

The Holocaust and the Greater Plan of God

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

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1. The Holocaust

From the Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

1. When you [the Jewish people] glorify and honor the memory of Christ, rest assured that the Christians will take your hands in real fellowship. All difficulty, hesitancy and restraint will vanish. Consider the troubles and persecutions heaped upon you in Russia for your fanaticism of unbelief. And you must not think that this is ended.

This humiliation will continue forever. The time may come when in Europe itself they will arise against the Jews. But your declaration that Christ was the Word of God will end all such trouble. My advice is that in order to become honorable, protected and secure among the nations of the world, in order that the Christians may love and safeguard the Israelitish people, you should be willing to announce your belief in Christ, the Word of God. This is a complete statement; there is nothing more. Is it not thoughtless, ignorant prejudice which restrains you from doing so? Declare that, verily, the Word of God was realized in Him, and all will be right.

(The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912 rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 414)

From Letters Written by or on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

2. With reference to your question concerning the racial problem in America: although the American race problem is no less serious than the race question in Europe, particularly as regards the Jews, yet the Guardian is inclined to think that for the present there is little likelihood of its becoming as widespread and tragic as in such European countries as Germany, Poland and other Central European and Balkan States. He feels convinced, however, that unless the racial question in America is vigorously and fearlessly tackled, grave disturbances, of both a social and political nature, will inevitably result.

(27 April 1939, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

3. Islam, at once the progenitor and persecutor of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, is, if we read aright the signs of the times, only beginning to sustain the impact of this invincible and triumphant Faith. We need only recall the nineteen hundred years of abject misery and dispersion which they, who only for the short space of three years persecuted the Son of God, have had to endure, and are still enduring. We may well ask ourselves, with mingled feelings of dread and awe, how severe must be the tribulations of those who, during no less than fifty years, have, “at every moment tormented with a fresh torment” Him Who is the Father, and who have, in addition, made His Herald—Himself a Manifestation of God—to quaff, in such tragic circumstances, the cup of martyrdom.

(28 March 1941, written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the World, published in The Promised Day Is Come (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), pp. 99-100)

4. The races of the world, Nordic, Slavonic, Mongolian, Arab and African are alike subjected to its [the Second World War's] consuming violence. The world's religious systems are no less affected by the universal paralysis which is creeping over the minds and souls of men. The persecution of world Jewry, the rapid deterioration of Christian institutions, the intestine division and disorders of Islam, are but manifestations of the fear and trembling that has seized humanity in its hour of unprecedented turmoil and peril. On the high seas, in the air, on land, in the forefront of battle, in the palaces of kings, and the cottages of peasants, in the most hallowed sanctuaries, whether secular or religious, the evidences of God's retributive act and mysterious discipline are manifest. Its heavy toll is steadily mounting—a holocaust sparing neither prince nor peasant, neither man nor woman, neither young nor old.

(In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 25 May 1941 written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, published in Messages to America: Selected Letters and Cablegrams Addressed to the Bahá'ís of North America 1932-1946 (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1947), p. 46)

5. Our Bahá'í attitude towards the Jewish question and Palestine is not difficult to define: first we have the prophecy of the Master in “Some Answered Questions”; how much that entails we cannot be sure of; all we can say is that God has forgiven the Jews in this Dispensation and that they will return to their homeland. We must not go further than this.

Second, we must discuss their problem with sympathy, but dispassionately; we are not concerned with, and must—for the protection of the Faith—keep out of, political controversies; all we can say is that the Jews, like every other minority in the world, are entitled to help, consideration, and justice. We must be broad in our approach to all such extremely heated controversies, and while giving our Bahá'í point of view, not take sides.

Needless to say we profoundly sympathize with the Jews, and deplore with all our hearts the cruel treatment they have received.

(26 July 1946, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

2. The Greater Plan of God

From Letters Written by Shoghi Effendi

6. The process of disintegration must inexorably continue, and its corrosive influence must penetrate deeper and deeper into the very core of a crumbling age. Much suffering will still be required ere the contending nations, creeds, classes and races of mankind are fused in the crucible of universal affliction, and are forged by the fires of a fierce ordeal into one organic commonwealth, one vast, unified, and harmoniously functioning system, Adversities unimaginably appalling, undreamed of crises and upheavals, war, famine, and pestilence, might well combine to engrave in the soul of an unheeding generation those truths and principles which it has disdained to recognize and follow. A paralysis more painful than any it has yet experienced must creep over and further afflict the fabric of a broken society ere it can be rebuilt and regenerated.

(11 March 1936 to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), pp. 193-94)

7. Dangers, however sinister, must, at no time, dim the radiance of their [the American Bahá'ís] new-born faith. Strife and confusion, however bewildering, must never befog their vision. Tribulations, however afflictive, must never shatter their resolve. Denunciations, however clamorous, must never sap their loyalty. Upheavals, however cataclysmic, must never deflect their course. The present Plan, embodying the budding hopes of a departed Master, must be pursued, relentlessly pursued, whatever may befall them in the future, however distracting the crises that may agitate their country or the world. Far from yielding in their resolve, far from growing oblivious of their task, they should, at no time, however much buffeted by circumstances, forget that the synchronization of such world-shaking crises with the progressive unfoldment and fruition of their divinely appointed task is itself the work of Providence, the design of an inscrutable Wisdom, and the purpose of an all-compelling Will, a Will that directs and controls, in its own mysterious way, both the fortunes of the Faith and the destinies of men. Such simultaneous processes of rise and of fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other, are but aspects of a greater Plan, one and indivisible, whose Source is God, whose author is Bahá'u'lláh, the theatre of whose operations is the entire planet, and whose ultimate objectives are the unity of the human race and the peace of all mankind.

(25 December 1938 to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, published as The Advent of Divine Justice (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), pp. 72-73)

8. A tempest, unprecedented in its violence, unpredictable in its course, catastrophic in its immediate effects, unimaginably glorious in its ultimate consequences, is at present sweeping the face of the earth. Its driving power is remorselessly gaining in range and momentum. Its cleansing force, however much undetected, is increasing with every passing day. Humanity, gripped in the clutches of its devastating power, is smitten by the evidences of its resistless fury. It can neither perceive its origin, nor probe its significance, nor discern its outcome. Bewildered, agonized and helpless, it watches this great and mighty wind of God¹ invading the remotest and fairest regions of the earth, rocking its foundations, deranging its equilibrium, sundering its nations, disrupting the homes of its peoples, wasting its cities, driving into exile its kings, pulling down its bulwarks, uprooting its institutions, dimming its light, and harrowing up the souls of its inhabitants

... The powerful operations of this titanic upheaval are comprehensible to none except such as have recognized the claims of both Bahá'u'lláh and the Bab. Their followers know full well whence it comes, and what it will ultimately lead to. Though ignorant of how far it will reach, they clearly recognize its genesis, are aware of its direction, acknowledge its necessity, observe confidently its mysterious processes, ardently pray for the mitigation of its severity, intelligently labor to assuage its fury, and anticipate, with undimmed vision, the consummation of the fears and the hopes it must necessarily engender.

This judgment of God, as viewed by those who have recognized Bahá'u'lláh as His Mouthpiece and His greatest Messenger on earth, is both a retributory calamity and an act of holy and supreme discipline. It is at once a visitation from God and a cleansing process for all mankind. Its fires punish the perversity of the human race, and weld its component parts into one organic, indivisible, world-embracing community. Mankind, in these fateful years, which at once signalize the passing of the first century of the Bahá'í Era and proclaim the opening of a new one, is, as ordained by Him Who is both the Judge and the Redeemer of the human race, being simultaneously called upon to give account of its past actions, and is being purged and prepared for its future mission. It can neither escape the responsibilities of the past, nor shirk those of the future. God, the Vigilant, the Just, the Loving, the All-Wise Ordainer, can, in this supreme Dispensation, neither allow the sins of an unregenerate humanity, whether of omission or of commission, to go unpunished, nor will He be willing to abandon His children to their fate, and refuse them that culminating and blissful stage in their long, their slow and painful evolution throughout the ages, which is at once their inalienable right and their true destiny.

(28 March 1941 to the Bahá'ís of the West, published as The Promised Day is Come, pp. 3-5)

1 The "tempest" and "this great and mighty wind of God" refer to the Second World War. See extract 12.

9. A crisis in the fortunes of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, of exceptional severity, extensive in its ramifications, unpredictable in its immediate consequences, directly involving the overwhelming majority of His followers in the land of His birth, and confronting with a major challenge Bahá'í communities in both Hemispheres, has plunged the Bahá'í world, whilst engaged in the prosecution of a world-wide spiritual crusade, into intense sorrow and profound anxiety

Seldom, if at any time since its inception, has such a widespread publicity been accorded the infant Faith of God, now at long last emerging from an obscurity which has so long and so grievously oppressed it. Not even the dramatic execution of its Herald, nor the blood-bath which, in circumstances of fiendish cruelty, followed quickly in its wake in the City of Tihiran, nor even the widely advertised travels of the Centre of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant in the West, succeeded in focusing the attention of the world and in inviting the notice of those in high places as has this latest manifestation of God's inscrutable will, this marvellous demonstration of His invincible power, this latest move in His Own Major Plan, using both the mighty and the lowly as pawns in His world-shaping game, for the fulfilment of His immediate purpose and the eventual establishment of His Kingdom on earth.

For though the newly launched world Spiritual Crusade—constituting at best only the Minor Plan in the execution of the Almighty's design for the redemption of mankind—has, as a result of this turmoil, paralyzing temporarily the vast majority of the organized followers of Bahá'u'lláh within His birthplace, suffered a severe set-back, yet the overall Plan of God, moving mysteriously and in contrast to the orderly and well-known processes of a clearly devised Plan, has received an impetus the force of which only posterity can adequately assess.

(20 August 1955, written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, published in Citadel of Faith: Messages to America 1947-1957 (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), pp. 133, 139-40)

From Letters Written by or on Behalf of the Universal House of Justice

10. We are told by Shoghi Effendi that two great processes are at work in the world: the great Plan of God, tumultuous in its progress, working through mankind as a whole, tearing down barriers to world unity and forging humankind into a unified body in the fires of suffering and experience. This process will produce, in God's due time, the Lesser Peace, the political unification of the world. Mankind at that time can be likened to a body that is unified but without life. The second process, the task of breathing life into this unified body of creating true unity and spirituality culminating in the Most Great Peace is that of the Bahá'ís, who are labouring consciously, with detailed instructions and continuing divine guidance, to erect the fabric of the Kingdom of God on earth, into which they call their fellow-men, thus conferring upon them eternal life.

The working out of God's Major Plan proceeds mysteriously in ways directed by Him alone, but the Minor Plan that He has given us to execute, as our part in His grand design for the redemption of mankind, is clearly delineated.

(8 December 1967, written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

11. The Guardian ... has stated that God's plan for mankind is going forward in two ways, that He has, as it were, two plans. One, the Major Plan, is inexorably driving mankind towards the unity and maturity that God intends for it. This plan operates in ways that are mysterious to us and as it pursues its tumultuous course, may even seem at times to interfere with our work, but we can be confident in the beneficence of its goals. The second plan is the one that has been given to the Bahá'ís and it is to the achievement of this that we must devote our attention and energies. It is the part that God Himself has chosen for us in the working out of His grand design.

(24 January 1979, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

12. To understand the condition of the world it is necessary to step back, so to speak, to gain a clearer view of the panorama of God's great redemptive Major Plan, which is shaping the destiny of mankind according to the operation of the divine Will. It should not be surmised that the calamitous events transpiring in all corners of the globe are random and lack purpose, though individually they may be difficult to comprehend. According to the words of our beloved Guardian: "The invisible

hand is at work and the convulsions taking place on earth are a prelude to the proclamation of the Cause of God.” We can confidently anticipate therefore, the arrival of the “new life-giving spring” once the destructive icy blasts of winter's tempests have run their course.

(14 March 1985, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

13. This Major Plan of God, carried out for the most part through the agency of people who are ignorant of its course and even antagonistic to its purpose, proceeds tumultuously, turbulently, as the Almighty makes use of the works of His disobedient children to tear down the barriers to human unity and weld mankind into a unified whole. It was in relation to the operation of this Plan that, in the opening paragraphs of “The Promised Day is Come”, the beloved Guardian characterized the devastating effects of the Second World War as “this great and mighty wind of God”.

The important distinction for Bahá'ís to recognize is that we can see the will of God working itself out in two ways. The Bahá'ís, in their activities, follow, to the best of their ability, the principles and teachings that Bahá'u'lláh has given. Others, however, are pursuing incoherent courses of action. In some of their deeds they are undoubtedly performing acts that are pleasing to God; in others they are behaving in ways that are contrary to the laws of this Dispensation; but through both kinds of activity Bahá'u'lláh is able to advance the realization of the oneness of mankind and the victory of His Cause.

(30 August 1987, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a Local Spiritual Assembly)

3. The Destiny of the Jewish People

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

14. The children of Him Who is the Friend of God [Abraham] and heirs of the One Who discoursed with God [Moses], who were accounted the most abject of men, have split the veils asunder, and rent the coverings, and seized the Sealed Wine from the hands of the bounty of Him Who is the Self-Subsisting, and drunk their fill, whilst the detestable Shi'ih divines have remained, until the present time, hesitant and perverse.

(Quoted in The Promised Day is Come, p. 87)

15. O God, my God! Open Thou to the face of Thy loved ones with the key of Thy most exalted Name the door of Thy grace and bounty, O Thou in Whose grasp is the rein of all nations. I beseech Thee to confirm the descendants of Him Who is the Friend of God [Abraham] to proclaim what befitteth Thy Days and to aid them to perform such deeds as would attain the glory of Thine acceptance. Thou verily art the All-Powerful, the All-Bountiful, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Compassionate.

(From a Tablet to a group of believers—translated from the Arabic)

16. O ye descendants of Him Who is the Friend of God [Abraham], and heirs of Him Who conversed with God [Moses]. Verily I say: Ye are today adorned with the ornament of the Name of Abha and are related to God. By My life! We behold Abraham in such joy as the pen of creation is powerless to describe; and we witness Moses in an exultation which is beyond the reckoning of men. Seize ye the cup of immortality in the Name of your God, the Lord of all mankind, and then, notwithstanding the heedless and the remote, and despite every rebellious tyrant, every sinful divine and every base man of learning, drink ye therefrom!

(From a Tablet to an individual believer—translated from the Arabic and Persian)

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

17. O Thou Peerless and Incomparable Lord!

Grant that the distinguished friends from among the descendants of Abraham may drink their fill from the soft-flowing waters of immortality. Enable them to guide every afflicted one, and to

become unequalled and matchless in the degree of their eagerness and enthusiasm. O Thou All-Loving Lord! Cause these pure-hearted souls to become the envy of all mankind, for centuries have rolled by and age has followed age during which the children of Israel have suffered abject misery and humiliation at the hands of others and endured captivity and affliction. Fulfil Thou, then, Thy promise at this time, and as they are illumined by the light of divine guidance invest them with honour and glory.

Thou art the Potent and the Powerful. Thou art the Bestower, the Gracious, the Forgiving, the All-Loving.

(From a Tablet to a group of Jewish Bahá'ís—translated from the from the Persian)

18. Praise be to God that whatsoever hath been announced in the Blessed Tablets unto the Israelites, and the things explicitly written in the letters of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, are all being fulfilled. Some have come to pass; others will be revealed in the future. The Ancient Beauty hath in His Sacred Tablets explicitly written that the day of their abasement is over. His bounty will overshadow them, and this race will day by day progress, and be delivered from its age-long obscurity and degradation.

(Quoted in The Advent of Divine Justice, pp. 55-56)

19. ... that Incomparable Branch will gather together all Israel, signifying that in this cycle Israel will be gathered in the Holy Land, and that the Jewish people who are scattered to the East and West, South and North, will be assembled together.

... Israel, scattered all over the world, was not reassembled in the Holy Land in the Christian cycle; but in the beginning of the cycle of Bahá'u'lláh this divine promise, as is clearly stated in all the Books of the Prophets, has begun to be manifest. You can see that from all the parts of the world tribes of Jews are coming to the Holy Land; they live in villages and lands which they make their own, and day by day they are increasing to such an extent that all Palestine will become their home.

(Some Answered Questions (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984) pp. 65-66)

20. You have asked Me a question with regard to the gathering of the children of Israel in Jerusalem, in accordance with prophecy.

Jerusalem, the Holy of Holies, is a revered Temple, a sublime name, for it is the City of God... The gathering of Israel at Jerusalem means, therefore, and prophesies, that Israel as a whole is gathering beneath the banner of God and will enter the Kingdom of the Ancient of Days. For the celestial Jerusalem, which has as its center the Holy of Holies, is a City of the Kingdom, a Divine City. The East and West are but a small corner of that City.

Moreover, materially as well (as spiritually), the Israelites will all gather in the Holy Land. This is irrefutable prophecy, for the ignominy which Israel has suffered for well-nigh twenty-five hundred years will now be changed into eternal glory, and in the eyes of all, the Jewish people will become glorified to such an extent as to draw the jealousy of its enemies and the envy of its friends.

*(Published in United States "Bahá'í News", no. 250, December 1951), p. 5)*²

From Letters Written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

21. If the Jews study the teachings they will find in them the hopes and aspirations that they have always cherished. Bahá'u'lláh bears a wonderful message to the Jews and many of them have come to appreciate it and are active in carrying it to others of their race. Through Bahá'u'lláh, the Master tells us, they shall regain their ancient glory and become loved by all the people of the whole world.

(14 June 1932 to an individual believer)

22. You should certainly endeavour to establish further contacts with your Jewish fellow-citizens, as their spiritual destiny is assuredly bright. The age-long sufferings and tribulations which the Jews all over the world have so cruelly experienced will be terminated during the Bahá'í era, as they will

² This translation is accompanied by the following note: "According to information received by the National Assembly many years ago, this Tablet was revealed by the Master in the year 1897 to a Jewish community in the Orient.

be gradually led to embrace the Faith, which, indeed, constitutes the only means of salvation to their race.

(22 September 1937 to an individual believer)

23. Regarding your question concerning the future of the Jews: They certainly have, as explicitly stated by the Master, a great spiritual destiny, and will gradually enter the Faith in large groups.

(13 November 1937 to an individual believer)