

## Pilgrims' Notes

By 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi  
Universal House of Justice

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The following excerpts on pilgrims' notes are taken from the one-volume encyclopedia of Bahá'í quotations *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File* (Compiler Helen Hornby); New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1994). See also some comments on Pilgrims' Notes in the letter from the International Teaching Centre, [https://bahai-library.com/itc\\_calamity\\_pilgrims\\_notes](https://bahai-library.com/itc_calamity_pilgrims_notes).

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### 147 Pilgrims's Notes

“Regarding the notes taken by pilgrims at Haifa. The Guardian has stated that he is unwilling to sign the notes of any pilgrim, in order that the literature consulted by the believers shall not be unduly extended... This means that the notes of pilgrims do not carry the authority resident in the Guardian's letters written over his own signature. On the other hand, each pilgrim brings back information and suggestions of a most precious character, and it is the privilege of all the friends to share in the spiritual results of these visits.”

(Shoghi Effendi: *Directives of the Guardian*, Page: 54)

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### 1431. Any Narrative Not Authenticated by a Text Should Not Be Trusted

“Thou has written concerning the pilgrims and pilgrims' notes. Any narrative that is not authenticated by a Text should not be trusted. Narratives, even if true, cause confusion. For the people of Bahá, the Text, and only the Text, is authentic.”

(‘Abdu'l-Bahá: from a previously untranslated Tablet)

1432. *Privilege of Friends to Share Results of These Visits*

“Regarding the notes taken by pilgrims at Haifa. The Guardian has stated that he is unwilling to sign the notes of any pilgrim, in order that the literature consulted by the believers shall not be unduly extended... This means that the notes of pilgrims do not carry the authority resident in the Guardian’s letters written over his own signature. On the other hand each pilgrim brings back information and suggestions of a most precious character, and it is the privilege of all the friends to share in the spiritual results of these visits.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States: Bahá’í News, No. 281, p. 4, July 1954)

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1433. *Pilgrims’ Notes Are Hearsay and Cannot Claim the Authority of the Sacred Text*

“The instructions of the Master and the Guardian make it very clear that Pilgrims’ notes are hearsay and cannot claim the authority and binding power of the Sacred Text... Moreover, the fact that the pilgrim writing of his experience is a reliable or well-known believer, or that the reported statement seems to be repeated in the notes of several pilgrims, does not in itself confer authority upon the pilgrim’s note in question.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, January 23, 1980)

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1434. *The Notes of Pilgrims Are for Their Own Use*

“Shoghi Effendi has often said that the notes of the pilgrims should be for their own personal use and bear absolutely no authority. What he desires to convey to the friends at large he will always say in his general letters.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, February 26, 1933)

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1435. *The Difference Between Talks and Tablets*

“Shoghi Effendi has laid down the principle that the Bahá’ís should not attribute much importance to talks reported to have been given by the Master, if these have not in one form or other obtained His sanction.

“Bahá’u’lláh has made it clear enough that only those things that have been revealed in the form of Tablets have a binding power over the friends. Hearsays may be matters of interest but can in no way claim authority. This basic teaching of Bahá’u’lláh was to preserve the Faith from being corrupted like Islám which attributes binding authority to all the reported sayings of Muḥammad.

“This being a basic principle of the Faith, we should not confuse Tablets that were actually revealed and mere talks attributed to the founders of the Cause. The first have absolute binding authority while the latter can in no way claim our obedience. The highest thing this can achieve is to influence the activities of the one who has heard the saying in person.

“Those talks of the Master that were later reviewed by Him, corrected or in some other form considered authentic by Himself, such as the ‘Some Answered Questions’, these could be considered as Tablets and therefore be given the necessary binding power. All the other talks such as are included in Ahmad’s diary or the diary of pilgrims, do not fall under this category and could be considered only as interesting material to be taken for what they are worth.

“For this reason Shoghi Effendi has not been encouraging the publication of reported sayings that were not authenticated by the Master Himself. And when he said that they may be published if quotation marks are taken away, Shoghi Effendi tried to prevent the friends from considering as actual words of the Master things that were not authenticated by Him.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the United States Publishing Committee, December 29, 1931)

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#### 1436. Stories Told About ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

“He would also urge you to attach no importance to the stories told about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá or to those attributed to Him by the friends. These should be regarded in the same light as the notes and impressions of visiting pilgrims. They need not be suppressed, but they should not also be given prominence or official recognition.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, October 2, 1935)

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#### 1437. Only Signed or Sealed Tablets Are Considered Authentic

“According to the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh no authority can be attached to a mere hearsay, no matter through whom it may come. The Tablets that bear the seal or signature of Bahá’u’lláh and the Master are the only parts of the literature that have any authority and that constitute the basis of our belief. All other forms of literature may bear points of interest but they cannot be considered as authentic. This is the view that Shoghi Effendi took towards the talks of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that Ahmad Sohrab had incorporated in his book, and it is the attitude that he would take towards any other reported saying, naturally unless the Master has appended His signature to that talk

and thereby given it the authority of a Tablet such as is the case with 'Some Answered Questions' that was actually corrected by Him."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 18, 1931)

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1438. Pilgrim's Notes Reporting the Master's Words on Embracing and Kissing

"The pilgrim's note reports the Master as saying: 'Women and men must not embrace each other when not married, or not about to be married. They must not kiss each other... If they wish to greet each other, or comfort each other, they may take each other by the hand.' In a letter to an individual written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi it is said: 'The Master's words to ..., which you quoted, can certainly be taken as the true spirit of the teachings on the subject of sex. We must strive to achieve this exalted standard.' (October 19, 1947)"

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, February 10, 1974)

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1439. Haifa Notes Collected by Mrs. Maxwell

"With reference to the Haifa notes collected by dear Mrs. Maxwell: These have exactly the same status as all other pilgrims' notes, and as such there should be no objection to their circulation among the believers. While these notes taken down by the pilgrims do not constitute as official pronouncements made by the Guardian, and therefore should not be imposed on the friends, those who wish to share them with the members of the Community should, under no circumstances, be prevented from doing so. Though not strictly official, and in some instances inaccurate and misleading, these notes, as experience has shown, can be of tremendous help, guidance and inspiration to many individual believers, and their value as such should therefore be readily admitted."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, April 28, 1939)

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