

Shoghi Effendi's Plans for Progress: Practical Lessons¹

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Abstract

This article first briefly explains the nature of “planning” and the role plans play in the Bahá'í concept of governance and human progress. The Bahá'í Faith is perhaps the most “planning-oriented” of all the major religions. Historical reasons explain the Bahá'í orientation toward plans, and the article will suggest a few of these reasons as well as indicate several ways in which Shoghi Effendi could be called a “planner.” The second major part of this article describes four broad categories of guidance that Shoghi Effendi used when overseeing three global plans and suggests ways that Shoghi Effendi's example offers practical lessons for others who must plan for their lives, their communities, or their organizations. The article draws these lessons from an examination of letters and cables that Shoghi Effendi wrote concerning global plans. The methodology of this part of a larger overall research project is to examine the plan-related writings of Shoghi Effendi in relation to three global plans initiated in the last phase of his life and to compare these findings with more general knowledge about the planning process, as interpreted through the academic planning literature and the author's experience. This article will explain the overall categories or “functional components” that can be used to categorize planning components of Shoghi Effendi's efforts during three global plans.

Résumé

L'article explique d'abord brièvement la nature de la «planification» et le rôle que jouent les plans dans le concept Bahá'í d'administration et de progrès humain. De toutes les grandes religions, la Foi Bahá'ie est peut-être celle qui est la plus orientée sur la planification. Des raisons d'ordre historique expliquent cette propension à établir des plans; l'article aborde quelques-unes de ces raisons puis examine plusieurs éléments montrant que Shoghi Effendi pourrait être qualifié de «planificateur». La deuxième partie de l'article décrit quatre grandes catégories de conseils auxquels Shoghi Effendi a eu recours au moment de superviser trois plans globaux et suggère comment l'exemple de Shoghi Effendi offre des leçons pratiques pour tous ceux qui doivent planifier dans leur vie, dans leur communauté ou dans leur organisation. L'article tire ces leçons d'un examen des lettres et câblogrammes rédigés par Shoghi Effendi concernant les plans globaux. Pour cette section, tirée d'un projet de recherche plus vaste, la méthodologie consistait à examiner les écrits de Shoghi Effendi portant sur les plans, par rapport aux trois plans globaux qu'il a initiés dans la dernière étape de sa vie, puis de les comparer avec des connaissances plus générales sur le processus de planification tel qu'interprété dans les publications universitaires sur la planification ainsi que d'après l'expérience propre de l'auteure. Enfin l'article explique les grandes catégories, au «composantes fonctionnelles», qui permettent de catégoriser les composantes de la planification que Shoghi Effendi a utilisées durant les trois plans globaux.

¹ Revised text of remarks presented at the 20th Annual Conference, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, 29 September 1996.

Resumen

Este artículo primeramente explica, en forma breve, la naturaleza de la planificación y el rol que desempeñan los planes dentro del concepto bahá'í de gobernanza y de progreso humano. De las religiones principales, la Fe Bahá'í es quizá la que más se concierne con la planificación. Existen razones históricas que dilucidan la orientación Bahá'í hacia la planificación, y el artículo sugerirá algunas de estas razones y también indicará los varios modos en que pudiera calificarse a Shoghi Effendi como "proyectorista." La segunda parte principal de este artículo traza las cuatro amplias categorías de asesoramiento usadas por Shoghi Effendi al dirigir tres proyectos globales y sugiere formas que, valiéndose del ejemplo de Shoghi Effendi, ofrecen lecciones prácticas para aquellos que deben planificar sus vidas, sus comunidades, o sus organizaciones. Este artículo extrae estas lecciones de un estudio de cartas y cablegramas escritos por Shoghi Effendi referente a planes globales. La metodología de esta parte de un proyecto investigativo de envergadura mayor es de examinar los escritos de Shoghi Effendi sobre planificación relativos a tres planes globales iniciados en la última etapa de su vida y comparar estos resultados con los conocimientos más generalizados acerca del proceso de planificación según la literatura académica y la experiencia de la autora. Este artículo explicará las categorías en conjunto o sea, "componentes funcionales" capaces de usarse para categorizar las componentes de las labores de planificación de Shoghi Effendi durante tres planes globales.

Planning and Its Role in the Bahá'í Faith

Planning is the process of creating a set of steps or activities needed in order to progress in some sphere of action. Professional planners, such as urban planners or corporate strategic planners, use certain procedures to create plans. These procedures might include laying out goals, designing alternative courses of action, and implementing the strategies of the plan. Different planning professionals do not always agree as to what these procedures precisely are, but they do agree as to what these procedures do: move some individual, organization, city, or other entity toward some improved future state in a deliberate manner.² One way to view this is as movement from anarchy or disorder in the present, to an improved condition or state of order in the future.

Notably, Bahá'í communities and organizations are active planners, in part because of the examples of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. Bahá'í plans range from complex efforts, such as the Four Year Plans of large national communities, to simple planning activities, such as local plans for a teaching event. Planning for social progress has been an integral part of Bahá'í activity for a long time.

Some people think of Bahá'í plans as beginning with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, revealed during World War I, but many precursory concepts related to planning are apparent in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, particularly certain letters or tablets such as *Maqşúd (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, 159–78), which called for effective and informed governance. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the precepts of Bahá'u'lláh were in fact "plans" for the progressive improvement of the world. In one passage, for example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá indicated that the "plan" of Bahá'u'lláh was to create world peace through a series of deliberate initiatives, leading to the election of a supreme tribunal (*Selections* 306–7). And, of course, the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* are an exemplary charter

² For the most exhaustive and scholarly explanation of the variations in planning theory, see John Friedmann, *Planning in the Public Domain: From Knowledge to Action*.

for the planned expansion of the light of Bahá throughout the world. Shoghi Effendi initiated many national and three global plans, and the Universal House of Justice has initiated many more, most recently the Four Year Plan (1996-2000). According to the Bahá'í vision, the progress of the world is to take place via movement through a series of epochs and eras, with plans serving as the galvanizing force helping to move humanity through the Formative Age.³

We could also consider plans as an integral part of the very structure of the Bahá'í administrative order. For example, one of the primary missions of each institution of the “rulers” (present and future Houses of Justice) is to create and administer plans for growth and development. The Universal House of Justice as well as national and local spiritual assemblies create and administer the plans, while the “learned”⁴ are to take on the responsibility of helping to implement such plans. The fourth epoch of the Formative Age of the Bahá'í Faith, a time period that began in 1986, is defined as a new stage in Bahá'í history in large part because it has further decentralized the planning process. In this fourth epoch, the Universal House of Justice has given more power to national spiritual assemblies to create their own goals and plans, in conjunction with the Continental Boards of Counsellors.⁵ So this matter of planning is an important one for the maturation, coherence, and complementary nature of the administrative order of the Bahá'í Faith.

³ For an explanation of the Formative Age and its epochs, see “The Epochs of the Formative Age.”

⁴ The term “learned” refers to that branch of the Bahá'í administrative order which includes Hands of the Cause of God, Counsellors, and Auxiliary Board members. These widely respected men and women, appointed rather than elected, have certain specific charges to carry out that are related to the propagation or the protection of the Bahá'í Faith, but they have no authority over spiritual assemblies or the membership at large.

⁵ “The Epochs of the Formative Age” and Universal House of Justice letter dated 2 January 1986, “To the Bahá'ís of the World.” The Continental Board of Counsellors is a group of people composed of Counsellors who are assigned to serve continents, such as North and South America, or Africa. Each Continental Counsellor promotes both the propagation and the protection of the Bahá'í Faith, with the assistance of Auxiliary Board members. Counsellors carry on many of the duties associated with Hands of the Cause of God, but Counsellors do not have the same “rank” as Hands of the Cause. When Shoghi Effendi died, the Universal House of Justice established the institution of Counsellors when it became clear that no new Hands of the Cause could be appointed because no Guardian existed to appoint them. See *Lights of Guidance* 326.

Bahá'í Cycles, Ages, Epochs, and Plans

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|---|------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| Adamic Cycle | Cycle of Fulfillment Universal Cycle | | 500,000 years → | | | | | |
| Dispensation | Bábí Disp. | Bahá'í Dispensation | 1,000 years → | | | | | |
| Age | Heroic Age | | | Formative Age | | | | Golden Age |
| Epoch | Báb | Bahá'u'lláh | 'Abdu'l- Bahá | 1 st Epoch | 2 nd Epoch | 3 rd Epoch | 4 th Epoch | |
| Plan | <i>Tablets of the Divine Plan</i> | | | | | | | |
| | 1 st Epoch of Tablets | | | 2 nd Epoch of Tablets | | | | |
| | 7yr Plan | 7yr Plan | 10yr Plan | 9yr Plan | 5yr Plan | 7yr Plan | 6 yr Plan | 3yr Plan |
| | 1844 | | 1921 | 1937 | 1963/4 | | 1986 | |

Greatest Holy Leaf
Last Remnant of
Heroic Age

*Note: not to scale and breaks not shown
where there are pauses between plans*

Based upon text of “The Epochs of the Formative Age.” Graphic designed by Darryl Greene, with assistance of June Manning

Yet neither those within nor those outside the Bahá'í world are always comfortable with the concept and process of planning. Sometimes we put off making plans, thinking they are too difficult or time consuming to create. Sometimes we create plans—how many times do we do this reluctantly or under duress?—and then put them aside for three or four months or years without looking at them. Sometimes our planning goals are so grandiose we cannot possibly meet them, leading to discouragement, or so modest that their success means very little, since we would have done the specified activities anyway. Unfortunately, in both the Bahá'í and wider world, many planning efforts suffer from problems of flawed conceptualization or execution, including lack of vision, unrealistic goals, weak strategies, lack of follow through, poor management of details, or incomplete plan implementation.⁶ Or, perhaps, planning efforts simply have no spirit, no power to rally the “troops” to bring about success.

An Exemplary Planner

Because of our reluctance and our less than perfect effectiveness, it is important to consider how Shoghi Effendi as Guardian was so effectively able to lead worldwide, national, and regional plans. Shoghi Effendi carried out planning activities in a way that demonstrated the essence of good planning leadership. In at least three different areas we must admire his planning skills. Although this article largely focuses upon the third, it is important to acknowledge the other two areas:

⁶ Problems with seeing plans through to the end are well documented in the scholarly literature. Two classic treatments are Daniel Mazri Anian and Paul Sabatier, *Implementation and Public Policy*, based largely upon the North American experience; and Sukhamoy Chakravarty, *Development Planning: The Indian Experience*, about national plan experiences in India. For related work by the present author (Thomas), see Chapter 8 in her book *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit*, which chronicles one city's difficulties with creating and executing a modern master plan.

• *Planner of the City of God*

The first way that Shoghi Effendi exemplified planning skills was the way that he supervised the construction and restoration of holy shrines on Mt. Carmel and in the vicinity of ‘Akka. This planning—“physical” or design based in nature—included not only his management of the construction and restoration of buildings but also his laying out of the gardens and Arc associated with the future evolution of Mt. Carmel. His authority and guidance in these activities came from the vision expressed by Bahá’u’lláh in the Tablet of Carmel (*Tablets* 1–5). This vision was undoubtedly supplemented by materials such as certain passages in the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, as well as the actions of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá concerning Mt. Carmel, including ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s construction of the first phase of the Shrine of the Báb. For many of his activities, however, Shoghi Effendi had to rely upon his own imagination and creative execution to carry out the general guidelines he received from his forebears Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.⁷

• *Planner of the Administrative Order*

A second “planning” triumph for Shoghi Effendi was his extraordinary guidance concerning the implementation and evolution of the Administrative Order of the Bahá’í Faith.⁸ His efforts built upon the authority clearly enunciated in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* and the *Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, but these documents laid out only the framework of such institutions as national and local spiritual assemblies. It was the Guardian who oversaw the successful evolution of these organizations, as is clearly evident in his letters, particularly those collected in the book *Bahá’í Administration*, written near the beginning of his ministry. Even at the end of his life, however, Shoghi Effendi was still planning for the development of Bahá’í administration, as with his 1957 creation of the Protection arm of the Auxiliary Board, formed to match the efforts of the Propagation arm.⁹ Shoghi Effendi did not lead the Bahá’í world into global plans of the type described below until he felt that its administrative order had been sufficiently established at the national and local levels so as to offer a bedrock for promulgating global planning activity.

• *Planner of the Expansion and Consolidation of the Bahá’í Faith*

It is the third aspect of Shoghi Effendi’s planning activities upon which this article focuses. One of the Guardian’s planning triumphs was his successful leadership of global and national plans, which were formal initiatives complete with goals and implementation strategies. He had extraordinarily clear vision about the purpose of these plans. His objectives were clear, he paid attention to details, he exercised active oversight, and he used effective techniques of assessment, feedback, and subsequent action. Even more important, however, he was able to inspire and galvanize the Bahá’í community to support the successful execution of several very challenging plans.

In this, Shoghi Effendi was carrying out the work begun by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, but with much expansion and creative execution on his part. Shoghi Effendi’s

⁷ For the best descriptions of Shoghi Effendi as planner of the “City of God,” see Ugo Giachery, *Shoghi Effendi, Recollections*, and portions of Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*.

⁸ For two particularly interesting discussions of Shoghi Effendi’s role as planner of the administrative order, see Roger Coe, “An Organic Order” and Dhikru’llah Khadem, “Service at the Threshold.” The latter article includes a list of all known Hands of the Cause, including Mr. Khadem himself, along with a touching personal testimony to the Guardian.

⁹ The Protection and Propagation Boards carry out “distinct but complementary functions” (*Lights of Guidance* 329). In 1957, in his last message to the Bahá’í world, Shoghi Effendi added the newer Protection Board to help safeguard the Bahá’í Faith; see Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl* 442.

approach to encouraging global plans-particularly those carried out by the American Bahá'ís, the chief standard-bearers for his global initiatives-began in earnest with the first Seven Year Plan, launched in 1937, and is clearly evident in his letters, which have been published in several books, among them *The Advent of Divine Justice*, *Messages to America*, and *Citadel of Faith*.¹⁰

Four Functional Components of the Guardian's Plans

The second purpose of this article, then, is to consider how Shoghi Effendi led global plans so capably. When one carefully studies the planning techniques that Shoghi Effendi displays in his letters, in comparison to other writings about planning, such as those in the professional planning literature, Shoghi Effendi fares exceptionally well. The difference is almost as stark as comparing his style of writing the English language with the style of even the best professional writers. One must examine his letters, particularly those missives to the North American community, for a full indication of his genius. These letters are largely published in *Citadel of Faith*, most of which concerns the second Seven Year Plan (1946-53) and the Global Crusade (1953-63), as well as in *Messages to America*, written during the first Seven Year Plan (1937-44). *The Advent of Divine Justice* was in fact an extensive letter, written to indicate how the Americans should successfully carry out the first global Seven Year Plan. These letters make it clear that Shoghi Effendi was an exceptional leader of national and global plans. He created the overall framework for plans, helped the Bahá'ís understand their importance, and then oversaw their successful implementation. Even forty years after his death, we can reexamine his plan-related letters and discover rich implications for how we can improve our own planning activities, not only in local and national Bahá'í communities but also in the world at large.

Listed below are four major components of the plans, components chosen for their close match with the professional literature's concepts of stages in the planning process. These are not sequential stages in Shoghi Effendi's writings, but rather broad categories of activities that relate to different phases of global plans. These four "functional components" include, first, the need to understand vision and mission; second, the need to plan for specific kinds of action; third, the importance of action and monitoring of action; and fourth, the necessity of examining the results of plans and promptly moving forth to the next stage.

Vision and Mission

Shoghi Effendi wrote his letters and cables about the plans in the context of a particular vision for the Bahá'í community. That vision, expanded to its fullest in letters written previously (*The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*), is based upon Bahá'u'lláh's vision that humanity will progress to the point that it is able to create, with God's help, a Golden Age, a world characterized by unity, peace, harmony, and social progress. Shoghi Effendi made exceptional contributions to helping Bahá'ís understand that vision, for example, by explaining what the term "world order" really means. Many people may understand the overall vision and yet not understand how to use the concept of vision in daily, monthly, or yearly planning efforts. Shoghi Effendi, in contrast, tapped into the power of vision and mission in order to make plans truly meaningful and inspiring.

¹⁰ Other books offer compilations that relate to plans the Guardian oversaw for other national spiritual assemblies. For a general overview of plan-related letters regarding the Global Crusade, begun in 1953 and addressed to the world at large, see Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World*.

In his letters Shoghi Effendi evoked, or “called forth,” the vision of a better future as a means of inspiration, as a way to galvanize people into understanding how important the plans were. He did not simply state what had to be done; he put tasks in the context of moving toward a larger, more diverse, more international Bahá’í community. Furthermore, he placed those actions in the context of the overall mission of the Bahá’í Faith: the spiritual salvation of the planet. Here is one example from *Citadel of Faith*:

Appeal to members of the community so privileged, so loved, so valorous, endowed with such potentialities to unitedly press forward however afflictive the trials their countrymen may yet experience . . . until every single obligation under the present Plan is honorably fulfilled, enabling them to launch in its appointed time the third crusade destined to bring glorious consummation to the first epoch in the evolution of their divinely appointed world mission, fulfill the prophecy uttered by Daniel over twenty centuries ago, contribute the major share of the world triumph of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh envisaged by the Center of His Covenant, and hasten the opening of the Golden Age of the Bahá’í Dispensation. (50)

And another example, also from *Citadel of Faith*:

One of these processes is associated with the mission of the American Bahá’í Community, the other with the destiny of the American nation. . . . [The Bahá’í process] must pass into the third stage of its evolution with the initiation of the third Seven Year Plan, designed to culminate in the establishment of the structure of the Administrative Order in all the remaining sovereign states and chief dependencies of the globe. It must reach the end of the first epoch in its evolution with the fulfillment of the prophecy mentioned by Daniel in the last chapter of His Book, related to the year 1335, and associated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá with the world triumph of the Faith of His Father. It will be consummated through the emergence of the Bahá’í World Commonwealth in the Golden Age of the Bahá’í Dispensation. (32)

One obvious implication of such passages is the constant need to remind those who are supposed to carry out plans of the noble purposes and mission governing these plans. This is in striking contrast to many common users of the concepts of vision and mission, who project visions that are possibly positive but not necessarily noble. It reduces the power of the vision if its ultimate purpose is only, for example, to bring increased salaries for a company’s chief executive officers, or to create physically beautiful places to live for the well-to do, or to gain more customers. Shoghi Effendi’s cause was indisputably noble: he constantly reminded his readers of the need to transform the world. The ultimate Bahá’í vision, of the Golden Age, *is* perhaps a powerful icon to evoke as we work our way through the day-to-day tasks associated with carrying out plans, but is not the ultimate purpose for all such effort the salvation of the planet? Even for more near-term aspects of the ultimate (Golden Age) vision, we can, as did the Guardian with the passage above, evoke the concept of vision and mission to remind ourselves what we want to see at the end of our efforts. The key point is that the Guardian constantly and continually referred to the purpose and mission of all activity in his writings, as a tool of encouragement. This constant referral provided an

important context for anyone who might have faltered in their enthusiasm for, or understanding of, the ultimate purpose for their community's activities.

Planning for Action

In the Tablet of *Maqşúd*, Bahá'u'lláh declared that “at the outset of every endeavour, it is incumbent to look to the end of it” (*Tablets* 168). One of the remarkable characteristics of the global plans overseen by Shoghi Effendi was how well they translated “the vision” into practical, audacious, yet attainable actions. Shoghi Effendi did this by setting broad goals for the plans that stretched the plans' recipients a little farther than they might themselves stretch and yet created a simple framework for action that was ultimately capable of leading to success. Although for the last global plan that he personally launched, Shoghi Effendi deemed the Americans ready for an extensive list of objectives or tasks (twenty-four tasks, in the context of four goals, launched the Global Crusade of 1953-63),¹¹ in previous plans he tended to create a few rallying points that allowed people to visualize exactly what he was asking of them.

At the beginning of the second Seven Year Plan, the Guardian told North American Bahá'ís to focus upon four goals (objectives) for their plan:

The first objective of the new Plan is consolidation of victories already won throughout the Americas, involving multiplication of Bahá'í centers, bolder proclamation of the Faith to the masses. The second objective is completion of the interior ornamentation of the holiest House of Worship in the Bahá'í world. . . . The third objective is the formation of three national Assemblies, pillars of the Universal House of Justice, in the Dominion of Canada, Central and South America. The fourth objective is the initiation of systematic teaching activity in war-torn, spiritually famished European continent . . . aiming at establishment of Assemblies in the Iberian Peninsula, the Low Countries, the Scandinavian states, and Italy. (*Messages to America* 88)

What is particularly remarkable about this process is that Shoghi Effendi did not stop there. He listed these goals and objectives in April of 1946. It was clear from previous writings that he expected the national community to plan the specifics of how they intended to meet these objectives and to inform him of *their* plans, but he felt no hesitation about giving even more detailed directions.

In early June of the same year, 1946, he cabled the community for the “prompt dispatch of nine competent pioneers” and the “establishment of auxiliary office in Geneva,” and the prompt action of the European Teaching Committee. One week later he sent this bombshell of a cable: “Appeal National Teaching Committee unitedly arise play notable part. . . . Plead focus attention enable thirty groups having six or more members speedily attain Assembly status. Devoutly praying number of Assemblies functioning in North America will reach one hundred and seventy-five ere expiry of second year of second stage of Divine Plan” (*Messages to America* 89–90). A long letter followed this cable two days later, with much more detail about the tasks that were required, concerning all the objectives. These supplemental instructions included much more beneficial material, including reference to the central figures and the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, explanation

¹¹ See Global Crusade goals and tasks in *Citadel of Faith* 107–9 (for USA), *Messages to the Bahá'í World* 41–43 (for world), and overview in Hassan, “Bahá'í History.”

of the importance of the three new national spiritual assemblies in the context of bringing eleven “pillars” of the international order into existence, review of past accomplishments, reference to the special station of America, and a vision statement concerning the promise given about the impending salvation of the “whole earth” (*Messages to America* 90–103).

Shoghi Effendi did not hesitate to champion the successful launching of a plan. He chose goals that were ambitious but based on realistic expectations (only the exterior of the Temple to be completed for the first Seven Year Plan), and he had specific targets in mind for many of them, such as pioneering and European extension. This was no “soft” start to a plan. It was, indeed, an example of a genius at work: demonstrating the expectation for excellence and defining that excellence in a bold, audacious manner, giving very clear instructions about expectations and potential. Yet it is also important to note that, as with his use of the concept of vision, he couched these directives in loving, encouraging, inspiring language. He stirred the imagination with references to the past and the future, and assured his charges of their ultimate victory and glorification. He encouraged prayer and spiritual discipline as essential requirements for success, as indeed they were, and he constantly evoked the noble legacy of heroic figures of the past. As J. Jameson Bond, one of the people who arose to travel in response to the Guardian’s call during the Ten Year Crusade, has commented:

Closely reasoned explanations set in penetrating, analytic language clarified objectives, processes, and priorities for the friends. He similarly appealed to the affective side of human nature. On such occasions, his language can only be described as noble and impassioned. Taken as a whole, his communications comprised varying proportions of intellectual and emotional appeal according to the needs of the occasion. They were always in perfect balance. (Bond, “Vision of Shoghi Effendi” 4)

This is very different from the way most planners handle goals and objectives. In the world of urban planning, for example, planners, politicians, and citizens often establish goals and objectives concerning improvements they would like to make in their cities, but this is frequently done without passion, encouragement, or even explanation. Things are no different in the corporate world. The concept of audacity is missing as well, if plans become perfunctory and disconnected from the vision and mission. The tradition of audacity is an essential heritage from the Guardian, but such audacity must be tempered with a clear understanding of the temperament, capacity, and destiny of community members—all of which must take place in full awareness of the context of the spiritual destiny for the planet. Studying the language of the Guardian would take us far along the path of understanding how to do this.

Action and Oversight

Bahá’u’lláh makes it clear that it was important to bring principles of social improvement into action. For example, in the Tablet of *Maqsud* Bahá’u’lláh said that “it is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action” (*Tablets* 166). He also spoke about the need for leaders of government to “enquire into the conditions of their subjects and to acquaint themselves with the affairs and activities of the divers communities in their dominions” (*Tablets* 130).

The most remarkable attribute of the Guardian's planning style, the attribute that is perhaps most illustrative of his superior planning leadership, was the way he oversaw and monitored the successful implementation of the Bahá'í global plans. It is hard to find reference to any famous government leader or king, professional planner or manager, or leader of any kind who so carefully and systematically managed the overall execution of something so inherently unmanageable as a global plan.¹² His successful oversight was almost superhuman in its manifestation. It is difficult to imagine anyone or any institution capable of doing such a thorough job, even though we now have computers, and the Guardian most certainly did not.

In essence, here is what the Guardian did: he not only established the goals for the plans and helped specify what they meant but also actually *kept up* with whether or not they were being implemented. He expected to receive, and evidently read and absorbed, constant reports about the success of the plans (for America and other nations simultaneously. Plus he managed the affairs at the Bahá'í World Centre and personal correspondence). If he did not think, for example, that the American community was moving fast enough, he promptly wrote them and suggested what they needed to do. How many communities or organizations monitor so closely even their own plans of limited size and scope compared with these? How carefully do we check back with committees, individuals, and communities to see how well they are doing, and to guide them toward mid-course corrections that might better help them to succeed? Most find it difficult to do these things, and yet the Guardian did them. Apparently, the global plan assignments he had given to the American Bahá'ís were of high priority to Shoghi Effendi, and so he kept up with how they were progressing.

For example, in the case of America, one year before the first Seven Year Plan even began, the Guardian gave the goals of one center in every state and every American republic to the attendees at the 1936 convention. Two months later, he wrote and asked for news of progress (*Messages to America* 7). In a cable sent two years after the beginning of the plan, he sent a listing of those objectives that still needed action. For Bahá'í settlement, he listed states and areas of Canada that were "still unsettled," as well as other necessary tasks. The same thing happened at the 1939 convention, three years after the beginning of the plan and throughout the remainder of the plan as well (*Messages to America* 16, 20).

Clearly, the Guardian was unstinting in his praise when victories were won, but he was not silent when victories were not being won. On the contrary, he was vocal in his calls for renewed action, increased vigor, and active rededication to the successful prosecution of the plan. He also made certain that his co-religionists understood the importance of their tasks.

It is hard, upon reading these letters, not to feel some sympathy for the Bahá'ís at that time. On the one hand, it must have been devastating for a national or local community to receive a letter from Shoghi Effendi indicating what they had *not* accomplished. On the other hand, it must have been an extreme comfort for the Bahá'ís to realize that someone was watching over their activities, someone who understood the entire context of their efforts, whose understanding of spiritual principle was impeccable, who loved them without reserve, and who had the ability to provide practical advice. Shoghi Effendi, in his letters and cables, also utilized a number of alternative ways of reminding the believers of the spiritual tools and forces that would help them complete

¹² Refer in particular to Chakravarty, cited above. See also Lisa Peattie, *Planning: Rethinking Ciudad Guayana*, which reports on the difficulties of managing a plan for a new Venezuelan city.

their work. He made generous reference to divine power and the concourse on high; he evoked the need for prayer; he encouraged and praised; he expressed profound and heartfelt gratitude; he referred in stirring tones to precedents set by the martyrs and heroic figures of the Bahá'í Faith, and in other ways refused to allow people to view the Plan of God as a mechanical thing with no heart or spirit.

One must surely realize what a taxing effort all of this must have been for Shoghi Effendi, requiring constant attention to a veritable flood of information and necessitating stamina as well as wisdom in order to lead and to respond appropriately. One letter concerning the second Seven Year Plan, for example, referred to the fact that “hope is welling up in my anxious, overburdened heart” (*Citadel of Faith* 46). Yet other letters make it clear that the Guardian’s greatest joy was the progress of the Bahá'í Faith, guided and framed by the successful execution of the goals of the plans. He once said, “The recent response . . . to my appeal for pioneers . . . has raised a load from my heart” (*Messages to America* 59). The true burdens, quite clearly, came from lack of progress of the plans, while movement forward relieved his distress and anxiety. In this day and epoch, no one person in the Bahá'í Faith carries the responsibilities that the Guardian did; many share the joys and the burdens of creating, overseeing, and successfully executing plans for growth and development. So it would seem that the many could accomplish at least a fraction of what this one person managed to do virtually alone.

Assessment and Subsequent Action

The fourth and final “functional component” of Shoghi Effendi’s oversight of plans was one of the most remarkable, and yet it is the one most often missing from even the best of modern planning efforts in the world at large: that is, once the time frame for a plan was completed, Shoghi Effendi carefully assessed what had been accomplished and what had not, placing this in the context of an overall vision for the progress of the Bahá'í Faith. Then he, in the same breath (that is, the same letter), advised the Bahá'ís what exactly to do next. This was true even when no formal plan existed.

Bahá'ís have had only two global plans that benefited from the Guardian’s comments at their conclusion, since he died well before the end of the Ten Year Global Crusade. With each of these, however, we see this trait in action. For example, his convention letter of 1944 showered the Americans with praise and gratitude. He listed all victories won thus far with the Seven Year Plan, in a series of letters that were written almost literally as the plan ended (April 15, 1944; May 9, 1944; convention letter May 15, 1944, in *Messages to America* 69–73). He said

the community had achieved total victory of the Seven Year Plan thereby sealing the triumph of the first stage in the Mission bestowed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, this repeatedly blessed, much envied community deserves to be acclaimed the Torchbearer of the civilization, the foundations of which the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is destined unassailably to establish in the course of the Second Bahá'í Century. I am moved to pay a well deserved tribute at this great turning point in the career of so privileged a community to the gallant band of its apostolic founders whose deeds heralded the dawn of the Day of the Covenant in the West, to its intrepid pioneers who labored to enlarge the bounds of the Faith in the five continents, to its indefatigable administrators whose hands

reared the fabric of the Administrative Order, to its heroic martyrs . . . to its itinerant teachers . . . and last but not least to the mass of its stout-hearted, self-denying members whose strenuous, ceaseless, concerted efforts so decisively contributed to the consolidation and broadening of its foundations. (*Messages to America* 72–73)

Imagine receiving such a message at the end of a plan—a message that so promptly noted all the good things you had done and that praised you so highly. However, while the Guardian was alive, he did not let people rest on their laurels. Less than two weeks later, he cabled the American Bahá'ís that “immediate attention should be focused in the course of the opening year of the Second Century on consolidation of the nobly-won victories through reinforcement of newly formed Assemblies, multiplication of groups and increase in number of Assemblies as well as corresponding effort through Latin America” (*Messages to America* 73). Two months later, he noted that, for the first year after the plan, he expected “the establishment of a Spiritual Assembly in every remaining Republic,” and he asked for “a steady increase in the number of pioneers for both Latin and North America,” “a further multiplication of groups, a wider dissemination of Bahá'í literature in both Spanish and Portuguese, closer relationships consolidating the communities and more effective contact by these communities with the masses of the population and all races and classes.” Then, helpfully, he promised that he was “ardently praying for mighty victories in every field” (*Messages* 74). It is a good thing he was praying for them, because his expectations were very high.

Much the same thing happened with the end of the second Seven Year Plan and the beginning of the Global Crusade. The Guardian's letter to the 1953 convention showered the audience with praise and lists of accomplishments, and then laid out the framework for the next tasks, including twenty-four specific goals.

This particular way of viewing his responsibility as planning leader was unique.¹³ The Guardian could not allow failure, but he could not reward success with mere praise without making it quite clear that it was not time to rest. Instead, he explained patiently and lovingly that many tasks remained yet to be done. If anything, he rewarded plan victors with the recognition that they indeed deserved another plan, and he gave it to them promptly, almost at the same time that he told them what they had done right with the last plan.

Implications

In summation, what are some of the practical lessons we might glean from these aspects of Shoghi Effendi's style of planning for local community and national plans? The lessons are many, but an attempt will be made to summarize only a few. Some aspects of these “lessons” apply to both religious and nonreligious contexts, the Bahá'í and wider world, but we will refer specifically to implications for Bahá'ís. Shoghi Effendi's example suggests that we:

¹³ The author has very rarely been able to find references in the voluminous professional planning literature to the use of praise and encouragement (and certainly not to prayer) as a way for organizational leaders to ensure the success of city, corporate, or national plans. Such allusions are more common in writings about Bahá'í plans, particularly in letters written by international and national bodies. The Guardian's style of mixing praise with firm and pointed guidance was particularly noteworthy.

- Regard plans as integral parts of the evolution of human progress and as key opportunities to organize activities and focus efforts in a fashion that has brought great success in the past and that will lead the community forward to the future. In the spirit of Shoghi Effendi, we should give community plans and the planning process keen attention and loving support, making them highly spiritual and effective tools for growth and development (rather than hastily carried out exercises or mechanisms for oppressive drudgery).
- Always keep in mind the vision and purpose for all activities and their contribution to global transformation. For Bahá'ís, any tendency to forget the overall vision or purpose for activities can be counteracted by studying the sacred writings or the letters of Shoghi Effendi (or, for a more contemporary vision, letters of the Universal House of Justice). Constant references to the community's vision and mission, or to one's spiritual leaders or sacred writings, can be a powerful tool for galvanization.
- Choose only a few realistic but audacious goals, unless capacity has been extremely well developed (as Shoghi Effendi perhaps judged was the case with the Ten Year Global Crusade but not for first two Seven Year Plans). Goals give focus and purpose to activities and frame visions of what is attainable in the short term. Choose goals that reflect the temperament and capacity of community members but that stretch them to attain more than they would ordinarily do.
- Encourage prayer and spiritually attuned focus in order to prepare for the success of the goals, and speak of the goals and the plan in inspiring, loving language.
- Begin to take action immediately, once the plan is developed, and maintain a high level of activity. Be aware that words (or plans) without action are useless.
- Monitor the success of the implementation of the plan. Leaders or governing institutions, if they emulate Shoghi Effendi, would not only monitor their communities' success (or lack of it) but also offer specific suggestions, so as to help galvanize them to carry forth with vigor and courage. Again Bahá'ís specifically can refer to the sources of inspiration that Shoghi Effendi used, such as the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, the heroic figures, and the promises of noble spiritual destiny.
- Near the end of the plan, assess accomplishments and challenges remaining. Give feedback to the "troops" as to how well the plan has worked. Be profuse in praising accomplishments, but frankly indicate remaining challenges.
- Plan for follow-up and continued action, so that the victories may not be lost, and progress need not stop. Be aware that each plan is only a steppingstone toward a vision of a better time, a time when our communities, cities, nations, and world will be diffused with the principles of unity, love, and social progress.

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