality from the covenant breakers, 'Abdu'l-Bahá ignored them. He was busy repairing His house, planting trees and storing fuel for the winter which surprised many inhabitants who believed that without doubt His days were numbered. *With the rumors* *widespred* They believed that He would be either executed or exiled to a desert in North Africa.

As the events were moving to a climax with the jubilation of the covenant breakers, something special happened. A friendly Italian man who had the agency of a shipping company, visited 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the middle of the night and offered a specially dispatched ship at His service to take Him to any port in the world. Do you think that was the way 'Abdu'l-Bahá was rescued? 'Abdu'l-Bahá invited some of the elders of the Bahá'í community to consult on it. They unanimously agreed that He should accept the offer. 'Abdu'l-Bahá looked at them disapprovingly and stated that running away had never been the practice of the chosen ones of God.

The commission did its final inspection of the Shrine on Mt. Carmel and its strong walls and the vault in it left no doubt about its purpose as a fortress. The four members of the commission boarded the ship which left Haifa to cross the bay towards Akká. As the sun was setting, its lights were quite visible to many believers who with their hearts in their throats were monitoring its movements. To them and everyone else that was the end. Soon they would be taking their beloved Master away. What a disaster! All of a sudden the ship changed its course and headed for the open waters of the Mediterranean Sea. That day a bomb intended for the sultán had exploded in front of his royal coach which killed a few but he was not harmed. With the gravity of the situation everything else was put aside including the commissions report.

Soon the revolutionaries demanded the release of all political and religious prisoners. In the summer of 1908 'Abdu'l-Bahá was freed and a few months later Sultán 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd was deposed. 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated that the hand of providence removed the chains from His neck and placed it on the neck of the Sultán. (The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 237)

Now a few words about the activities of the covenant breakers in the East and the West. It suffices to say that the Arch-breaker's chief lieutenants were the greatest teachers who got quite egotistical from their success. They had the promise of Muḥammad-ʿAlí to be appointed as the head of the Faith in those regions. After Muḥammad-ʿAlí was *cast out* by ʿAbdu'l-Bahá, ninety-nine per cent of the steadfast community of Persia rejected these ^{*expelled*} arrogant teachers. In the United States it took great efforts by ʿAbdu'l-Bahá and teachers such as Mirzá Abu'l-Faḍl to clear the confusion created by the egotistical defector Ibráhim Khayru'lláh who had been a very successful teacher. The purpose of ʿAbdu'l-Bahá's extensive travel to the West in 1912 was twofold. One was to proclaim the Cause of His Father first hand and the second was to show the believers in the world that the foundation of the covenant was so firm it could not be harmed by the covenant breakers during his long absence from the Holy Land.

PART III

The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

The Administrative Order - the Offspring of the Covenant

the Will + Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,
 This vital document, called the Charter of the Administrative Order by Shoghi Effendi, was unsealed at a crucial time when the Ark of the Covenant appeared to be heading towards the treacherous waters of rebellion and division after the ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The twin strongholds or mighty pillars of the Administrative Order, namely, the institution of the Guardianship and of the Universal House of Justice were the offspring of the two monumental charters, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Before that critical time it was the period of smooth sailing with 'Abdu'l-Bahá at the helm. The defeated creatures of the dark were hiding in their dens wondering what went wrong with their plans. They mourned 'Abdu'l-Bahá's survival of the onslaught of their successive assaults. Their dismay had no bounds when towards the end of World War One Jamál Páshá, the commander of the Turkish army, could not crucify 'Abdu'l-Bahá as he had promised, having been conquered by the British army. Then after the War, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was knighted in Haifa by the British government official, General Allenby for His humanitarian services rendered during the gloomy days of the war.

Shoghi Effendi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's eldest grandson, received his Bachelor of Arts degree from the Universtiy of Beirut in 1918 and was more than glad to return to his Grandfather whom he loved so much. For two years he acted as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's secretary for His English correspondence

How unforgettable were those two happy years in the life of Shoghi Effendi who would accompany 'Abdu'l-Bahá when meeting dignitaries and officials.

'Abdu'l-Bahá had made an allusion about a possible trip to India and the Far East, the United States and Europe, taking four to five years. (The Priceless Pearl, p. 31) It is possible that Shoghi Effendi was counting on accompanying Him on that trip. After all when he was fifteen years old he accompanied 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the start of the trip to the United States, but through the mischief of a jealous relative, Shoghi Effendi was forced to return to Haifa from the port of Naples, Italy. (The Priceless Pearl, p. 19)

When it was decided that Shoghi Effendi should go to Oxford University in England to polish his translating ability, he welcomed it. 'Abdu'l-Bahá though advanced in age, was so active that every one thought the end was in the distant future. He Himself knew the approach of the hour but His allusions to this effect fell on relatively deaf ears. Life without 'Abdu'l-Bahá was unthinkable.

It had been a little more than one year since Shoghi Effendi, now almost twenty five years old, had entered Oxford when on November 28, 1921, 'Abdu'l-Bahá after a short illness passed away. A while before His passing, He had requested the parents of Shoghi Effendi to wire him to return immediately. But the parents chose to send the message by mail instead of telegram so as not to worry their son. Well, with the slow postal service, the letter arrived much too late.

With 'Abdu'l-Bahá gone and no one at the helm for forty days, it appeared to the believers that the Ark of the Covenant had again entered the choppy

waters of instability and treachery. The greatest concern was the Arch-breaker Muḥammad-Álī, sixty nine years old, who according to the Will of Bahá'u'lláh, was the next in line as the successor. Heaven forbid even the thought of such a perfidious man who had opposed Ábdu'l-Bahá so viciously for three decades now taking His place.

Well, another transition and time for tests and cleansing the Faith from the insincere and egotistical. Invariably every time it was the insincere people in the family and some of the high ranking teachers who had to be cast out.

The following update will help you to understand the coming events.

Ábdu'l-Bahá was survived by the following:

- His two years younger sister the Greatest Holy Leaf.
- His wife Munírih Khánum
- Four daughters, all married and their families including fourteen grandchildren.
- The eldest grandson was Shoghi Effendi born in 1897.

Shoghi means one who longs or yearns. This name was given to him by Ábdu'l-Bahá who also instructed everyone even his parents to call him Shoghi Effendi, Effendi being a respectful title, even during his childhood. The last name of Rabbáni was also conferred by Ábdu'l-Bahá to Shoghi Effendi, therefore his full name is Shoghi Effendi Rabbáni. His mother was the eldest daughter of Ábdu'l-Bahá and his father was an Afnán, meaning a descendent of the family of the Báb's wife. Shoghi Effendi had two brothers and two sisters.

The covenant breakers were mostly of the older generation - Muḥammad-ÁlÍ, his younger brother BađÍ'u'lláh and the notorious Majdi'd-Dín, their cousin. Muḥammad-ÁlÍ's son Shua'u'lláh had been doing mischief in the United States since Ábdu'l-Bahá's trip. There were other covenant breakers too which shall not be mentioned by name. Two prominent Persian believers who became covenant breakers after the passing of Ábdu'l-Bahá were Aḥmad Sohráb and Ávárih.

Aḥmad Sohrab as a young man was sent to the United States to be a servant to MÍrzá Abd'l-Fađl during his stay in the United States. However, Aḥmad Sohráb stayed in the States and became proficient in English. In 1912 during Ábdu'l-Bahá's tour of the United States, Sohráb became Ábdu'l-Bahá's interpreter. Ábdu'l-Bahá took him back to Haifa to serve as secretary for His English communication to the West. In view of that position he became well known to the Western believers and grew in prominence.

Ávárih's name was Ábdu'l-Ḥusayn from Taft, a village close to Yazd. Ábdu'l-Bahá gave him the title of Ávárih meaning Wanderer on account of his extensive travel teaching. He was recognized as one of the best and most popular and respected Bahá'í teachers. Not a good ending awaited them.

With this brief introduction, we open the next chapter.

When Shoghi Effendi heard the shocking news of Ábdu'l-Bahá's passing, he collapsed. It took a couple weeks before he could sail back to Haifa on December 16, 1921. He arrived in Haifa on December 29. He knew that there was a sealed envelope with his name on it entrusted to the Greatest Holy Leaf by Ábdu'l-Bahá.

As he has stated himself, he had no idea about becoming the Guardian. He thought that after 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the House of Justice would be formed and he might be the convenor.

After his arrival in Haifa, the Will and Testament was read to him which was another shock about the gravity of the task. How could any one replace 'Abdu'l-Bahá?

It was about forty anxiety-ridden days from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing to January third, 1922, when the Will was read to the family and the believers. It was written in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own handwriting, clearly appointing Shoghi Effendi as the Guardian of the Cause and the authorized interpreter.

The Bahá'í World was informed and the photocopy of the Will was distributed. The believers all over hailed the joyous news. No one questioned the authenticity of the Will except an American lady, Mrs. Ruth White. She had seen 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Holy Land and after His ascension questioned the Will to the degree that she asked the Postmaster of the United States to prohibit the National Spiritual Assembly from using U. S. postal system since according to her they were distributing lies about Shoghi Effendi being the successor to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. She also wrote her objections to the British High Commissioner of Palestine but she was ignored by both.

Successive poundings began to assault the Ark of the Covenant trying to split it but were incapable of breaking the unity.

Due to two nerve-shattering shocks, Shoghi Effendi's health deteriorated so in April 1922 he left Haifa for treatment in Europe. Recovered, he returned to Haifa in December of the same year.

None of us can realize what it meant to be at the helm in those turbulent years. The life of Shoghi Effendi is a task all by itself presently being prepared. You must also study his biographies. Words cannot portray the impact of those terrible attacks. Soon after the ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the old creatures of the dark crept out of their dens. Their delusion was that with the mighty guard, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, out of the picture, the shield was down and Shoghi Effendi, only 25 years old, was inexperienced and would be vulnerable to their deadly assault. How oblivious of the impregnable armour of the covenant and its source of strength.

Muhammad-Álî and his associates tried to enforce his claim to be the successor after 'Abdu'l-Bahá through both government and religious authorities.

Frustrated by the lack of progress in their aims, his brother Badi'u'lláh by force took the key of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh from its Bahá'í caretaker.

In a short time, authorities intervened and the key was returned to Shoghi Effendi.

Most of the family, the prominent Bahá'ís of the East and the West as well as the government officials favored formation of the House of Justice because it appeared that the affairs of the Cause were too much for young Shoghi Effendi to handle.

Before leaving the Holy Land in April 1922, Shoghi Effendi invited some prominent believers to Haifa to discuss the issue of the Universal House of Justice. Amazing how everyone favored it, particularly those with ego who were sure of their membership in it. Ahmad Sohráb was one of them. Ávarih arrived too late for the meeting but he intimidated to the Greatest Holy Leaf the urgent need for such a formation. In allusion, he threatened that should Shoghi Effendi fail to comply, he could make the Persian believers rise against him. What a folly.

The guidance of Bahá'u'lláh promised through His unfailing covenant led Shoghi Effendi to decide against the formation of the Universal House of Justice at that time. He found that the foundation was not strong enough to support it. There were loosely-knit local assemblies whose members had no idea what their real purpose or the scope of their duties were. National Spiritual Assemblies did not exist. Ábdu'l-Bahá's Will established them as the secondary Houses of Justice, essential for the election of the Universal House of Justice.

Through dedicated guidance and supervision of Shoghi Effendi, the pattern of the institutions of the Faith were first built in the United States. Horace Holley was the right hand of the Guardian, and later was elevated to the rank of a Hand of the Cause. Now you know why the Guardian referred to the United States as the Cradle of the Administrative Order.

The achievements and dedicated work of Shoghi Effendi in that hostile environment in the Holy Land are too numerous to be mentioned here. However, it is important to mention that the Guardian did not interject his personal

ideas into the building of the administration. All were interpretations of the Words of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which he was empowered to do. The best example of it was his not pronouncing anything new as a condition for his choice to appoint a successor. Such a new pronouncement or legislation would be only in the domain of of the Universal House of Justice. His was only to interpret what had been revealed, explicitly or implicitly. As the expounder of the Faith, he enabled the believers for centuries to come to understand what is the station of Bahá'u'lláh and the goal of His Cause.

Before long, Ahmad Sohráb and Ávárih and their underlings with their hopes for leadership dashed, began their rebellion and were cast out as covenant breakers. Ávárih's wife left him in obedience to the law to shun the covenant breakers. Unfortunately, the close family of Shoghi Effendi did not understand this principle. After the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sister, the Greatest Holy Leaf in 1932, one by one family members including the aunts *and their families as well as* his brothers and sisters were expelled as covenant breakers. This did not include his parents. Alone, he guided the Ark into safe waters. After his marriage in 1937 to Mary Maxwell, known as Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khanum, he benefitted from her companionship and assistance. If it were not the activities of the covenant breakers, it was the Jewish-Arab war which terrorized the Holy Land, and equally bad was World War Two. Fortunately many of the covenant breakers took the side of the Arabs during the Jewish-Arab war and left Israel.

Regaining the Mansion of Bahjí and the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh from the hands of the covenant breakers, the beauty of the Bahá'í gardens, the majesty of

the Shrine of the Báb and the International Archives Building and rapid growth of the Faith gave assurance to the Bahá'í World for peaceful sailing for years to come but it was not to be. Again, another transition, another storm of tests.

The news of the sudden passing of Shoghi Effendi at age sixty in November 1957 sent tremor throughout the Bahá'í World. The after-shock was yet to come. He passed away in London and was laid to rest there.

A short digression here is necessary. Bahá'u'lláh appointed four Hands of the Cause whose services extended during the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not appoint any and only conferred the rank upon a few posthumously. His Will and Testament authorized the Guardian to appoint the Hands of the Cause during His ministry for the purpose of protection and propagation of the Cause. Shoghi Effendi during thirty-six years of his ministry appointed thirty-one Hands of whom twenty-seven were living at his passing. (The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 323, 381)

Most of the Hands were appointed during the last years of his ministry. One month before his passing in his letter written in October 1957 he referred to the twenty-seven Hands of the Cause as "The Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth."

On the invitation of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khanum, herself a Hand of the Cause, the Hands of the Cause gathered in Haifa and examined Shoghi Effendi's desk and papers and found no will and no appointed successor. This news was the after-shock which again shook the Bahá'í World within a short span of time.

Leaving no will caused some concern, but the believers had matured and no serious disruption took place. The Hands of the Cause realized what their appointment as the "Chief Stewards" in the last letter from Shoghi Effendi meant. It became clear that they were to take charge and navigate the Ark through some dangerous and narrow passes. This was again critical because they were not infallible as Shoghi Effendi was or the Universal House of Justice would be, but they had the protection of the Covenant.

In 1953 when Shoghi Effendi had launched the Ten Year World Crusade, there were only twelve National Spiritual Assemblies. In 1963, six years after his passing, when the Crusade was completed, there were fifty-six National Assemblies. We can easily see how with the final plan of the Guardian, the foundation became strong enough to support the Universal House of Justice.

(PAUSE)

You might question why the Guardian of the Faith did not follow the injunction of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas to write a will. The purpose of a will by a Bahá'í is, first, declaration of his belief in Bahá'u'lláh and second, dispersement of assets. Shoghi Effendi in his writings clearly demonstrated his belief in Bahá'u'lláh. He did not have any assets since all of the buildings and holy places were registered under the name of various National Spiritual Assemblies. Lastly, the conditions dictated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will could not be met for the appointment of a successor. As was said earlier, he was not authorized to legislate a variation. The condition was that the successor must be Shoghi Effendi's son or an Aghsán, meaning one of the male descendants of Bahá'u'lláh. Well, he had no child and all of the Aghsán had been declared covenant breakers which disqualified them.

The Hands of the Cause as Chief Stewards had the protection of the covenant and the assurance that Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas had made a reference to such a possible break in successorship before the election of the Universal House of Justice. (Kitáb-i-Aqdas, parag. 42)

So they went to work and elected nine of the Hands to stay in Haifa fully in charge of their duties to protect the Cause and propagate it. For propagation they oversaw the orderly and systematic progress of the remaining five years of the Ten Year Crusade.

As for the protection of the Faith, an unusual challenge confronted them. That was in 1960 when Mason Remey, another Hand of the Cause, claimed to be the second Guardian of the Faith. He tried to by-pass or manipulate the provisions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will. First he claimed to be a branch or ghuṣn. A ghuṣn which is the Arabic word for branch specifically referred to male offspring of Bahá'u'lláh in their Wills. Remey said he was a branch because Bahá'u'lláh had said "Ye are all the fruite of one branch" and that meant every person is a branch. However, this kind of branch mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh in Persian is called Shákhṣár, entirely different than ghuṣn. Both are translated into English as branch.

The real delusion which led Mason Remey to make such a preposterous claim was his being appointed by the Guardian as the president of the International Bahá'í Council. The Guardian had referred to this Council as the embryonic form of the Universal House of Justice. Mason Remey deducted that this presidency equated with the presidency of the real House of Justice which according to the Will of 'Abdu'l-Bahá belongs to the Guardian.

He was counselled by the other Hands that if his deduction was right, then the Guardian himself during his lifetime should have presided over the Council, and secondly, the House of Justice would be formed by election, but the council was by appointment. The last decisive rebuff was that the Will of 'Abdu'l-Bahá specifically mentions that the successor appointee by the Guardian must have the approval of the nine Hands of the Cause elected by all of the Hands. Since he could not be counselled to give up his false claim, he had to be declared a covenant breaker. That crisis, as severe as it appeared to be, was another test and another indicator about unassailability of the covenant.

The ripples he caused made a few ambitious and insincere to sink with him. Some of his misguided followers and contending successors still exist but soon they will wither and disappear.

It is noteworthy that all of the covenant breakers who contested the authorized successors gradually sank deeper into the folly of their betrayal, they ultimately repudiated acceptance of the station of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

(PAUSE)

Bahá'ís must shun the covenant breakers and not read their literature. Should one accidentally open their communication, it must be forwarded to the National Spiritual Assembly. The covenant breakers and their writings are contaminated with the spirit of rebellion and are as contagious as a virus. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that the contact of one thousand healthy people with a sick person will not cure him, but one diseased person can contaminate a thousand healthy ones. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Star of West, Vol. XII, p. 233)

Bahá'u'lláh has forbidden association with the violators of the covenant which also has been reaffirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Testament, "...one of the greatest and most fundamental principles of the Cause of God is to shun and avoid entirely the covenant breakers, for they will utterly destroy the Cause of God, exterminate His Law and render of no account all efforts exerted in the past." (Bahá'í World Faith, p. 434)

Before we go to part four, the following two questions should be answered. By reading certain writings of the Faith, it appears that the institution of the Guardianship should continue. To answer this question, one must define the unique domain of the Guardianship versus the domain of the Universal House of Justice.

The principle domain of the Guardian is authorized interpretation of the Holy Words while the domain of the Universal House of Justice is legislation of new laws as authorized by Bahá'u'lláh. When we look at the history of the Faith with the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá for twenty-nine years from 1892 to 1921 and ministry of Shoghi Effendi for thirty-six years from 1921 to 1957, this Faith has more than sixty-five years of authorized interpretation of the Holy Words. As you know, Bahá'u'lláh Himself allowed the believers to ask Him questions and He clarified many issues, such as found in the Question and Answer part of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The extensive thirty-six years of interpretation by the Guardian has left for posterity a rich mine which the Universal House of Justice will continue to research. This is the meaning of the continuation of the Institution of the Guardianship.

What about the writing that states the Guardian is the permanent president

of the Universal House of Justice. Doesn't it imply that other than the Guardian, no chairman or president should head the House? Could it be considered a protective measure which will not give any individual believer the special position of occupying that seat?

You should know that the Universal House of Justice, contrary to all other kinds of organizations, does not have an elected chairman. In rotation, members convene the meetings and sign the communications issued by the Supreme Body. Most likely you have seen communications from the House of Justice. The signature is not an individual's name but is signed "The Universal House of Justice." The perfection of this system is astonishing.

PART IV

The making of a covenant breaker, its perils and perpetual damnation.

(Baha' World Faith pp 436-7)

There are four major categories of covenant breakers:

- Those who were related to Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi.
- Those who achieved prominence.
- Those who blindly fell victims to the above by maintaining contact.
- Those who oppose and try to undermine the authorized leadership of the Faith.

Closeness to Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi proved very dangerous and at times spiritually fatal for those not spiritually oriented. The fruit of spiritual blindness is pride, ambition and lust for power. Such were the characteristics of the family members who became covenant breakers.

They were oblivious to the true station of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. All they could see in the appointed successor was their physical similarities as family members and could not fathom that the destiny of mankind was dependent upon the provisions of the Covenant. How narrow-minded and how selfish. Instead of whole hearted support, they caused sorrow and temporary delay in the progress of the Faith.

About those who achieved prominence in the Faith, one can easily see how the attention and admiration of the believers made them feel they should have a special rank. The example of the Exemplar, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that the highest rank for a believer is that of humility and servitude meant nothing or the family members to them. By feeling equal to each appointed successor, they wished to become partners with them or displace them and as a result they were cast out. They devised all sorts of schemes to mislead the gullible believers. Anything from pretentious revelation writing, interpolation of the text to dissemination of letters discrediting 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, the Hands of the Cause and the Universal House of Justice. Every time it was a great test for the believers. Fortunately they didn't make a dent and the Faith remains undivided. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "Were it not for the protecting power of the Covenant to guard the impregnable fort of the Cause of God, there would arise among the Bahá'is in one day a thousand different sects." (Bahá'í World Faith, pp. 357-8)

Cutting off contact or shunning the covenant breakers and not reading their literature may sound like being against the principle of independent investigation of truth. Consideration of two facts will help us to understand the reason for shunning.

Number one, most of us have done our investigation before becoming believers, which should include knowing the history of and understanding the spiritual death in covenant breaking. Being a sincere believer includes accepting the authority and being obedient to the commandments of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice.

Number two, the covenant breakers are not just ignorant enemies of the Faith. The majority have been learned Bahá'ís who could not satisfy their hunger for leadership. With their beguiling talk they can confuse a believer who is not so learned. At the beginning they appear sincere. As soon as one's confidence is gained, they implant the seeds of doubt, which are based on falsehoods about the chain of succession and authority in the Faith.

Therefore investigating their claims should not be confused with investigation of truth.

Just one example of the devious activities of the covenant breakers in 'Akka after the passing of Bahá'u'lláh will suffice. To discredit 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the covenant breakers would send couple of their double-faced agents to befriend the believers, most of whom had actually been in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. These agents would act as sincere Bahá'ís and very devoted to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In the course of their visits, they gradually would elevate 'Abdu'l-Bahá's rank to that of Bahá'u'lláh and even greater, falsifying that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had claimed this.

At this stage, a third agent entering the picture would adamantly dispute such preposterous claims. Well, you guess the result, the seed of doubt and confusion planted and another victim recruited to their camp.

This brings up an important point and that is we have to understand that we may not call believers who do not agree with us or who are disobeying some laws covenant breakers. Pronouncing a person a covenant breaker was done by Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. In the present day it is done by the Hands of the Cause in consultation with the Universal House of Justice. It is a very serious pronouncement and may not be done lightly by an individual. The extent of loving counselling extended to these people beginning with Mirzá Yahyá to the average person in this day is beyond the patience of an ordinary person.

In case one observes that another believer is maintaining contact with a covenant breaker or engaging in attacking the Faith, one should discuss his or her concerns with a Board member for protection or their assistants. Gossiping about such concerns must absolutely be avoided.

In regard to the retribution awaiting the soul of a covenant breaker, this *one of many* admonishment^s from Bahá'u'lláh will leave no doubt, "He who breaks the Covenant is cursed by heaven and earth." (Bahá'í World Faith, p. 436)

To understand why the sin of covenant breaking has been cursed by Bahá'u'lláh the following explanation might help.

A child never physically challenges an adult. To challenge and oppose, one must feel equal or superior to the opponent. This was the attitude of Mirzá Yahyá who challenged Bahá'u'lláh, Muḥammad-Álī who challenged 'Abdu'l-Bahá and their likes then or later on. Assuming such equality or partnership is a transgression well beyond any other sin. The enemies of the Faith who through ignorance have attacked the Faith might be forgiven by God, but those who were believers and knowingly violate the covenant and strike at its roots are entirely different.

Sincere repentance could bring absolution. Bahá'u'lláh offered it to Mírzá Yahyá in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, but he did not repent. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice have forgiven those deserving it, but the majority have gone to the grave with that eternal burden.

Now a few words about the attitude of the believers towards covenant breakers. Bahá'is must shun the covenant breakers, ignore their literature but never challenge or persecute them. Just ^{by} leaving them to themselves like a cut off branch, they spontaneously will wither and die. ^{However,} The community must be protected from the covenant breakers as the body from a deadly disease. Such protection must not be confused with acts of opposition and hatred.

Before closing this presentation one final thought. Why do we need to pray for firmness in the Covenant? Remember, the Covenant is a contract between Bahá'u'lláh and us. We are the second party to this covenant and believe in the authorized successors to Bahá'u'lláh. The prayer is for our protection to never, even for one moment doubt the infallibility of Bahá'u'lláh and His appointed successors. Such doubting does not necessarily need the interference of a covenant breaker. Our human weakness might be our worst enemy. May this prayer from 'Abdu'l-Bahá protect us all.

"O my Lord and my Hope! Help Thou Thy loved ones to be steadfast in Thy mighty Covenant, to remain faithful to Thy manifest Cause, and to carry out the commandments Thou didst set down for them in Thy Book of Splendors; that they may become banners of guidance and lamps of the company above, well-springs of Thine infinite wisdom, and stars that lead aright, as they shine down from the supernal sky. Verily, art Thou the Invincible, the Almighty, the All-Powerful.
