

# The Lesser Peace and the Most Great Peace\*

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Looking at the Writings of Shoghi Effendi in English, one can readily observe how he was able -- through his marvellously creative pen -- to give a comprehensive description and an all-embracing analysis of the state of the world today. The reader could clearly perceive why such extraordinary developments in social, political, economic, scientific and cultural affairs have taken place; why these developments continue to be on the rise; how humanity would be influenced by them; what stages of growth society at large would need to traverse; and to what ultimate station would humanity be led.

According to the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, in whatever age the Manifestations of God appear, they guide humanity to more elevated levels of spiritual as well as material advancements; and, although these advancements are all positive in themselves, their establishment requires a destruction of the foundations of the old order so that a new divine civilisation may be established upon its ruins. Consider the sun and how -- on the one hand -- it is able to melt the snow over the mountains, creating frightening floods that lead to havoc and the destruction of cities, villages and hamlets; but -- on the other hand -- how it can produce the heat and light necessary for the growth of vegetation and all other living things. It can therefore be noted that now that the Sun of Truth has dawned from the Horizon of the Cause of the Blessed Beauty, both of these processes need to unfold on a global level. In other words, one can notice the signs of destruction -- or the negative aspects -- as well as the signs of construction -- or the positive aspects.

Bahá'u'lláh has described the destruction of the world and all that is therein by the following statement:

*Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead. (GWB 7)*

And also:

*The time for the destruction of the world and its people hath arrived.* (ADJ 81)

And again:

*From two ranks amongst men power hath been seized: kings and ecclesiastics.* (PDC 20)

Yet again:

*The whole earth is now in a state of pregnancy...the day is approaching when it will have yielded its noblest fruits, when from it will have sprung forth the loftiest trees, the most enchanting blossoms, the most heavenly blessings.* (GPB 217)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has also referred to these parallel processes in His Writings. He says:

*...these chronic diseases shall never be healed; nay, they shall grow fiercer from day to day...* (SWAB 249)

And about the positive effects of these developments He says:

*Thus the world of humanity will be wholly transformed and the merciful bounties become manifest.* (SWAB 282)

The negative evidences of these developments are abasement, destruction and chaos in society; while their positive impacts are the progress and the expansion of the Cause of God on earth. Made explicit in texts from the Holy Writings, the starting point of these two parallel processes was the Declaration of the Blessed Báb in Shiraz in 1260 AH or 1844 AD.

There are references both in the Bible and in the Qur’an to the fact that the commencement of these processes would coincide with the advent of the Promised Day. For example it is written in the Bible:

*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.* (Revelations 21:1)

And in the Qur’an, it is written:

*One day the earth will be changed to a different earth, and so will be the heavens.* (Q 14:48)

It is clear that by “earth” here is meant the temporal civilization, and by the “heavens” is meant the heavens of divine Revelation, as stated in the Kitáb-i-Şqán by the Blessed Beauty.

In describing these two-fold processes, Shoghi Effendi has written the following:

A twofold process, however, can be distinguished, each tending, in its own way and with an accelerated momentum, to bring to a climax the forces that are transforming the face of our planet. The first is essentially an integrating process, while the second is fundamentally disruptive. The former, as it steadily evolves, unfolds a System which may well serve as a pattern for that world polity towards which a strangely-disordered world is continually advancing; while the latter, as its disintegrating influence deepens, tends to tear down, with increasing violence, the antiquated barriers that seek to block humanity's progress towards its destined goal. The constructive process stands associated with the nascent Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and is the harbinger of the New World Order that Faith must ere long establish. The destructive forces that characterize the other should be identified with a civilization that has refused to answer to the expectation of a new age, and is consequently falling into chaos and decline. (WOB 170)

In his Writings, the beloved Guardian also refers to a third process, which consists of positive advancements that are taking shape in the world -- independent of the direct involvement of the Bahá'í community. Nevertheless, since this third process is indirectly derived from the life-giving influences of the Cause of God, it is in harmony with the spirit of the Bahá'í Teachings. Shoghi Effendi's statement in this regard is as follows:

“So marvellous a conception finds its earliest manifestations in the efforts consciously exerted and the modest beginnings already achieved by the declared adherents of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh who, conscious of the sublimity of their calling and initiated into the ennobling principles of His Administration, are forging ahead to establish His Kingdom on this earth. It has its indirect manifestations in the gradual diffusion of the spirit of world solidarity which is spontaneously arising out of the welter of a disorganized society.” (WOB 191)

After the First World War, in the midst of the afflictions

facing the entire human race, the League of Nations was established in 1920. Although this League was confronted with numerous difficulties, still its establishment was -- from a global political point of view -- the first significant step taken in this path and in absolute harmony with the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Shoghi Effendi has stated the following in this regard:

For the first time in the history of humanity the system of collective security, foreshadowed by Bahá'u'lláh and explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, has been seriously envisaged, discussed and tested. (WOB 191)

Regarding the Unity of Mankind proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh as the cornerstone of His All-embracing Dominion, Shoghi Effendi states:

Uttered at a time when its possibility had not yet been seriously envisaged in any part of the world, it has, by virtue of that celestial potency which the Spirit of Bahá'u'lláh has breathed into it, come at last to be regarded, by an increasing number of thoughtful men, not only as an approaching possibility, but as the necessary outcome of the forces now operating in the world. (WOB 47)

After the Second World War, in 1945 the League of Nations was changed to The United Nations Organisation, which has since been going through its process of growth and development. It has of course encountered many problems and difficulties such as determining the number of the members of its Security Council or issues pertaining to veto rights; however, as foreseen by Bahá'u'lláh, this organisation must indeed complete its evolutionary growth towards its state of maturity, which is none other than the establishment of the Lesser Peace envisaged by the Blessed Beauty.

Bahá'u'lláh has stated, addressing the kings and rulers of the world:

*Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace, hold ye fast unto this, the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependents. (GWB 253)*

This Lesser Peace is one that is solely founded upon political considerations and requirements. In other words, although its

future constitution will -- to some extent -- be influenced by moral and ethical standards, it will undoubtedly be devoid of the bounty of the spiritual principles of the Cause of God. For example, even though the Lesser Peace would undoubtedly ensure equality of rights for all and the honouring of individual or collective beliefs, yet we must bear in mind that there is a tremendous difference between the observance of human rights -- which is a worldly and legal matter -- and the necessity for the complete eradication of religious and racial prejudices, which is a spiritual condition and a matter of conscience.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, there appeared a debate amongst the friends with regards to the Tablet of the Seven Candles of Unity, in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

*The fifth candle is the unity of nations -- a unity which in this century will be securely established, causing all the peoples of the world to regard themselves as citizens of one common fatherland. (SWAB 32)*

Some friends therefore concluded that the Lesser Peace must be fully established by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This conclusion of course stands in contradiction with the statement of Shoghi Effendi in a letter dated 1946 to one of the friends in the West. In this letter, the beloved Guardian clearly indicates that the time for the fulfilment of the establishment of the Lesser Peace is not determined:

All we know is that the Lesser and the Most Great Peace will come -- their exact dates we do not know. (LOG 434)

If we ponder closely on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words concerning the unity of nations, it will become evident that He is not speaking of the Lesser Peace; but rather He is stating that under the fifth candle of unity and throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a unity will be established, "...causing all the peoples of the world to regard themselves as citizens of one common fatherland." Considering the earth as one country is of course not the same as establishing the Lesser Peace. What 'Abdu'l-Bahá indicates is that the scientific explorations of the twentieth century on the one hand and economic relations on the other will undoubtedly prove to the inhabitants of the earth that the planet is indeed one country. This was of course proven in practicality, especially when astronauts managed to take some beautiful aerial photographs of the planet earth, which were widely published.

As for the Great Peace, Bahá'u'lláh describes this process as

follows:

*The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch... If the rulers and kings of the earth, the symbols of the power of God, exalted be His glory, arise and resolve to dedicate themselves to whatever will promote the highest interests of the whole of humanity, the reign of justice will assuredly be established amongst the children of men, and the effulgence of its light will envelop the whole earth... The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace amongst men... This will ensure the peace and composure of every people, government and nation. (TAB 163)*

In connection with this Great Peace, Shoghi Effendi writes:

A world community in which all economic barriers will have been permanently demolished and the interdependence of Capital and Labor definitely recognized; in which the clamor of religious fanaticism and strife will have been forever stilled; in which the flame of racial animosity will have been finally extinguished; in which a single code of international law -- the product of the considered judgment of the world's federated representatives -- shall have as its sanction the instant and coercive intervention of the combined forces of the federated units; and finally a world community in which the fury of a capricious and militant nationalism will have been transmuted into an abiding consciousness of world citizenship -- such indeed, appears, in its broadest outline, the Order anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh, an Order that shall come to be regarded as the fairest fruit of a slowly maturing age. (WOB 40)

This statement by the beloved Guardian requires careful attention, for it speaks of religious and racial prejudices, and specifies that it is through the process of the Great Peace that the "clamour of religious fanaticism" and "the flame of racial animosity" will finally be wiped out entirely from the face of the earth. Here, one can easily deduce that unfortunately under the Lesser Peace, religious strife and racial prejudice will not

have entirely left the hearts and souls of the human race. However, by the emergence of the Great Peace, the Bahá'í Teachings will have beyond any doubt penetrated the organs of the Lesser Peace, leaving no room for religious and racial prejudices and thus healing the world's spiritual ailments with the blessings of the divine panacea.

Let us consider the Most Great Peace now. Shoghi Effendi provides the following explanation:

The Most Great Peace, on the other hand, as conceived by Bahá'u'lláh -- a peace that must inevitably follow as the practical consequence of the spiritualization of the world and the fusion of all its races, creeds, classes and nations -- can rest on no other basis, and can be preserved through no other agency, except the divinely appointed ordinances that are implicit in the World Order that stands associated with His Holy Name. In His Tablet, revealed almost seventy years ago to Queen Victoria, Bahá'u'lláh, alluding to this Most Great Peace, has declared: "That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith. This can in no wise be achieved except through the power of a skilled, an all-powerful and inspired Physician. This, verily, is the truth and all else naught but error... (WOB 162)

And again the beloved Guardian quotes from one of the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh:

*It beseemeth all men in this Day...to take firm hold on the Most Great Name, and to establish the unity of all mankind. There is no place to flee to, no refuge that any one can seek, except Him. (WOB 163)*

Shoghi Effendi offers a detailed exposition, outlining and explaining the conditions which will come into place in the world of being, as a result of the establishment of the Most Great Peace. Here are some extracts from his statements regarding this matter:

“In such a world society, science and religion, the two most potent forces in human life, will be reconciled, will cooperate, and will harmoniously develop... Destitution on the one hand, and gross accumulation of ownership on the other, will disappear. The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war, whether economic or political, will be

consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to the increase of the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the planet, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race.

A world federal system, ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West, liberated from the curse of war and its miseries, and bent on the exploitation of all the available sources of energy on the surface of the planet, a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sustained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation -- such is the goal towards which humanity, impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving." (WOB 203)

'Abdu'l-Bahá in *Some Answered Questions* describes the Most Great Peace as follows:

*One of the great events which is to occur in the Day of the manifestation of that Incomparable Branch (Bahá'u'lláh) is the hoisting of the Standard of God among all nations. By this is meant that all nations and kindreds will be gathered together under the shadow of this Divine Banner, which is no other than the Lordly Branch itself, and will become a single nation. Religious and sectarian antagonism, the hostility of races and peoples, and differences among nations, will be eliminated. All men will adhere to one religion, will have one common faith, will be blended into one race, and become a single people. All will dwell in one common fatherland, which is the planet itself. (SAQ 65)*

It is therefore clear that upon the establishment of the Most Great Peace, all the divine laws and ordinances revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and in other Bahá'í Holy Writings will be officially implemented. This peace will not be merely for the fortification of the basis of a political unity; nor is it solely intended to promote a spirit of brotherhood or the abolishment of racial prejudice and religious fanaticism. These achievements

in removing all traces of prejudice are all features of the Great Peace. The Most Great Peace will ensure the greater expansion of the Bahá'í Teachings with a wider and more effectively penetrating influence upon the world and its inhabitants, inasmuch as under the Most Great Peace, "all men will adhere to one religion, will have one common faith, will be blended into one race, and become a single people."

It can therefore be concluded that humanity has three processes ahead of itself: the Lesser Peace, the Great Peace and the Most Great Peace.

The Lesser Peace is one that will - as explained before - be established through the efforts of the nations of the world, and will be regarded by them as the last and only remaining solution to their political ordeals. It can be said that this development may indeed reflect the maturity of the United Nations; a stage which will be reached through the severity of the trials and tribulations heaped upon the peoples and nations of the world. All these nations will voluntarily - and by force if necessary - come under this political unification; for they will realise that they have no other recourse but to establish one official world government. This world government will have the power to limit justly the unbridled authority exercised by some of the governments today, and subordinate national interests to whatever promotes the welfare of humanity.

The Great Peace is the next stage following the Lesser Peace and a prelude to the Most Great Peace. This Peace will come about through the operations of the Major Plan of God and the pervading influence of the Divine Will. Moreover, it constitutes -- as indicated in the Holy Writings -- the Order designed by the Blessed Beauty, inasmuch as the Bahá'í International Institutions at that time will be in a position to inspire the work of the world federation and all its branches and to guide its operation in conformity with the spirit of the Teachings of the Faith -- which are all based on the principle of the unity of mankind.

As for the Most Great Peace: this Peace is the ultimate peace promised to all the peoples and nations. It is a peace, the features of which are all derived from the Teachings of the Blessed Beauty. This peace will embody secular and administrative factors as well as spiritual and divinely ordained principles, so that material requirements and spiritual standards may completely integrate and marvellously blend together. This world embracing New World Order will establish a civilization

which is neither of the East nor of the West and which has been promised by all the religions of the past.

We all know that the current Local and National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'í World each exercise (within their own jurisdiction) legislative, executive and judicial powers, enabling them to conduct the spiritual and administrative affairs of the community. However, it is also clear that these three powers will in the future be separated in accordance with the guidance of the Universal House of Justice. The Spiritual Assemblies -- which will later be named Local and National Houses of Justice -- will as a result of this separation of powers become the legislative arm under whose aegis the two other divisions, namely the executive and the judiciary, will be established and will operate in conjunction with their subsidiary agencies. This separation of powers will undoubtedly be realised on the international level as well.

One of the distinguishing features of the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh as compared to other secular disciplines in the world is that the central axis of the institutions of the Faith is the legislative power, meaning the Houses of Justice; while in secular organisations, it is normally the executive power that governs. In two of his letters (The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 40, p. 162), the beloved Guardian offers separate explanations with regard to the Great Peace and the Most Great Peace. In the case of the Great peace, the executive power is given precedence, while in the case of the Most Great peace, it is the legislative power that comes first. This legislative power -- as explained above - is represented by the Houses of Justice, be they local, national or international.

Concerning the importance and the necessity of the establishment of the Lesser Peace, Shoghi Effendi has given us the following comprehensive and remarkable statement in one of his letters, and with it we will conclude this article:

“The long ages of infancy and childhood, through which the human race had to pass, have receded into the background. Humanity is now experiencing the commotions invariably associated with the most turbulent stage of its evolution, the stage of adolescence, when the impetuosity of youth and its vehemence reach their climax, and must gradually be superseded by the calmness, the wisdom, and the maturity that characterize the stage of manhood. Then will the human race reach that stature of ripeness which will enable it to acquire all the powers and

capacities upon which its ultimate development must depend.

Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life.” (WOB 202)

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\* This is the English version of the Persian text published in *Safini-yi 'Irfán*, Book Ten, 2007