

SHOGHI EFFENDI: Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith

One day, when Shoghi Effendi was a small child, he picked up the pen of his grandfather, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and tried to write. 'Abdu'l-Bahá gently told him, "Now is not the time to write, now is the time to play, you will write a lot in the future." Shoghi Effendi *did* grow up to write thousands of pages—as leader of the Bahá'í world community.

Born in 1897 in what is now 'Akká, Israel, Shoghi Effendi was a courteous child who played with boundless energy. He adored his grandfather, who led the Bahá'í Faith at that time. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the eldest son and successor of Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith.

In his teens, Shoghi Effendi went to college in Lebanon.* He loved learning and preparing to help 'Abdu'l-Bahá in his work. After graduation, he spent two years as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's secretary and constant companion, often translating letters and conversations into English. Serving at his grandfather's side brought him great joy.

In 1920, Shoghi Effendi went to Oxford University in England to continue his studies and perfect his English. He worked hard on his school-work and enjoyed debating and tennis. He also loved photography, a hobby he pursued throughout his life.

An Incredible Challenge

In 1921, Shoghi Effendi's world collapsed when 'Abdu'l-Bahá passed



"Look at his eyes, they are like clear water," 'Abdu'l-Bahá said of the young Shoghi Effendi (left). Climbing the Alps refreshed his spirit (middle), especially after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing, when he discovered he was to head the Bahá'í Faith (right).

away suddenly. He was so grief-stricken, he stayed in bed for days.

When he returned to Israel, Shoghi Effendi learned that in his will, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had named him the Guardian, the new head of the Bahá'í Faith. Shoghi Effendi was just 24 years old. Overwhelmed, he confided in a friend, "Wherever I go I remember my beloved grandfather and whatever I do I feel the terrible responsibility He has so suddenly placed upon my feeble shoulders."

To prepare himself for the challenging tasks ahead, Shoghi Effendi retreated to the Swiss Alps. Some days he climbed for 16 hours, renewing his spiritual and physical strength. After eight months, he returned to Israel to take on his new role "with feelings of joyful confidence."

Inspiring Leadership

In 1937, Shoghi Effendi married a Canadian Bahá'í, Mary Maxwell. He gave her the name Amatu'l-Bahá

Rúhiyyih Khánum.** They had a loving relationship, and she was a great help to him with his work.

For 36 years, Shoghi Effendi worked tirelessly. He encouraged Bahá'ís to strengthen their characters, deepen their knowledge of the Faith, and share its teachings of peace and unity.

He wrote over 26,000 letters, translated many writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá into English, and wrote a history of the Faith. He also oversaw the construction of sacred buildings and gardens. Under his leadership, the number of Bahá'ís quadrupled. His energy, enthusiasm, and devotion inspired many around the world.

On November 4, 1957, Shoghi Effendi unexpectedly passed away from a heart attack at age 60. His life of service and words of encouragement still help guide the Bahá'í community today.† He wrote, "A glorious future awaits you all, more brilliant than any you can imagine."

* His school is known today as the American University of Beirut.

** Learn more about Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum in Sept/Oct 2005, p. 22 and Mar/Apr 2009, p. 8.

† Learn more about Shoghi Effendi in Nov/Dec 2000, Jan/Feb 2002, p. 10; and Sept/Oct 2005, p. 21.