

Comments on Historical Consciousness, Power and Authority, and Modes of Communication: Foreword to the 2nd Edition of *Planning Progress*

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It has been a quarter of a century since this book was first published. When I read it some twenty-five years ago, I remember being immediately struck by its many insights, and so took it upon myself to study it assiduously, knowing that the lessons it contained applied directly to the work of the institutions I was serving on at the time. I had already developed an abiding appreciation and love for the writings of Shoghi Effendi, but this book further deepened and broadened my understanding of the scale of his achievements and his unparalleled capacity to systematically articulate a vision of growth, encourage unity of purpose, appeal to both heart and mind, and thereby strengthen the resolve and canalize the efforts of an ever-growing worldwide community

of consecrated souls eager to serve their beloved Faith and promote the betterment of humankind.

Now, twenty-five years later, it seems especially timely to revisit the lessons articulated in this book for at least two reasons. The first is that they underscore the significance of, and shed further light on, what the Bahá'í community has achieved over the last few decades, particularly with respect to the way it operates in seeking to transform the material and spiritual dimensions of life at both the individual and social levels. In this regard, the Universal House of Justice affirms that the community is today “distinguished by a mode of operation characterized by study, consultation, action, and reflection,” (28 November 2023) which has profound implications for the vibrant culture it is developing; the latent potential it is releasing among individuals, communities, and institutions—“the three protagonists of a new way of life”; and the impact it is having on the society-building process overall. As the House of Justice observes, the Bahá'í community

is steadily increasing its capacity to apply the Teachings in a variety of social spaces and to collaborate with those in the wider society who share a yearning to revitalize the material and spiritual foundations of the social order. In the transformative alembic of these spaces, to the extent possible, individuals and communities become protagonists of their own

development, an embrace of the oneness of humanity banishes prejudice and otherness, the spiritual dimension of human life is fostered through adherence to principle and strengthening of the community's devotional character, and the capacity for learning is developed and directed towards personal and social transformation. The effort to understand the implications of what Bahá'u'lláh has revealed and to apply His healing remedy has now become more explicit, more deliberate, and an indelible part of Bahá'í culture. (28 November 2023)

The House of Justice, moreover, emphasizes the magnitude of this development and its implications for the future, stating that “[t]he conscious grasp of the process of learning and its extension worldwide, from the grassroots to the international arena, are among the finest fruits of the first century of the Formative Age,” and that “[t]his process will increasingly inform the work of every institution, community, and individual in the years ahead, as the Bahá'í world takes on ever-greater challenges and releases in ever-greater measures the Faith's society-building power” (28 November 2023). It also stresses the singular role that Shoghi Effendi played in setting the community on its path of learning, recounting that while he consolidated the understanding of the believers regarding their mission, he “also guided the believers, step by step, to learn how

to effectively establish the structural basis of the Administrative Order and systematically share Bahá'u'lláh's teachings with others,” and that he did so in the following interactive manner:

The Guardian patiently directed their efforts by gradually clarifying the nature, principles, and procedures which characterize that Order, while raising their capacity for teaching the Faith, individually and collectively. On each vital matter, he would provide direction and the believers would consult and strive to apply his guidance, sharing their experiences with him and raising questions when they faced perplexing problems and difficulties. Then, taking into consideration the accumulating experience, the Guardian would offer additional guidance and elaborate the concepts and principles that would enable the friends to adjust their action as needed, until their efforts proved effective and could be applied more broadly. (28 November 2023)

In this book, Professor June Manning Thomas provides the reader with an in-depth study of how Shoghi Effendi shepherded this process of capacity building as the endeavors of the community gained in strength and complexity during his ministry. By examining his approach to planning, monitoring, and guiding the efforts of the believers, Thomas clearly illustrates Shoghi Effendi's mastery at cultivating their

capacity to act systematically and apply their learning ever more widely. For this reason alone, her book is worth a close reading.

A second reason it is timely to revisit the lessons in this book is that they help us to better understand, by contrast, the degraded state into which leadership and citizenship have fallen today. This matter is especially urgent considering the “plethora of destructive forces and events” now facing humanity, which, as the House of Justice explains, include “environmental degradation, climate change, pandemics, the decline of religion and morals, the loss of meaning and identity, the erosion of the concepts of truth and reason, unbridled technology, the exacerbation of prejudices and ideological contention, pervasive corruption, political and economic upheaval, war and genocide”—all of which “have left their traces in blood and anguish on the pages of history and the lives of billions” (28 November 2023).

Owing to such forces of disintegration, many across the globe find themselves dismayed by the state of the world and beleaguered by the estrangement they feel towards one another: “But with every passing day, we see too the condition of the world grow more desperate, its divisions more severe. The escalating tensions within societies and between nations affect peoples and places in a myriad ways” (Ridván 2024). People are, for example, distressed because there is a seeming dearth of the collective will and capacity needed to address the growing

threats to humanity; because their ways of life are being eroded by rampant turmoil, conflict, and intemperate technological developments; and because rank disparities and persistent discrimination impede many from flourishing as individuals, citizens, and members of communities. There is also the escalating fear that democracy itself is collapsing as the forces of illiberalism swell in country after country.¹

It is important to remember that, alongside the destructive forces, “hopeful constructive trends can also be discerned which are contributing to that ‘universal fermentation’ which Shoghi Effendi said is ‘purging and re-shaping humanity in anticipation of the

1 For example, many would agree with Calhoun et al. that “[p]olitical parties are broken, functioning as little more than ideologically polarized fundraising machines” (216), and that society, more generally, is now characterized by “declining citizen efficacy, weakening local communities, fraying intergenerational bonds, evaporating small-scale economic opportunity, and eroding social ties that had once knit citizens together across lines of difference and fostered solidarity” (209). Craig Calhoun, Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, and Charles Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*. See also the following references for similar analyses of democratic decline: Anne Applebaum, *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*; Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt *How Democracies Die*; Todd Smith and Benjamin W. Kelly, “Public Discourse and Wilful Incommensurability: A Case for Attentive Free Speech,” *Frontiers of Sociology* 9.

Day when the wholeness of the human race will have been recognized and its unity established'.” These trends include “[t]he diffusion of the spirit of world solidarity, a greater consciousness of global interdependence, the embrace of collaborative action among individuals and institutions, and a heightened longing for justice and peace,” all of which “are profoundly transforming human relationships” (28 November 2023). Yet, humanity continues to be “gripped by a crisis of identity,” (18 January 2019) a state of being that is aggravated by prejudice at the individual, cultural, and structural levels, as well as by other exacerbators of polarization, such as hyper-partisanship, radicalization, and various kinds of fundamentalism.² The result is the normalization of division and discord in pursuit of the preeminent goal of factional vindication. In this respect, the House of Justice observes:

Without a vision of shared identity and common purpose, [peoples and groups] fall into competing ideologies and power struggles.

2 It might be added that perpetuating these trends is the increasing entrenchment of deleterious proclivities, such as the penchants to fragment reality, quash alternative perspectives, and dismiss seemingly inconvenient information while fabricating and purveying disinformation in its place. These inclinations are, in turn, incessantly fortified by traditional allegiances, much of mainstream and social media, and the unreflective embrace of consumerism and other forms of escapism.

Seemingly countless permutations of “us” and “them” define group identities ever more narrowly and in contrast to one another. Over time, this splintering into divergent interest groups has weakened the cohesion of society itself. Rival conceptions about the primacy of a particular people are peddled to the exclusion of the truth that humanity is on a common journey in which all are protagonists. (18 January 2019)

From a Bahá'í perspective, these deleterious conceptions and struggles are all symptoms of humanity's disregard for its inherent oneness. As the House of Justice continues:

Consider how radically different such a fragmented conception of human identity is from the one that follows from a recognition of the oneness of humanity. In this perspective, the diversity that characterizes the human family, far from contradicting its oneness, endows it with richness. Unity, in its Bahá'í expression, contains the essential concept of diversity, distinguishing it from uniformity. It is through love for all people, and by subordinating lesser loyalties to the best interests of humankind, that the unity of the world can be realized and the infinite expressions of human diversity find their highest fulfilment. (18 January 2019)

In view of such observations as well as the mode of learning evolving within the Bahá'í community, I have found Thomas' book to be especially helpful in understanding the following three overlapping themes—among many others—as they pertain to the present condition of society: vision and historical consciousness; power and authority; and modes of communication. Taking into account recent guidance of the Universal House of Justice, these themes are discussed below with the aim of foregrounding the enduring relevance of Thomas' examination of Shoghi Effendi's approach to planning, administration, and communication. Likewise, much can be gleaned from the Guardian's leadership style that bears on the question of how those serving in positions of authority can suitably play their essential part in addressing the challenges of immediate global concern.

Vision and historical consciousness.³

There is presently a lot of emphasis on the importance of thinking and being in the moment, of training oneself not to become wrapped up in the past or overly concerned about the future. Many would agree that there is merit to this perspective, which is a central feature of Stoicism, Buddhism, and other philosophical and religious traditions. For

example, it is doubtlessly important to make the best of every moment—to live every moment to the fullest—which implies not being weighed down by circumstances over which one has no control. In addition, when conversing with someone on spiritual themes, it is most befitting to be entirely present, treating the exchange as a “conversation between two souls—a conversation distinguished by the depth of understanding achieved and the nature of the relationship established” (28 December 2010). The same is certainly true when meditating on the Sacred Word and when communing with God. Prayer, the House of Justice explains, “is the essential spiritual conversation of the soul with its Maker, direct and without intermediation. It is the spiritual food that sustains the life of the spirit. Like the morning's dew, it brings freshness to the heart and cleanses it, purifying it from attachments of the insistent self. It is a fire that burns away the veils and a light that leads to the ocean of reunion with the Almighty” (18 December 2014).

Today, however, living in the moment has become conflated with what Kierkegaard identifies as an aesthetic mode of living, that is, a way of being that is tangled up with the pursuit of diversion in an effort to avoid boredom, to escape the discomfort of tribulation, or to fend off feelings of despair that accompany the state of anomie and mediocrity pervading more and more of society. This hollow mode of being is reinforced and propagated by our consumer culture, in which many of

3 This section is informed by my paper “Crisis and the Power of an Inclusive Historical Consciousness: Progressing from Delusional Habits to Dynamic Freedom,” in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*.

us are captivated by the idea of (if not consciously committed to) amassing transitory indulgences that are relentlessly promoted by advertising, influencers and politicians, and social media algorithms and posts. As a result of this consumerism—this “opium to the human soul” (2 March 2013)—and the associated inundation of frivolous images and (often) reductionist opinions from all directions, many of us lose sight of our purpose as citizens and so end up living empty lives, incessantly looking for that next moment that will proffer some modicum of pleasure if not some semblance of meaning.

Again, this is not to deny the importance of living every moment to the fullest. But in order to do so well, we learn from Shoghi Effendi’s writings that it is vital to develop a historical consciousness, which provides context—and thus significance—to everything we do. This perspective of history, moreover, must be global in scope and consider all human beings as protagonists on a collective journey toward the inevitable realization of the oneness of humankind—a journey that is concurrently propelled by the forces of disintegration and integration, both of which “serve to carry humanity, each in its own way, along the path leading towards its full maturity.” “Such is the view of history,” the House of Justice states, “that underlies every endeavour pursued by the Bahá’í community” (2 March 2013). It, moreover, “endows every instance of social action with a particular purpose: to foster true prosperity, with its spiritual and material

dimensions, among the diverse inhabitants of the planet” (Office of Social and Economic Development, 26 November 2012). In short, the meaning of any moment is immensely enriched when infused with this embracing conception of social evolution.

This is a key theme in Thomas’ book. For example, Thomas effectively demonstrates how Shoghi Effendi continuously drew the believers’ attention to this vision of the unfolding of history and employed it to effectively contextualize and guide their efforts. She highlights the extensive statements of this vision in his writings, which he framed in relation to world events as well as to the epochs and ages of Bahá’u’lláh’s Dispensation. She also explains that the Guardian regularly referred to the vision in shorter messages and cables to the believers, linking it to their special missions and their specific plans of action. He thus methodically situated their smaller visions, or their shorter-term plans, within this “bigger vision.” Put another way, he fostered an evolving unity in diversity of narrative consciousness around a common core of beliefs concerning the inherent nobility, oneness, and purpose of humankind.

Building on Thomas’ analysis, and in view of subsequent guidance of the Universal House of Justice, it might be added that in taking this approach, Shoghi Effendi helped the community to think coherently and to transcend certain habits of mind, such as those of compartmentalizing areas of action, “of reducing an entire theme into one

or two appealing phrases,” and of perceiving “dichotomies, where, in fact, there are none” (28 December 2010). This is not to say that there are, for example, no such things as dichotomies. Indeed, not every either/or is a fallacy: sometimes reality *really is* either this way or that (a certain event did happen, or it didn’t; a certain person told the truth, or didn’t; this fact is the case, or it isn’t, etc.). Similarly, the capacity to focus is vital: it is important to be able to concentrate on a specific issue, element, or endeavor in order to effectively address, understand, and/or carry it forward. But without moderation, the tendencies to distinguish and focus can become overly reductive, leading to dogmatic, superficial thinking that shirks the intricacies of certain realities and so neglects their underlying interrelations. These tendencies can, for example, lead to unduly favoring some facts over others, the selective interpretation of those facts, and even the conjuring up of facts in support of conspiracy theories. Currently people are assailed by such reductionisms in the form of simplistic social media posts, obsessive partisan bickering, and other forms of speech focused on reducing individuals and groups to labels and on otherwise stigmatizing, “othering,” denigrating, or even demonizing them. As such, this fragmented mindset feeds various pernicious bigotries, including racism, sexism, national jingoism, and other instantiations of gratuitous intransigence that rationalize disparities,

conflict, persecution, and war.⁴

Conversely, thinking coherently involves being able to focus on different endeavors (or elements) in their own right while also considering how they relate to other endeavors and, further, how a given constellation of endeavors is, or can be, mutually reinforcing and animating. Thomas provides an expansive window into how Shoghi Effendi regularly attended to these dynamics in his own guidance to the believers. We are assisted to conceptualize what is involved in thinking in terms of complexity and interconnectedness and in placing different lines of action into an evolving, narrative context that frames how they are working together.⁵ Her analysis of Shoghi Effendi’s approach in this regard seems directly applicable to what the Bahá’í community is learning about today. In its 30 December 2021 message, the House of Justice underlines the significance of this growing capacity in the following terms:

4 These themes are addressed in more detail in Smith and Kelly, “Public Discourse and wilful incommensurability.”

5 In its letter of 19 April 2007 to a National Spiritual Assembly, the House of Justice states: “In every cluster the institutions and agencies guiding the process—the Auxiliary Board members and the institute, together with the Area Teaching Committee—need to examine the dynamics of growth on a regular basis and analyze the way in which these elements are working together, in order to identify gaps and determine what adjustments should be made.”

Over the last series of Plans, the community's capacity to maintain focus on the Faith's most pressing needs emerged as one of its most important strengths. However, this sense of focus has to accommodate many lines of action, all of which must advance without being in competition. This calls for an expanded vision, a nuanced understanding of coexisting imperatives, added flexibility, and heightened institutional collaboration. (30 December 2021)

Power and authority. Another major issue facing society concerns how power is conceived of and abused. Power is commonly viewed as control over others or equated with the capacity to secure what one wants in the face of resistance. It has certainly been used to oppress people, to keep them in their place, and—through propaganda, fear, backbiting, manipulation, the construction and propagation of disinformation, as well as various physical means—to deceive, condition, and force groups and individuals into submission or acquiescence in accordance with the wishes and ideologies of those in authority. Of equal concern are the micro workings of power, including those identified by thinkers such as Foucault, who explains how biopower and disciplinary practices normalize populations; and those highlighted by feminist thinkers, who analyze the many ways in which women have been, and still are, oppressed by men. Yet, it can also be argued that such

conceptions are actually distortions of the true nature of power that blind us to its arguably more genuine expressions, particularly those that are mutualistic, participatory, and inclusive, and that consequently encourage both individual and collective flourishing.⁶ On this theme, the House of Justice states:

Clearly the concept of power as a means of domination, with the accompanying notions of contest, contention, division and superiority, must be left behind. This is not to deny the operation of power; after all, even in cases where institutions of society have received their mandates through the consent of the people, power is involved in the exercise of authority. But political processes, like other processes of life, should not remain unaffected by the powers of the human spirit that the Bahá'í Faith—for that matter, every great religious tradition that has appeared throughout the ages—hopes to tap: the power of unity, of love, of humble service, of pure deeds. Associated with power in this sense are words such as “release”, “encourage”, “channel”, “guide” and “enable”. Power is not a finite entity which

6 For fuller discussions of this theme, see pages 55–61 of Michael Karlberg's book *Constructing Social Reality: An Inquiry into the Normative Foundations of Social Change* and Chapter 6 of Paul Lample's book *Revelation and Social Reality: Learning How to Translate What Is Written into Reality*.

is to be “seized” and “jealously guarded”; it constitutes a limitless capacity to transform that resides in the human race as a body. (2 March 2013)

When power is conceived of in this way, those in positions of authority seek to elicit latent potential, to foster collective volition, and to cultivate an evolving unity in diversity of vision-building and exploration. In so doing, they actively help to deflate the “power over” dynamic that has driven the historical struggle for dominance and recognition.

Thomas enables us to appreciate how Shoghi Effendi encouraged this elevated understanding of the dynamics of power and authority. In addition to invoking the power of vision and stressing the importance of looking to the end of any endeavor, the Guardian showed that effective leadership involves combining exhortations to action with affirmations of love and encouragement. It also requires the daily cultivation of spiritual attributes. These attributes, or virtues, according to Thomas, include “devotion, courtesy, purity of motive, and radiance of spirit” (32) all of which must be fostered in an effort to govern in accordance with the standards of equity and justice. In this connection, Thomas quotes the following admonition of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “The spiritually learned must be characterized by both inward and outward perfections; they must possess a good character, an enlightened nature, a pure intent, as well as intellectual

power, brilliance and discernment, intuition, discretion and foresight, temperance, reverence, and a heartfelt fear of God” (*Secret* 23–24).

Thomas goes on to explain that “[i]n this view, the leader is a person of influence in the community, of learning and high character, spiritually mature, and in control of his or her own baser temptations and inclinations” (127). Such leaders, including those elected to membership on institutions, strive to approach their task with modesty, humility, and with a heartfelt yearning to consult with, to learn from, and to release the potential of those they are called upon to serve. Their foremost conviction, in the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is that “[m]an’s greatness lieth in humility, and his abiding glory is found in lowliness, self-effacement, and servitude to the servants of the Lord. This, verily, is the greatest attainment in this resplendent Day” (*Light* section 76). They, moreover, understand, according to the House of Justice, that “[w]ithin the environment thus created, institutions invested with authority see themselves as instruments for nurturing human potential, ensuring its unfoldment along avenues productive and meritorious” (28 December 2010). As Thomas summarizes the lesson from Shoghi Effendi, effective institutions offer love, support, and encouragement, imbuing the efforts associated with plans of action with a sense of nobility and purpose so that each person feels inspired to contribute as much as he or she is able.

In this same spirit, those in positions

of leadership also see themselves as active participants among the three protagonists—the individual, the community, and the institutions—working for the betterment of the world, (28 November 2023) each of which “has capacities and qualities that must be developed” but which “is incapable of manifesting its full potential on its own” (30 December 2021). That is, these leaders take to heart that it is only when the three protagonists strengthen

their dynamic relationships with one another that their powers are combined and multiplied. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that the more the qualities of cooperation and mutual assistance are manifested by a people, “the more will human society advance in progress and prosperity”; in the Faith, this principle distinguishes and shapes the interactions of individuals, institutions, and communities, and it endows the body of the Cause with moral vigour and spiritual health. (30 December 2021)

In short, it could be concluded that the three protagonists only truly progress when each is nourishing the other two and all three are congruently oriented toward serving the common weal. They all benefit to the extent possible when they are in dynamic interplay with one another. With this concept in mind, it is decidedly beneficial to read Thomas’ book for key insights into how Shoghi Effendi attended to the development of the individual, the community, and the

institutions, and how he consequently laid the groundwork for their evolving dynamic relationship.⁷

Modes of communication. The subject of communication, alluded to earlier, warrants further attention given the prevalent manner in which people and their leaders express themselves. We have, generally speaking, learned in society to embrace competition as a

7 It is worth noting that this mindset similarly differs from current conceptions of freedom, specifically those informed by the philosophy of individualism. There are some merits to this philosophy. It has, for example, been a fundamental impetus behind the widespread acceptance and codification of universal rights and freedoms, emphasized freedom of conscience and the independent investigation of truth, led to many beneficial innovations, and helped to spur on the rise of democratic government. But, carried too far, it leads to a me-centrism, or cult of individualism, that often entails a posture of entitlement. Such atomistic freedom results in a dissipation of standards, fuels identity politics, and so undermines the integrity of the collective. In so doing—if we accept the premise that we are all essentially interconnected—it ironically undermines the individual him- or herself. This theme is explored in more depth in Smith, “Crisis.” Among other related themes, in this paper it is explained that individualism today essentially values three freedoms: 1) the freedom to do what I want when I want; 2) the freedom to access the necessary resources to carry out the first freedom; and 3) the freedom to take the first two freedoms for granted, which, again, amounts to a sense of entitlement.

natural mode of relating to one another, based on commonly held assumptions that correspond more closely to Hobbes' conception of human nature than to Rousseau's, who assumes humans to be naturally compassionate.⁸ We are in many ways conditioned to believe that we can only prosper at the expense of others.⁹ This belief, moreover, is often tied to the additional belief that we are naturally adversarial and self-interested creatures, driven to satiate our material desires and rationalize our yearnings for status. Taken together, this "distortion of the human spirit" (Ridván 2012) infects various realms, including politics, which tends to become ever more partisan given that opposition, debate, and confrontation are considered basic to the way things operate; the legal realm, which is obviously adversarial; business, where getting ahead often means defeating the competition; the media, which is growingly complicit in the fragmentation and polarization that contaminates much of society; and academia, which tends to function through the contest of ideas to the point where many scholars (some certainly more than others) derive purpose from demolishing the ideas of their peers.

While the competitive mindset has arguably produced beneficial results, it

is proving insufficient for solving the crises that now confront the peoples of the world and for counteracting the rising despair at the apparent inability to solve them. In studying Thomas' book as well as guidance of the House of Justice, it seems clear that what is urgently required at this stage in the development of humanity is the capacity to think and act collaboratively, which in turn requires the internalization of a revised set of assumptions about human nature and purpose. These include the conviction that we are fundamentally good and noble, but that, without proper education, we are prone to succumbing to materialistic impulses. With this conviction and the vision outlined by Shoghi Effendi as part of our worldview, the aim becomes one of mutual upliftment and of creating environments in which souls "advance their understanding together, humbly sharing the insights each possesses at a given moment and eagerly seeking to learn from fellow wayfarers on the path of service" (29 December 2015). Indeed, the watchword becomes one of humble service conjoined with a mode of learning focused on capacity building, fostering universal participation, and developing a consultative will aimed at effectively tackling problems of pressing social concern.

Such an approach to expression differs greatly from the way speech is currently practiced, which stifles progress in a number of ways. In its present combative mode, freedom of speech leads to entrenchment, factionalism, radicalization, and conspiracy theories

8 For an in-depth investigation into the merits of each position, and particularly that of Rousseau's, see Rutger Bregman's book *Humankind: A Hopeful History*.

9 Ironically, we also seek recognition for our advancements in the eyes of others.

that are perpetuated by the spread of propaganda, disinformation, filter bubbles, and ideological echo chambers. The culture of contest¹⁰ permeates how we interact with one another such that discourse often consists of reductionist, dogmatic, and antagonistic speech that betrays flimsy (or deliberately distorted) links to reality. It thus creates an environment in which constructive dialogue becomes all but impossible to pursue while the voice of demagoguery—and the fantastical realities, delusions of grandeur, and cult of personality that both emerge from and feed it—becomes increasingly brazen. In the name of “telling it like it is,” such speech “employs a style of expression which robs language of its decorum.” Moreover, “in a time when stridency is commonly presumed to be a quality of leadership, candor is crass, and authority speaks in a loud and vulgar voice” (19 May 1994). As the House of Justice more recently summarizes the present situation:

One conspicuous symptom of society's deepening malaise is the steady descent of public discourse into greater rancour and enmity, reflecting entrenched partisan points of view. A prevalent feature of such contemporary discourse is how political disagreements rapidly degenerate into invective and ridicule. However, what particularly differentiates the present age from those that preceded it is how

so much of this discourse occurs in full view of the world. Social media and related communication tools tend to give the greatest exposure to all that is controversial.... (1 December 2019)

There are, of course, elements of the current pattern that should be retained in some form. These include being candid and attending to facts. As Thomas makes clear, Shoghi Effendi's approach to communication explicitly highlights the importance of both. Yet, she also makes clear that to facilitate mutual development, speech must also convey genuine praise and spiritual intimacy. It needs to appeal concurrently to both mind and heart. In this regard, Thomas explains that Shoghi Effendi exemplified the value of understanding the population he was addressing and with whom he was working—of being attuned to their circumstances, values, and motivations; of establishing clear, yet inspiring objectives in accordance with the capacity of the population, suitable strategies to achieve these objectives, and built-in measures to readily assess progress; of ensuring that all objectives and strategies reflect noble values and praiseworthy principles, and are additionally consistent with the inclusive view of history that should contextualize every noble endeavor; and of regularly reminding the population of its accomplishments, evolving capacities, and the ever-expanding horizons of possibility opening up before it in view of its evolving vision of the more distant future.

10 Michael Karlberg, *Beyond the Culture of Contest*.

Finally, we are reminded by the guidance that the most productive speech entails speaking with a kindly tongue; with moderation; with a commitment to finding points of unity, harmonizing perspectives, and building a common framework of understanding; and with divine love. Speech infused with such characteristics is essential for opening up minds, breaking down seemingly intransigent barriers, and facilitating the search for truth. Indeed, such characteristics give speech its true power and so conduce to both individual and social transformation. In the words of the House of Justice:

Ultimately, the power to transform the world is effected by love, love originating from the relationship with the divine, love ablaze among members of a community, love extended without restriction to every human being. This divine love, ignited by the Word of God, is disseminated by enkindled souls through intimate conversations that create new susceptibilities in human hearts, open minds to moral persuasion, and loosen the hold of biased norms and social systems so that they can gradually take on a new form in keeping with the requirements of humanity's age of maturity. (22 July 2020)

When reading Thomas's book, it becomes evident that Shoghi Effendi continuously demonstrated to the Bahá'í community the vital importance of radiating this divine love.

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