

The Day That Shall Not Be Followed By Night, Part 2: (Ibrahim Kayr'u'llah and Mason Remey) By Tim Nolan

The strength of a thing can be measured by testing how much pressure or stress it can bear before breaking. For example, engineers test the components of a bridge – steel or concrete or wood - before constructing the span, and they apply stress greater than the bridge is designed for, to make sure it is safe. If a bridge is designed to support ten tons, applying one ton of pressure to a component proves nothing. However, bridges, like all physical objects, will fail if enough pressure or deformation is applied.

But, the Baha'i Covenant is of a different nature; it is incorruptible and has not been compromised even when the most prominent and influential believers opposed it and tried to undermine it. Two examples will illustrate this principle.

Ibrahim Khayru'llah

Ibrahim Khayru'llah was a Syrian Christian doctor who accepted the Baha'i Faith in 1892. He received a Tablet from Baha'u'llah, designating him as "*Ibrahim, whom God confirmed*". ([Tablet to Ibráhím George Kheiralla-by Abdu'l-Bahá](#)) In 1892 he migrated to Chicago in the United States where he set up his medical practice. At this time, he had not met Abdu'l Baha, and had very little Baha'i literature, so his knowledge of the Baha'i teachings was limited. In Chicago he began teaching the Faith in a series of lessons based on his own interpretation of biblical prophecies. His teaching efforts were remarkably successful, bringing in hundreds of new believers over the next few years. Among the individuals he brought into the Cause were some of the luminaries of the early years of the Faith in North America: Thornton Chase, Isabella Brittingham, Louisa (Moore) Getsinger, Robert Turner. Because of the scarcity of Baha'i literature, in those closing years of the nineteenth century, these new believers turned to Khayru'llah as virtually their sole source of information about the Faith.

The fateful turning point for Khayru'llah came in 1898 when he accompanied Phoebe Hearst, Lua and Edward Getsinger, and others, on the first pilgrimage to Akka by western believers. For the first time, Khayru'llah and the other Americans heard the true Baha'i teachings from Abdu'l-Baha Himself. This caused confusion among these recent converts because it became clear that what Khayrullah had been teaching them had little to do with what the Baha'i Faith actually was. At the same time, Khayru'llah became enticed by the machinations of Mirza Muhammad Ali, Abdu'l-Baha's half brother and the arch breaker of Baha'u'llah's Covenant.

When the pilgrims returned to America, the Getsingers and Thornton Chase began teaching the accurate Baha'i principles they had learned from Abdu'l-Baha. As a result, the believers began to realize that what Khayru'llah had taught them was not correct, and gradually they ceased looking to him as their guide. Khayru'llah, his pride hurt, responded by spreading disparaging rumors about the Getsingers. This led to confusion and divisions within the community. Within a few years, Abdu'l-Baha dispatched several Persian teachers, including Mirza Abu'l Fadl, to America to educate the believers and clear up their misunderstandings. This further diminished Khayru'llah's status.

Eventually, Khayru'llah embraced the idea that he should be the head of the Faith in the West, and Abdu'l-Baha would be the head of the eastern Baha'is. This was in clear contradiction to Baha'u'llah's words in the Kitab-i-Aqdas and the Kitab-i-Ahd. As a result of this defection, by the "father" of the American Baha'i community, hundreds of individuals left the Faith.

At the end, Khayru'llah's legacy was pitiable. The Guardian wrote:

"...the greedy and conceited Ibráhím-i-Khayru'lláh, who had chosen to uphold the banner of his rebellion in America for no less than twenty years, and who had the temerity to denounce, in writing, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His "false teachings, His misrepresentations of Baháism, His dissimulation," and to stigmatize His visit to America as "a death-blow" to the "Cause of God," met his death soon after he had uttered these denunciations, utterly abandoned and despised by the entire body of the members of a community, whose founders he himself had converted to the Faith" ([God Passes By p. 319](#))

Mason Remey

Perhaps most tragic is the case of Charles Mason Remey.

He first learned of the Faith in 1899 from May Bolles, while he was studying in Paris. She gave him the series of lessons from Khayru'llah, and when he received the final lesson which revealed the stations of Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha, his reaction was immediate acceptance and joy. He later wrote:

"I believed the moment that I was told, and I found myself in the highest ecstasy. I arrived at my rooms in a whirl; I was in the seventh heaven..." (Harper p. 288)

From the start of his years as a believer, Remey made significant contributions. He established the first Baha'i consultative body in Washington D.C. He published at least 55 pamphlets and booklets, including a compilation on the Covenant. At Abdu'l-

Baha's request, Remey travelled the breadth of the United States to teach the Faith. Beginning in 1909, he travelled with Harold Struven on the first round the globe teaching trip, visiting Japan, Burma and India among other countries.

Abdu'l-Baha wrote many tablets to Mason Remey; in one of them He addressed Remey as:

“O thou who art firm in the Covenant.” (Harper p 290)

In 1951, Shoghi Effendi announced the formation of the International Baha'i Council, the forerunner of the Universal House of Justice, and named Hand of the Cause Mason Remey as its president. The Guardian accepted Mason Remey's designs for the Houses of Worship for Kampala, Sydney and Mount Carmel.

When Shoghi Effendi died unexpectedly, in November 1957, all the Hands of the Cause, including Remey, signed a document stating the he had not appointed anyone to succeed him as Guardian.

Gradually however, Mason Remey became convinced that there had to be a second Guardian, that the Faith could not function without a living Guardian, even though the authoritative writings do not support such a claim. He also came to believe that, as president of the International Council, he was the person who should rightfully be that Guardian. For about two years, the other Hands of the Cause, who loved Mason Remey, tried to talk him out of his preposterous assertion. Eventually, though, after Remey began issuing “encyclicals” and publicly announcing his claim, the body of the Hands of the Cause had no choice but to expel him from the Faith and announce to the Baha'i world that he was a covenant breaker. All the Hands had known and loved Mason Remey for decades; no doubt they admired his many contributions to the Cause. It must have caused them much grief to do what they saw as their duty as protectors of the Faith.

Some may wonder about Remey's mental state when he claimed the Guardianship, since he was in his mid-eighties at the time. The Hands, at first, characterized his claim as *“evidence of a profound emotional disturbance”*, but in a later communication said Remey's actions reflected a *“well thought-out plan”*. (Harper p. 303-305)

In the end, Mason Remey, the recipient of many honors from both Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, died in his hundredth year, in Florence Italy, virtually alone. The fact that Khayru'llah and Remey, each one of the most prominent, influential Baha'is of his time, failed to do any permanent harm to the Faith demonstrates clearly that the Covenant established by Baha'u'llah is impregnable and incorruptible.

A personal note: During the years that Ibrahim Khayru'llah and Mason Remey were faithful to the Cause of God, their accomplishments were far greater than anything my insignificant efforts have achieved. If such notable believers can fall into the spiritually deadly trap of pride and arrogance, leading to their downfall as covenant breakers, how much more must I strive to be steadfast. I pray that God will protect me from the "...*Evil Whisperer, who whispers in men's breasts*". ([Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah pp 232-233](#))

Works Consulted

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