

# BAHÁ'Í PROCEDURE

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Instructions from Shoghi Effendi, and Procedures and Rulings Adopted by the National Spiritual Assembly, Compiled from the Guardian's Letters, Bahá'í News, and Minutes and Records of the National Assembly, for the Information of American Bahá'ís.



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*Note:* Additions and Revisions Will be Made in these Sheets from Time to Time, as Conditions Change. Recommendations are Requested from Spiritual Assemblies for the Improvement of this Secondary Administrative material.

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**BAHÁ'Í PUBLISHING COMMITTEE**

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## QUALIFICATIONS OF A BELIEVER

Regarding the very delicate and complex question of ascertaining the qualifications of a true believer, I cannot in this connection emphasize too strongly the supreme necessity for the exercise of the utmost discretion, caution and tact, whether it be in deciding for ourselves as to who may be regarded a true believer or in disclosing to the outside world such considerations as may serve as a basis for such a decision. I would only venture to state very briefly and as adequately as present circumstances permit the principal factors that must be taken into consideration before deciding whether a person may be regarded a true believer or not. Full recognition of the station of the Forerunner, the Author, and the True Exemplar of the Bahá'í Cause, as set forth in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Testament; unreserved acceptance of, and submission to, whatsoever has been revealed by their Pen; loyal and steadfast adherence to every clause of our Beloved's sacred Will; and close association with the spirit as well as the form of the present day Bahá'í administration throughout the world—these I conceive to be the fundamental and primary considerations that must be fairly, discreetly and thoughtfully ascertained before reaching such a vital decision. Any attempt at further analysis and elucidation will, I fear, land us in barren discussions and even grave controversies that would prove not only futile but even detrimental to the best interests of a growing Cause. I would therefore strongly urge those who are called upon to make such a decision to approach this highly involved and ever-recurring problem with the spirit of humble prayer, and earnest consultation, and to refrain from drawing rigidly the line of demarcation except on such occasions when the interests of the Cause absolutely demand it.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## LAWS OF THE AQDAS

In view of the importance of such a statement he feels it his duty to explain that the Laws revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in the Aqdas are, whenever practicable and not in direct conflict with the Civil Laws of the land, absolutely binding on every believer or Bahá'í institution whether in the East or in the West. Certain laws, such as fasting, obligatory prayers, the consent of the parents before marriage, avoidance of alcoholic drinks, monogamy, should be regarded by all believers as universally and vitally applicable at the present time. Others have been formulated in anticipation of a state of so-

ciety destined to emerge from the chaotic conditions that prevail today. When the Aqdas is published this matter will be further explained and elucidated. What has not been formulated in the Aqdas, in addition to matters of detail and of secondary importance arising out of the application of the laws already formulated by Bahá'u'lláh, will have to be enacted by the Universal House of Justice. This body can supplement but never invalidate or modify in the least degree what has already been formulated by Bahá'u'lláh. Nor has the Guardian any right whatsoever to lessen the binding effect much less to abrogate the provisions of so fundamental and sacred a Book.

Already in Egypt, Persia, India and Iráq, Assemblies, both local and national, are availing themselves of the opportunity which the autonomy granted to Eastern religious communities in matters of personal status has offered them, to press for the recognition by the civil authorities of such Laws of the Aqdas which they conscientiously feel they must uphold and enforce. They have even, under certain circumstances, preferred to suspend their activities and dissolve their institutions rather than follow the dictates of those officials who have tried to induce them to violate what has been expressly ordained by the Author of their Faith.

The Guardian will, when the Aqdas is published, elaborate this fundamental principle of our Faith. This brief reference, he feels, is adequate for any reference you wish to make regarding this matter in the News Letter.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## DAILY OBLIGATORY PRAYER

The daily obligatory prayers are three in number. The shortest one consists of a single verse which has to be recited once in every twenty-four hours and at midday. The medium (prayer) which begins with the words: "The Lord is witness that there is none other God but He", has to be recited three times a day, in the morning, at noon and in the evening. The long prayer which is the most elaborate of the three has to be recited once in every twenty-four hours, and at any time one feels inclined to do so.

The believer is entirely free to choose any one of those three prayers, but is under the obligation of reciting either one of them, and in accordance with any specific directions with which they may be accompanied.

These daily obligatory prayers, together with a few other specific ones, such as the Healing Prayer, the Tablet of Ahmad, have been invested by Bahá'u'lláh with a special

potency and significance, and should therefore be accepted as such and be recited by the believers with unquestioned faith and confidence, that through them they may enter into a much closer communion with God, and identify themselves more fully with His laws and precepts.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## THE ORDINANCE OF FASTING

As regards fasting, it constitutes, together with the obligatory prayers, the two pillars that sustain the revealed Law of God. They act as stimulants to the soul, strengthen, revive and purify it, and thus insure its steady development.

The ordinance of fasting is, as is the case with these three prayers,\* a spiritual and vital obligation enjoined by Bahá'lláh upon every believer who has attained the age of fifteen. In the Aqdas He thus writes: "We have commanded you to pray and fast from the beginning of maturity; this is ordained by God, your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers. He has exempted from this those who are weak from illness or age, as a bounty from His Presence, and He is the Forgiving, the Generous." And in another passage He says: "We have enjoined upon you fasting during a brief period, and at its close have designated for you Naw-Ruz as a feast. . . . The traveler, the ailing, those who are with child or giving suck, are not bound by the fast. . . . Abstain from food and drink, from sunrise to sundown, and beware lest desire deprive you of this grace that is appointed in the Book."

Also in the "Questions and Answers" that form an appendix to the Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh reveals the following: "Verily, I say that God has appointed a great station for fasting and prayer. But during good health its benefit is evident, and when one is ill, it is not permissible to fulfill them." Concerning the age of maturity, He reveals in the appendix of that same book: "The age of maturity is in the fifteenth year; women and men are alike in this respect."

Regarding the vital character and importance of the Divine ordinances and laws, and the necessity of complete obedience to them by the believers, we thus read in the *Gleanings*, p. 175: "Know verily that the essence of justice and the source thereof are both embodied in the ordinance prescribed by Him Who is the Manifestation of the Self of God amongst men, if ye be of them that recognize this truth. He doth verily incarnate the highest, the infallible standard of

\* The three obligatory daily prayers, any one of which the believer is free to choose.

justice unto all creation. Were His law to be such as to strike terror into the hearts of all that are in heaven and on earth, that law is naught but manifest justice. The fears and agitation which the revelation of this law provoke in men's hearts should indeed be likened to the cries of the sucking babe weaned from his mother's milk, if ye be of them that perceive. . . ."

The fasting period, which lasts nineteen days starting as a rule from the second of March every year and ending on the twentieth of the same month, involves complete abstention from food and drink from sunrise till sunset. It is essentially a period of meditation and prayer, of spiritual recuperation, during which the believer must strive to make the necessary readjustments in his inner life, and to refresh and reinvigorate the spiritual forces latent in his soul. Its significance and purpose are, therefore, fundamentally spiritual in character. Fasting is symbolic, and a reminder of abstinence from selfish and carnal desires.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## THE BÁB AND BAHÁ'U'LLÁH IN DRAMAS

With reference to your question whether the figures of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh should be made to appear as characters in dramatic works written by the believers, Shoghi Effendi's opinion is that such an attempt to dramatize the Manifestations would be highly disrespectful, and hence should be avoided by the friends, even in the case of the Master. Besides it would be practically impossible to carry out such a plan faithfully, and in a dignified and befitting manner.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## TRANSLATION OF SYMBOL OF THE GREATEST NAME

He also wishes me to inform you that the symbol of the Greatest Name represents an invocation which can be translated either as "O Glory of Glories" or "O Glory of the All-Glorious." The word glory used in this connection is a translation of the Arabic term "Bahá," the name of Bahá'u'lláh.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## TRANSLITERATION OF PERSIAN BAHÁ'Í TERMS

The friends are reminded of the Guardian's wish that in all printed literature of the Cause, the Persian words and terms be transliterated according to the correct stand-

ard observed by the Guardian. This standard will be found in *The Bahá'í World*, Vol. IV.—N. S. A.

## SYMBOL OF THE GREATEST NAME

The friends will be happy to learn that the use of this Symbol is now legally protected for proper Bahá'í use under the trade mark registration recently made by the National Spiritual Assembly through the U. S. Patent Office.

After careful consideration of the significance of this sacred Symbol, the Assembly has voted that its use should be confined to books and pamphlets containing the words of Bahá'u'lláh.—N. S. A.

## DISTINCTION BETWEEN TABLETS AND TALKS

Shoghi Effendi has laid down a principle that the Bahá'ís should not attribute much importance to talks, reported to have been given by the Master, if these have not in one form or other obtained His sanction.

Bahá'u'lláh has made it clear enough that only those things that have been revealed in the form of Tablets have a binding power over the friends. Hearsays may be matters of interest but can in no way claim authority. This basic teaching of Bahá'u'lláh was to preserve the Faith from being corrupted like Islám which attributes binding authority to all the reported sayings of Muhammad.

This being a basic principle of the Faith we should not confuse Tablets that were actually revealed and mere talks attributed to the founders of the Cause. The first have absolute binding authority while the latter can in no way claim our obedience. The highest thing this can achieve is to influence the activities of the one who has heard the saying in person.

Those talks of the Master that were later reviewed by Him and corrected or in some other form considered authentic by Himself, such as the *Some Answered Questions*, these could be considered as Tablets and therefore be given the necessary binding power. All the other talks such as are included in Ahmad's diary or the other diaries of pilgrims do not fall under this category and could be considered only as interesting material to be taken for what they are worth.

For this reason Shoghi Effendi has not been encouraging the publication of reported sayings that were not authenticated by the Master Himself. Shoghi Effendi is trying to prevent the friends from considering as ac-

tual words of the Master things that were not authenticated by Him.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## STORIES ABOUT 'ABDU'L-BAHA

He would also urge you to attach no importance to the stories told about 'Abdu'l-Bahá or to those attributed to Him by the friends. These should be regarded in the same light as the notes and impressions of visiting pilgrims. They need not be suppressed, but they should not also be given prominence or official recognition.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## CONCERNING LETTERS FROM HAIFA

I wish to add and say that whatever letters are sent in my behalf from Haifa are all read and approved by me before mailing. There is no exception whatever to this rule.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## THE GUARDIAN'S LETTERS TO INDIVIDUALS

As regards Shoghi Effendi's letters to the individual Bahá'ís, he is always very careful not to contradict himself. He has also said that whenever he has something of importance to say, he invariably communicates it to the National Spiritual Assembly or in his general letters. His personal letters to individual friends are only for their personal benefit and even though he does not want to forbid their publication, he does not wish them to be used too much by the *Bahá'í News*. Only letters with special significance should be published there.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## THE GUARDIAN'S RELATION TO INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS

As to the important issue you have raised in this connection regarding the nature and significance of the ties which must unite individual Bahá'ís with their Guardian, it should be made clear that such a relationship, though it transcends any relationship to an Assembly, is by no means intended to curtail the authority of the administrative bodies of the Cause, that it rather serves to strengthen and consolidate the unity of the Administration. Administrative efficiency and order should always be accompanied by an equal degree of love, of devotion and of

spiritual development. Both of them are essential and to attempt to dissociate one from the other is to deaden the body of the Cause. In these days, when the Faith is still in its infancy, great care must be taken lest mere administrative routine stifles the spirit which must feed the body of the Administration itself. That spirit is its propelling force and the motivating power of its very life.

But as already emphasized, both the spirit and the form are essential to the safe and speedy development of the Administration. To maintain full balance between them is the main and unique responsibility of the administrators of the Cause.

It is invariably my purpose and constant effort to uphold and reinforce the administrative principles of the Faith, and I trust that nothing will be allowed to interfere with the proper functioning of these administrative bodies.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

### **GUARDIAN REQUESTS BAHÁ'ÍS NOT TO OBSERVE HIS BIRTHDAY**

I wish to add a few words in person regarding the commemoration of my birthday anniversary. I would earnestly request all the believers and Assemblies not to observe, under any circumstances, whether officially or privately, my birthday anniversary. I strongly feel that only anniversaries in connection with the life of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá should be celebrated by the believers. It will, I am sure, prove conducive to my own spiritual growth and happiness, and would be in the best interests of our beloved Faith. I trust that you will acquaint all the believers with this insistent request of mine and I feel sure that they will all joyfully respond.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

### **CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER**

“Regarding the practice of congregational prayer, the Guardian wishes you to know that this form of prayer has been enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh only for the dead. In all other circumstances there is no obligation whatever imposed upon the believers. When the Aqdas is published the form of congregational prayer prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh will be made clear to all the believers.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

### **NATURE OF BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGE**

In regard to your question concerning the nature and character of Bahá'í marriage. As you have rightly stated, such a marriage

is conditioned upon the full approval of all four parents. Also your statement to the effect that the principle of the oneness of mankind prevents any true Bahá'í from regarding race itself as a bar to union is in complete accord with the Teachings of the Faith on this point. For both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Báha never disapproved of the idea of inter-racial marriage, nor discouraged it. The Bahá'í Teachings, indeed, by their very nature transcend all limitations imposed by race, and as such can and should never be identified with any particular school of racial philosophy.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

### **BAHÁ'Í FUNERAL SERVICE**

Regarding the Bahá'í funeral service: it is extremely simple, as it consists only of a congregational prayer to be read before burial. This prayer will be made available to the friends when the Aqdas is translated and published. In the meantime your N. S. A. should take great care lest any uniform procedure or ritual in this matter be adopted or imposed upon the friends. The danger in this, as in some other cases regarding Bahá'í worship, is that a definite system of rigid rituals and practices be developed among the believers. The utmost simplicity and flexibility should be observed, and a selection from the Bahá'í Sacred Writing would serve the purpose at the present time, provided this selection is not rigidly and uniformly adopted on all such occasions.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

### **THE USE OF RINGSTONES AND BURIAL STONES**

In regard to the use of ringstones and burial stones, the Guardian leaves this matter at present entirely to the discretion of the believers, and has no objection if your Assembly provides facilities for their purchase by the friends. When the “Kita'b-i-Aqdas” is published the necessary instructions will be given regarding this matter.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

### **TAXES AND SPIRITUAL OFFERINGS**

There is a difference between taxes and spiritual offerings. The House of Justice has certain revenues such as inheritance shares, fees and fines. These are the taxes which, according to the Aqdas, go directly not to the Guardian but to the House of Justice. According to the Master's Will which

complements the Aqdas, the Huquq goes only to the Guardian.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

**IMPORTANCE OF ARCHIVES**

The importance of the institution of Bahá'í Archives is not due only to the many teaching facilities it procures, but is especially to be found in the vast amount of historical data and information it offers both to the present-day administrators of the Cause, and to the Bahá'í historians of the future. The institution of Bahá'í Archives is indeed a most valuable storehouse of information regarding all the aspects of the Faith, administrative as well as doctrinal. Future generations of believers will be surely in a better position than we are to truly and adequately appreciate the many advantages and facilities which the institution of the Archives offers to individual believers and also to the community at large.

Now that the Cause is rapidly passing through so many different phases of its evolution, is the time for the friends to exert their utmost in order to preserve as much as they can of the sacred relics and various other precious objects that are associated with the lives of the Founders of the Faith, and particularly the Tablets They have revealed.

Every believer should realize that he has a definite responsibility to shoulder in this matter, and to help, to whatever extent he can, in rendering successful the valuable work which national and local Bahá'í Archives committees are so devotedly accomplishing for the Faith in America.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

**PRESERVATION OF RELICS**

Regarding the preservation of relics associated with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the general principle should be that any object used by Him in person should be preserved for posterity, whether in the local or the national archives. It is the duty and responsibility of the Bahá'í Assemblies to ascertain carefully whether such objects are genuine or not, and to exercise the utmost care and caution in the matter.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

**TEMPLE MEETINGS**

As to the character of the meetings in the Auditorium of the Temple, he feels that they should be purely devotional in character, Bahá'í addresses and lectures should be strictly excluded. For the present, he feels that there would be no objection to having Bahá'í meetings including addresses and the

business sessions of the Convention held in the Foundation Hall. Shoghi Effendi would urge that choir singing by men, women and children be encouraged in the Auditorium and that rigidity in the Bahá'í service be scrupulously avoided. The more universal and informal the character of Bahá'í worship in the Temple the better. Images and pictures, with the exception of the Greatest Name, should be strictly excluded. Prayers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and the Master as well as the sacred writings of the Prophets should be read or chanted as well as hymns based upon Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í sacred writings.

**CHANTING IN THE TEMPLE**

As regards the chanting of Tablets in the Temple, Shoghi Effendi wishes in this connection to urge the friends to avoid all forms of rigidity and uniformity in matters of worship. There is no objection to the recital or chanting of prayers in the Oriental language, but there is also no obligation whatsoever of adopting such a form of prayer at any devotional service in the auditorium of the Temple. It should neither be required nor prohibited. The important thing that should always be borne in mind is that with the exception of certain specific obligatory prayers, Bahá'u'lláh has given us no strict or special ruling in matters of worship, whether in the Temple or elsewhere. Prayer is essentially a communion between man and God, and as such transcends all ritualistic forms and formulae.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

**DRAMATIC PERFORMANCES IMPROPER FOR FOUNDATION HALL**

Shoghi Effendi feels it to be inadvisable that the Temple Foundation Hall be used for dramatic performances. He believes that only Bahá'í meetings, and business sessions of the Convention, can be held in it until such time as the erection of a special edifice for this purpose has been undertaken by the American friends.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

**HOW FUNDS ARE TO BE CONTRIBUTED**

You asked concerning some plans whereby funds could be gathered for the Temple. Shoghi Effendi believes that the best and noblest method is to have free donations that are made spontaneously and with the sense of making some sacrifice in furthering the Cause. It is with sacrifice that this Temple

is to be built. This is the truly worthy method. This principle therefore excludes any method whereby the help of non-Bahá'ís is included.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## TEST OF FAITH

He wishes you particularly to impress the believers with the necessity of maintaining the flow of their contributions to the Temple, and also to stress the importance of the institution of the National Bahá'í Fund which, in these early days of the administrative development of the Faith, is the indispensable medium for the growth and expansion of the Movement. Contributions to this fund constitute, in addition, a practical and effective way whereby every believer can test the measure and character of his faith, and to prove in deeds the intensity of his devotion and attachment to the Cause.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## THE NINETEEN DAY FEAST

This institution, established by Bahá'u'lláh, has been described by the Guardian as the foundation of the new World Order. The National Spiritual Assembly understands that it is incumbent upon every believer, unless ill or absent from the city, to attend each of these Feasts.

In a general letter issued to Local Spiritual Assemblies several years ago, it was pointed out that the Guardian instructs that the Nineteen Day Feast be held according to the following program: the first part, entirely spiritual in character, is devoted to readings from Bahá'í Sacred Writings; the second part consists of general consultation on the affairs of the Cause, at which time the Local Spiritual Assembly reports its activities to the community, asks for suggestions and consultation, and also delivers messages received from the Guardian and the National Assembly. The third part is the material feast and social meeting of all the friends. Only voting believers are invited to attend the Nineteen Day Feasts, but young people of less than twenty-one years of age, who are declared believers, especially when members of a Bahá'í family, can also be present.

These meetings may be regarded as the very heart of our Bahá'í community life. When properly conducted, and attended by a Bahá'í community which fully appreciates their importance, the Nineteen Day Feasts serve to renew and deepen our spirit of faith, increase our capacity for united action, remove misunderstandings and keep us fully informed of all important Bahá'í ac-

tivities, local, national and international in scope.—N. S. A.

## PROPER METHOD OF CONSULTATION

Shoghi Effendi firmly believes that consultation must be maintained between the N. S. A. and the entire body of the believers, and that such consultation, while the Convention is not in session, can best be maintained through the agency of the local Assemblies, one of whose essential functions is to act as intermediaries between the local communities and their national representatives. The main purpose of the Nineteen Day Feasts is to enable individual believers to offer any suggestion to the local Assembly which in its turn will pass it to the N. S. A. The local Assembly is, therefore, the proper medium through which local Bahá'í communities can communicate with the body of the national representatives.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## THE TRUE CHARACTER OF CONSULTATION

After careful consideration, the National Spiritual Assembly voted to record the view first, that anonymous communications are not in conformity either with the spirit or the letter of the Bahá'í Teachings, and secondly, that the general distribution of any letter, whether anonymous or otherwise, by an individual believer to members of the American Bahá'í communities is an improper method of Bahá'í consultation.—N. S. A.

*Haifa, May 18, 1934, (Cablegram) "Urge believers strictly adhere (to) National Assembly's instructions regarding anonymous letters." (signed) Shoghi.*

## BAHÁ'Í ANNIVERSARIES AND NINETEEN-DAY FEASTS

The question is frequently raised whether Nineteen-Day Feasts and Anniversary Celebrations noted on the Bahá'í calendar should be regarded as occasions limited to believers or open to non-Bahá'í guests. The matter was referred to Shoghi Effendi by the National Assembly before the Convention, to have the question answered for us all in such a way as to reflect truest wisdom and knowledge. The Guardian's reply placed the decision, for the present at least, in the members of the National Assembly.

After consultation, the Assembly recorded its view that Bahá'í Feasts and Anni-

versaries should be regarded as opportunities for spiritual inspiration and fellowship among the believers, and occasions to be kept sacred for the Cause, but in recording this attitude did not lay it down as a formal ruling to bind the American friends. Each local Spiritual Assembly is free to conduct these meetings in accordance with its own conditions and needs.

It is evident, of course, that a religious community needs certain occasions free from influence by prevailing customs and opinions, when its collective spirit and will may be confirmed from the one acknowledged source of guidance and power. All Bahá'ís are in need of such blessed hours shared with fellow believers, for the development of the inner life within the community which can survive and serve the Cause only as it becomes one in Bahá'u'lláh.

Appreciating the value of the influence released upon inquirers permitted to attend such Bahá'í gatherings, the National Assembly nevertheless believes that the same effect can be gained by occasional meetings of a combined spiritual and social character, held in addition to those marked upon the calendar of the Cause.—N. S. A.

Concerning the nature of the Nineteen Day Feast. In the Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh clearly revealed the spiritual and social character of this institution. Its administrative significance, however, has been stressed by the Guardian in direct response to the growing needs of the Bahá'í community in this formative period of the Bahá'í era for better training in the principles and practice of Bahá'í administration.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## THE FEASTS AND ANNIVERSARIES

The question has been raised whether the statement made in the July, 1930, issue of *Bahá'í News* was intended to convey the fact that the Guardian's instruction to the American National Assembly meant that each Local Assembly is free to decide for itself whether non-believers may be invited to the Nineteen-Day Feasts.

The answer is that only the Anniversaries, not the Nineteen-Day Feasts, have been left to the discretion of the believers. If a Local Assembly feels that the Cause will be served by inviting non-believers to one of the Anniversary meetings, it is free to do so, even though the National Assembly pointed out the ideal in the statement published last July. The Nineteen-Day Feasts, however, are for the recognized believers alone. If a non-believer be found present, naturally

he will be treated with every courtesy and consideration.—N. S. A.

## HOW TO PRESENT THE MASTER'S WILL TO NEW BELIEVERS

Concerning the best method of presenting the Master's Will to the newcomers, Shoghi Effendi is of the opinion that the N. S. A. should first make some suitable extracts from the Testament, and to send these to all the local Assemblies for their use, so that there may be full unity in circulating the provisions of the Will among the new believers. The problem of choosing such excerpts is left entirely to the discretion of the N. S. A. The main thing, as it appears to the Guardian, is that the full station of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá be clearly explained, and that the origin, nature and working of the Administrative Order of the Faith be clearly stated. The full implications of such a recognition are evidently beyond the comprehension of any new believer. Such a knowledge can be acquired gradually, and only when the essentials of the Faith have been clearly recognized and adequately understood.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## MEMBERSHIP IN OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Formal affiliation with and acceptance of membership in organizations whose programs or policies are not wholly reconcilable with the Teachings is of course out of the question. In the case of the World Fellowship of Faiths, however, Shoghi Effendi sees no objection if the American National Assembly decides to appoint one or two Bahá'í representatives to address some of the public meetings held under their auspices. To merely address such gatherings on one or two occasions on a subject which is in harmony with the spirit of the Teachings does not constitute acceptance by the Bahá'í speaker of the entire program of the Fellowship. We should welcome and seize every opportunity that presents itself, however modest it may be, to give a wider publicity to the Cause, to demonstrate its all-inclusiveness and liberal attitude, its independence and purity, without committing ourselves, whether by word or deed, to programs or policies that are not in strict conformity with the tenets of the Faith. Shoghi Effendi hopes that this principle will guide your distinguished Assembly in its dealings with various associations which will increasingly seek, in the days to come, the support of Bahá'í indi-



viduals and Assemblies for the attainment of their ends.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## CONTACT WITH SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

It is surely very necessary that the friends should keep in touch with the modern social movements, but their main objective should be to draw more people to the spirit and teachings of the Cause. They should learn from the experience of others and not permit themselves to go (off) at a tangent, and finally be so absorbed in other movements as to forget the Cause of God.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## CONCERNING MEMBERSHIP IN NON-BAHÁ'Í RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

The instruction written by Shoghi Effendi concerning membership in non-Bahá'í religious organizations, published in the July, 1935 number of *Bahá'í News*, has brought forth some interesting and important communications from local Spiritual Assemblies and also from individual believers, to all of which the National Spiritual Assembly has given careful and sympathetic attention.

The National Assembly itself, on receiving that instruction, made it the subject of extensive consultation, feeling exceedingly responsible for its own understanding of the Guardian's words and anxious to contribute to the understanding of the friends.

In October, 1935, the Assembly sent in reply to some of these communications a general letter embodying its thoughts on the subject, and a copy of that letter was forwarded to Shoghi Effendi for his approval and comment. His references to its contents, made in letters addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly on November 29 and December 11, 1935, are appended to this statement.

Now that Shoghi Effendi's approval has been received, the National Assembly feels it desirable to publish, for the information of all the American believers, the substance of the October letter.

While so fundamental an instruction is bound to raise different questions corresponding to the different conditions existing throughout the Bahá'í community, the most important consideration is our collective need to grasp the essential principle underlying the new instruction, and our capacity to perceive that the position which the Guardian wishes us to take in regard to church membership is a necessary and inevitable result of the steady development

of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

This essential principle is made clear when we turn to Shoghi Effendi's further reference to the subject as published in *Bahá'í News* for October, 1935—words written by the Guardian's own hand.

In the light of these words, it seems fully evident that the way to approach this instruction is in realizing the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh as an ever-growing organism, destined to become something new and greater than any of the revealed religions of the past. Whereas former Faiths inspired hearts and illumined souls, they eventuated in formal religions with an ecclesiastical organization, creeds, rituals and churches, while the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, likewise renewing man's spiritual life, will gradually produce the institutions of an ordered society, fulfilling not merely the function of the churches of the past but also the function of the civil state. By this manifestation of the Divine Will in a higher degree than in former ages, humanity will emerge from that immature civilization in which church and state are separate and competitive institutions, and partake of a true civilization in which spiritual and social principles are at last reconciled as two aspects of one and the same Truth.

No Bahá'í can read the successive World Order letters sent us by Shoghi Effendi without perceiving that the Guardian, for many years, has been preparing us to understand and appreciate this fundamental purpose and mission of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Even when the Master ascended, we were for the most part still considering the Bahá'í Faith as though it were only the "return of Christ" and failing to perceive the entirely new and larger elements latent in the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Thus, in the very first of the World Order letters, written February 27th, 1929, Shoghi Effendi said: "Who, I may ask, when viewing the international character of the Cause, its far-flung ramifications, the increasing complexity of its affairs, the diversity of its adherents, and the state of confusion that assails on every side the infant Faith of God, can for a moment question the necessity of some sort of administrative machinery that will insure, amid the storm and stress of a struggling civilization, the unity of the Faith, the preservation of its identity, and the protection of its interests?"

Although for five years the Guardian had been setting forth the principles of Bahá'í Administration in frequent letters, in 1927 he apparently felt it necessary to overcome some doubts here and there as to the validity of the institutions the Master bequeathed to the Bahá'ís in His Will and Testament.

The series of World Order letters, however, goes far beyond the point of defending and explaining their validity as an essential element in the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh—the Guardian vastly extended the horizon of our understanding by making it clear that the Administrative Order, in its full development, is to be the social structure of the future civilization.

Thus, in that same letter quoted above, he wrote: "Not only will the present-day Spiritual Assemblies be styled differently in future, but will be enabled also to add to their present functions those powers, duties, and prerogatives necessitated by the recognition of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, not merely as one of the recognized religious systems of the world, but as the State Religion of an independent and Sovereign Power. And as the Bahá'í Faith permeates the masses of the peoples of East and West, and its truth is embraced by the majority of the peoples of a number of the Sovereign States of the world, will the Universal House of Justice attain the plenitude of its power, and exercise, as the supreme organ of the Bahá'í Commonwealth, all the rights, the duties, and responsibilities incumbent upon the world's future super-state."

This passage stands as the keystone in the noble structure which Shoghi Effendi has raised in his function as interpreter of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. The Master developed the Cause to the point where this social Teaching, always existent in the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, could be explained to the believers and given its due significance as the fulfilment of Bahá'í evolution. As the Guardian expressed it: "That Divine Civilization, the establishment of which is the primary mission of the Bahá'í Faith." (World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, pages 3 and 4).

For us these words mean that a Bahá'í is not merely a member of a revealed Religion, he is also a citizen in a World Order even though that Order today is still in its infancy and still obscured by the shadows thrown by the institutions, habits and attitudes derived from the past. But since the aim and end has been made known, our devotion and loyalty must surely express itself, not in clinging to views and thoughts emanating from the past, but in pressing forward in response to the needs of the new creation.

That true devotion, which consists in conscious knowledge of the "primary mission," and unified action to assist in bringing about its complete triumph, recognizes that a Bahá'í today must have singleness of mind as of aim, without the division arising when we stand with one foot in the Cause and one foot in the world, attempting to reconcile

diverse elements which the Manifestation of God Himself has declared to be irreconcilable.

The principle underlying the Guardian's instruction about membership in non-Bahá'í religious bodies has already been emphasized by Shoghi Effendi in another connection—the instruction about the non-political character of the Faith which he incorporated in his letter entitled "The Golden Age of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh." For example: "I feel it, therefore, incumbent upon me to stress, now that the time is ripe, the importance of an instruction which, at the present stage of the evolution of our Faith, should be increasingly emphasized, irrespective of its application to the East or to the West. And this principle is no other than that which involves the non-participation by the adherents of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, whether in their individual capacities or collectively as local or national Assemblies, in any form of activity that might be interpreted, either directly or indirectly, as an interference in the political affairs of any particular government."

Again, when the question was raised as to membership in certain non-Bahá'í organizations not directly religious or political in character, the Guardian replied: "Regarding association with the World Fellowship of Faiths and kindred Societies, Shoghi Effendi wishes to reaffirm and elucidate the general principle that Bahá'í elected representatives as well as individuals should refrain from any act or word that would imply a departure from the principles, whether spiritual, social or administrative, established by Bahá'u'lláh. Formal affiliation with and acceptance of membership in organizations whose programs or policies are not wholly reconcilable with the Teachings is of course out of the question." (*Bahá'í News*, August, 1933.)

Thus, not once but repeatedly the Guardian has upheld the vital principle underlying every type of relationship between Bahá'ís and other organizations, namely, that the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh is an ever-growing organism, and as we begin to realize its universality our responsibility is definitely established to cherish and defend that universality from all compromise, all admixture with worldly elements, whether emanating from our own habits rooted in the past or from the deliberate attacks imposed by enemies from without.

It will be noted that in the instruction published in July, 1935, *Bahá'í News*, the Guardian made it clear that the principle involved is not new and unexpected, but rather an application of an established prin-

ciple to a new condition. "Concerning membership in non-Bahá'í religious associations, the Guardian wishes to reemphasize the general principle already laid down in his communications to your Assembly and also to the individual believers that no Bahá'í who wishes to be a whole-hearted and sincere upholder of the distinguishing principles of the Cause can accept full membership in any non-Bahá'í ecclesiastical organization. . . . For it is only too obvious that in most of its fundamental assumptions the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh is completely at variance with outworn creeds, ceremonies and institutions. . . . During the days of the Master the Cause was still in a stage that made such an open and sharp dissociation between it and other religious organizations, and particularly the Muslim Faith, not only inadvisable but practically impossible to establish. But since His passing events throughout the Bahá'í world, and particularly in Egypt where the Muslim religious courts have formally testified to the independent character of the Faith, have developed to a point that have made such an assertion of the independence of the Cause not only highly desirable but absolutely essential."

To turn now to the Guardian's words published in October *Bahá'í News*: "The separation that has set in between the institutions of the Bahá'í Faith and the Islamic ecclesiastical organizations that oppose it . . . imposes upon every loyal upholder of the Cause the obligation of refraining from any word or action that might prejudice the position which our enemies have . . . of their own accord proclaimed and established. This historic development, the beginnings of which could neither be recognized nor even anticipated in the years immediately preceding 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing, may be said to have signaled the Formative Period of our Faith and to have paved the way for the consolidation of its administrative order. . . . Though our Cause unreservedly recognizes the Divine origin of all the religions that preceded it and upholds the spiritual truths which lie at their very core and are common to them all, its institutions, whether administrative, religious or humanitarian, must if their distinctive character is to be maintained and recognized, be increasingly divorced from the outworn creeds, the meaningless ceremonials and man-made institutions with which these religions are at present identified. Our adversaries in the East have initiated the struggle. Our future opponents in the West will, in their turn, arise and carry it a stage further. Ours is the duty, in anticipation of this inevitable contest, to uphold unequivocally and with un-

divided loyalty the integrity of our Faith and demonstrate the distinguishing features of its divinely appointed institutions."

Nothing could be clearer or more emphatic. These words, asserting again the essential universality of the Cause, likewise repeat and renew the warning that the organized religions, even in America, will become bitterly hostile to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, denounce and oppose it, and seek its destruction in vain effort to maintain their own "outworn creeds" and material power. Informed of this inevitable development, can a Bahá'í any longer desire to retain a connection which, however liberal and pleasing it now seems, is a connection with a potential foe of the Cause of God? The Guardian's instruction signifies that the time has come when all American believers must become fully conscious of the implications of such connections, and carry out their loyalty to its logical conclusion.

Shoghi Effendi's latest words are not merely an approval of the foregoing statement, but a most helpful elucidation of some of the problems which arise when the friends turn to their local Assemblies for specific advice under various special circumstances.

"The explanatory statement in connection with membership in non-Bahá'í religious organizations is admirably conceived, convincing and in full conformity with the principles underlying and implied in the unfolding world order of Bahá'u'lláh." (November 29, 1933.)

"The Guardian has carefully read the copy of the statement you had recently prepared concerning non-membership in non-Bahá'í religious organizations, and is pleased to realize that your comments and explanations are in full conformity with his views on the subject. He hopes that your letter will serve to clarify this issue in the minds of all the believers, and to further convince them of its vital character and importance in the present stage of the evolution of the Cause.

". . . In this case\*, as also in that of suffering believers, the Assemblies, whether local or national, should act tactfully, patiently and in a friendly and kindly spirit. Knowing how painful and dangerous it is for such believers to repudiate their former allegiances and friendships, they should try to gradually persuade them of the wisdom and necessity of such an action, and instead of thrusting upon them a new principle, to make them accept it inwardly, and out of pure conviction and desire. Too severe and

\* A special case involving an aged believer, afflicted with illness, for whom severance of church relations might have been too great a shock.

immediate action in such cases is not only fruitless but actually harmful. It alienates people instead of winning them to the Cause.

"The other point concerns the advisability of contributing to a church. In this case also the friends must realize that contributions to a church, especially when not regular, do not necessarily entail affiliation. The believers can make such offerings, occasionally, and provided they are certain that while doing so they are not connected as members of any church. There should be no confusion between the terms affiliation and association. While affiliation with ecclesiastical organizations is not permissible, association with them should not only be tolerated but even encouraged. There is no better way to demonstrate the universality of the Cause than this. Bahá'u'lláh, indeed, urges His followers to consort with all religions and nations with utmost friendliness and love. This constitutes the very spirit of His message to mankind." (December 11, 1935.)

The National Spiritual Assembly trusts that the subject will receive the attention of local Assemblies and communities, and that in the light of the foregoing explanations the friends will find unity and agreement in applying the instruction to whatever situations may arise. In teaching new believers let us lay a proper foundation so that their obedience will be voluntary and assured from the beginning of their enrollment as Bahá'ís. In our attitude toward the older believers who are affected by the instruction let us act with the patience and kindness the Guardian has urged.—N. S. A.

## BAHÁ'ÍS AND WAR\*

One of the chief responsibilities of Bahá'ís in this transitional era is to grasp the principle upon which rests their loyalty to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in relation to their duty toward their civil government. This problem arises in its most difficult form in connection with our individual and collective attitude toward war.

Nothing could be more powerful than the Bahá'í teachings on the subject of Peace. Not only does Bahá'u'lláh confirm the teachings of all former Manifestations which uphold amity and fellowship between individual human beings, and the supremacy of love as the end and aim of mutual intercourse and association, but He likewise ex-

tends the divine law of Peace to governments and rulers, declaring to them that they are called upon to establish Peace and Justice upon earth, and uproot forever the dire calamity of international war.

Despite His Revelation, a most agonizing and excruciating conflict raged in Europe for four years, and since that war many other wars and revolutions have dyed the earth, while at present the heaven of human hope is black with the approach of a final world-shaking catastrophe.

What wonder that faithful Bahá'ís, abhorring and detesting war as insane repudiation of divine law, as destroyer of life and ruin of civilization, should now, in these fateful days, ponder how they may save their loved ones from the calamity of the battlefield, and how they may contribute their utmost to any and every effort aimed at the attainment of universal Peace?

Conscious of these heart-stirrings, and mindful of its responsibility toward all American believers, and particularly that radiant youth which would first of all be sacrificed in the event of a declaration of war by the government, the National Spiritual Assembly wishes to express its view upon the matter, in the hope that the result of its study of the Teachings and of the Guardian's explanations will assist in bringing a unity of opinion and a clarification of thought among the friends.

Concerning the duty of Bahá'ís to their government, we have these words, written by Shoghi Effendi on January 1, 1929 (see "Bahá'í Administration," page 152): "To all these (i.e., restrictive measures of the Soviet regime) the followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh have with feelings of burning agony and heroic fortitude unanimously and unreservedly submitted, ever mindful of the guiding principle of Bahá'í conduct that in connection with their administrative activities, no matter how grievously interference with them might affect the course of the extension of the Movement, and the suspension of which does not constitute in itself a departure from the principle of loyalty to their Faith, the considered judgment and authoritative decrees issued by their responsible rulers must, if they be faithful to Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's express injunctions, be thoroughly respected and loyally obeyed. In matters, however, that vitally affect the integrity and honor of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and are tantamount to a recantation of their faith and repudiation of their innermost belief, they are convinced, and are unhesitating prepared to vindicate by their life-blood the sincerity of their conviction, that no power on earth, neither the arts of the most

\* "The Guardian has carefully read the N. S. A.'s statement on the Bahá'í attitude toward war, and approves of its circulation among the believers."—Shoghi Effendi, through his secretary, Haifa, January 10, 1936.

insidious adversary nor the bloody weapons of the most tyrannical oppressor, can ever succeed in extorting from them a word or deed that might tend to stifle the voice of their conscience or tarnish the purity of their faith."

In view of the fact that early Christians were persecuted because they refused to render military service, the question might be raised whether the above statement means that the Guardian includes refusal to bear arms as one of those matters which "vitally affect the integrity and honor of the Faith . . . and are tantamount to a recantation of their faith and repudiation of their innermost belief"—a question the more important in that the early Christians preferred persecution to military service.

The answer to this question is that the Guardian instructs us that the obligation to render military duty placed by governments upon their citizens is a form of loyalty to one's government which the Bahá'í must accept, but that the believers can, through their National Assembly, seek exemption from active army duty *provided* their government recognizes the right of members of religious bodies making peace a matter of conscience to serve in some non-combatant service rather than as part of the armed force.

The National Spiritual Assembly has investigated carefully this aspect of the situation, and has found that, whereas the government of the United States did, in the last war, provide exemption from military duty on religious grounds, nevertheless this exemption was part of the Statutes bearing directly upon that war, and with the cessation of hostilities the exemption lapsed. In other words, there is today no basis on which any Bahá'í may be exempted from military duty in a possible future conflict. The National Assembly, consequently, cannot at present make any petition for exemption of Bahá'ís from war service, for such petitions must be filed with reference to some specific Act or Statute under which exemption can be granted. The Assembly understands that, in the event of war, there will be some kind of provision for exemption enacted, but as far as Bahá'ís are concerned, no steps can be taken until this government declares itself in a state of war.

This explanation, it is hoped, will satisfy those who for some years have been urging that protection be secured for American Bahá'í youth.

On the other hand it must be pointed out that it is no part of our teaching program to attract young people to the Cause merely in order to take advantage of any exemption that may later on be officially obtained for

duly enrolled Bahá'ís. The only justifiable reason for joining this Faith is because one realizes that it is a divine Cause and is ready and willing to accept whatever may befall a believer on the path of devotion. The persecutions which have been inflicted upon Bahá'ís so frequently make it clear that the path of devotion is one of sacrifice and not of ease or special privilege.

Another question encountered here and there among believers is what can Bahá'ís do to work for Peace? Outside the Cause we see many organizations with peace programs, and believers occasionally feel that it is their duty to join such movements and thereby work for a vital Bahá'í principle.

It is the view of the National Spiritual Assembly that activity in and for the Cause itself is the supreme service to world peace. The Bahá'í community of the world is the true example of Peace. The Bahá'í principles are the only ones upon which Peace can be established. Therefore, by striving to enlarge the number of declared believers, and broadcasting the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, we are doing the utmost to rid humanity of the scourge of war. Of what use to spend time and money upon incomplete human programs when we have the universal program of the Manifestation of God? The firm union of the Bahá'ís in active devotion to the advancement of their own Faith—this is our service to Peace, as it is our service to all other human needs—economic justice, race amity, religious unity, etc. Let non-believers agitate for disarmament and circulate petitions for this and that pacifist aim—a Bahá'í truly alive in this Faith will surely prefer to base his activities upon the foundation laid by Bahá'u'lláh, walk the path which the Master trod all His days, and heed the appeals which the Guardian has given us to initiate a new era in the public teaching of the Message.—N. S. A.

## COLLECTIVE ACTION BY LEAGUE OF NATIONS

He feels that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh are under the obligation of obeying the orders of their respective governments whenever these are acting as participants in any collective action directed by the League of Nations.—SHOGHI EFFENDI. (This instruction came in answer to a letter inquiring whether a Canadian believer should feel a moral obligation to accept military service in the event that, under its obligation to the League, his government participated with other governments in military action initiated by the League).

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In a letter dated March 16, 1933, the Guardian sent these further details:

"As regards the non-political character of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi feels that there is no contradiction whatsoever between the Tablet (to Thornton Chase, referred to above) and the reservations to which he has referred. The Master surely never desired the friends to use their influence towards the realization and promotion of policies contrary to any of the principles of the Faith. The friends may vote, if they can do it, without identifying themselves with one party or another. To enter the arena of party politics is surely detrimental to the best interests of the Faith and will harm the Cause. It remains for the individuals to so use their right to vote as to keep aloof from party politics, and always bear in mind that they are voting on the merits of the individual, rather than because he belongs to one party or another. The matter must be made perfectly clear to the individuals, who will be left free to exercise their discretion and judgment. But if a certain person does enter into party politics and labors for the ascendancy of one party over another, and continues to do it against the expressed appeals and warnings of the Assembly, then the Assembly has the right to refuse him the right to vote in Bahá'í elections."—N. S. A.

### ON CORRESPONDENCE WITH INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS

At the meeting held on November 12 and 13, 1932, the National Spiritual Assembly voted to adopt the policy that general Bahá'í matters must first be presented by individual believers to their Local Spiritual Assembly, and the National Assembly will respond to all such matters presented to it by a Local Assembly, it being understood that communications received from individual believers on personal matters will be answered direct. It was the sense of the meeting that this action should be brought to the attention of all believers in *Bahá'í News*.

The purpose of this vote is to discourage individual believers from undertaking correspondence with the National Assembly on matters related to the Cause in general and not confined to the individual's personal affairs. In the case of matters concerning the Cause as a whole, if individuals wish to seek information or make suggestions, they are requested to do so through their Local Assembly. In the case of personal affairs, the National Assembly will be happy to carry on correspondence with individual believers to the extent of its capacity.—N. S. A.

### PRESERVING THE ORGANIC UNITY

The believers, and particularly those who have not had sufficient experience in teaching, should be very careful in the way they present the teachings of the Cause. Sincerity, devotion and faith are not the sole conditions of successful teaching. Tactfulness, extreme caution and wisdom are equally important. We should not be in a hurry when we announce the message to the public and we should be careful to present the teachings in their entirety and not to alter them for the sake of others. Allegiance to the Faith cannot be partial and half-hearted. Either we should accept the Cause without any qualification whatever, or cease calling ourselves Bahá'ís. The new believers should be made to realize that it is not sufficient for them to accept some aspects of the teachings and reject those which cannot suit their mentality in order to become fully recognized and active followers of the Faith. In this way all sorts of misunderstandings will vanish and the organic unity of the Cause will be preserved.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

### THE VOTING RIGHT

I feel I must reaffirm the vital importance and necessity of the right of voting—a sacred responsibility of which no adult recognized believer should be deprived, unless he is associated with a community that has not as yet been in a position to establish a local Assembly. This distinguishing right which the believer possesses, however, does not carry with it nor does it imply an obligation to cast his vote, if he feels that the circumstances under which he lives do not justify or allow him to exercise that right intelligently and with understanding. This is a matter which should be left to the individual to decide himself according to his own conscience and discretion.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

### REGISTRATION OF ISOLATED BELIEVERS

A general letter has recently been issued to all Bahá'ís who have been listed as "isolated believers." This letter requested all such believers to fill out and return a registration card; thus permitting such believers to record their adherence to the Bahá'í Faith and giving the National Assembly a true and correct mailing list.

Copies of *Bahá'í News* and other communications will in future be sent only to those isolated believers who register themselves with the National Assembly.

## BAHÁ'Í PROCEDURE

Any isolated believer who fails to receive a registration card is requested to notify the National Office.—N. S. A.

### GROUP CORRESPONDENT

All local groups are requested to elect a Correspondent once a year, and preferably on April 21. The function of the Correspondent is to receive *Bahá'í News* and other general communications intended for all members of the group, and also to serve as link between the group and the Teaching Committee, Publishing Committee, etc.—N. S. A.

### RELATION OF INDIVIDUAL TO COMMUNITY

I fully approve and whole-heartedly and unreservedly uphold the principle to which you refer that personalities should not be made centers around which the community may revolve but that they should be subordinated under all conditions and however great their merits to the properly constituted Assemblies. You and your co-workers can never overestimate or overemphasize this cardinal principle of Bahá'í Administration.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

### ASSEMBLIES, NOT INDIVIDUALS, CONSTITUTE THE BEDROCK

Regarding the principle that the Cause must not be allowed to center around any Bahá'í personality, the Guardian wishes to make it clear that it was never intended that well qualified individual teachers should not receive from local Assemblies every encouragement and facilities to address the public. What the Guardian meant was that the personality and popularity of such a speaker should never be allowed to eclipse the authority, or detract from the influence of the body of the elected representatives in every local community. Such an individual should not only seek the approval, advice and assistance of the body that represents the Cause in his locality, but should strive to attribute any credit he may obtain to the collective wisdom and capacity of the Assembly under whose jurisdiction he performs his services. Assemblies and not individuals constitute the bedrock on which the Administration is built. Everything else must be subordinated to, and be made to serve and advance the best interests of, these elected custodians and promoters of the Laws of Bahá'u'lláh.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## SECTION ONE, SHEET 15

### FIRST APPROACH THE LOCAL, THEN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

To facilitate matters and avoid misunderstandings he prefers to refer you and the individual friends to them (the National Assembly). He is sure that you will obtain full satisfaction by putting the question to them. The purpose of the Guardian in this is not to avoid the issue but only to facilitate matters and eliminate misunderstandings. In all such matters the friends should first approach the Local, then the National Assembly and only in case they can obtain no satisfaction should they approach the Guardian on these matters. This way many difficulties will be avoided.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

### TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATION

Regarding the statement made by the Guardian in his letter . . . concerning the fact that believers can serve both as teachers and administrators. Shoghi Effendi would approve your Assembly making this fact known to all the friends. For although it is essential for the believers to maintain always a clear distinction between teaching and administrative duties and functions, yet they should be careful not to be led to think that these two types of Bahá'í activity are mutually exclusive in their nature, and as such cannot be exercised by one and the same person. As a matter of fact, the friends should be encouraged to serve in both the teaching and the administrative fields of Bahá'í service. But as there are always some who are more specially gifted along one of these two lines of activity it would seem more desirable that they should concentrate their efforts in acquiring the full training for that type of work for which they are best suited by nature. Such a specialization has the advantage of saving time, and of leading to greater efficiency, particularly at this early stage of our development. The great danger, however, lies in that by so doing the friends may tend to develop a sort of class consciousness which is fundamentally contrary to both the spirit and actual teachings of the Faith. It is precisely in order to overcome such a danger that the Guardian thinks it advisable that the friends should be encouraged to serve from time to time in both the teaching and the administrative spheres of Bahá'í work, but only whenever they feel fit to do so.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.



**STATUS OF TRAVELING  
TEACHERS**

Concerning the activities of traveling teachers, the National Assembly has voted to give new emphasis to the administrative principle under which a traveling teacher is not only subject to the jurisdiction of the local Assembly in each city, but is expected to be concerned only with teaching activities and not to intervene in local problems unless specifically requested by the local Assembly to assist in some local situation where the believer may render good service, under the Assembly's direction.—N. S. A.

**FREEDOM OF THE INDIVIDUAL TO EXPRESS HIS OWN VIEWS**

As regards the statement of our own views and explanations of the teachings: Shoghi Effendi believes that we should not restrict the liberty of the individual to express his own views so long as he makes it clear that these views are his own. In fact, such explanations are often helpful and are conducive to a better understanding of the teachings. God has given man a rational power to be used and not killed.

This does not, however, mean that the absolute authority does not remain in the revealed Words. We should try and keep as near to the authority as we can and show that we are faithful to it by quoting from the Words of Bahá'u'lláh in establishing our points. To discard the authority of the revealed Words is heretic and to suppress completely individual interpretation of those Words is also bad. We should try to strike a happy medium between these two extremes.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

**CHIEF DUTY OF EVERY  
BAHÁ'Í**

Concerning the abolition of the institution of paid national teachers, the Guardian wishes to reaffirm his former statements on this matter, and to stress once more that great care be taken to avoid the difficulties and the misunderstandings which in former days had caused so much trouble among the friends. The main point to be emphasized in this connection is that of making the teachings of the Cause not the work of a limited group but the chief duty and responsibility of every Bahá'í. This is why no salaried teachers should any longer exist. But occasionally to defray the expenses of a teaching trip of a certain Bahá'í, particular-

ly when it is done spontaneously, can cause no harm to the Cause. Such an action, provided it is done with care and only when circumstances make it necessary, constitutes no violation of the principle already referred to. The danger in all activities of this nature is to give the impression that the teaching of the Cause is an institution, depending on the support of paid teachers. Those who willingly and with utmost detachment arise to promote the Cause should, undoubtedly, be helped in every way. But they have no claim whatever on the financial help which some friends may freely choose to extend to them.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

**CONCERNING INDIVIDUAL TEACHING**

Concerning individual teaching, Shoghi Effendi would urge every Bahá'í who feels the urge to exercise his right of teaching unofficially the Cause, to keep in close touch with the Local Spiritual Assembly of the locality in which he is working. The Local Spiritual Assembly, while reserving for itself the right to control such activities on the part of individual Bahá'ís, should do its utmost to encourage such teachers and to put at their disposal whatever facilities they would need in such circumstances. Should any differences arise, the National Spiritual Assembly would naturally have to intervene and adjust matters.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

**TEACHING THROUGH  
DRAMA AND ART**

We have to wait only a few years to see how the spirit breathed by Bahá'u'lláh will find expression in the work of the artists. What you and some other Bahá'ís are attempting, are only faint rays that precede the effulgent light of a glorious morn. We cannot yet estimate the part the Cause is destined to play in the life of society. We have to give it time. The material this spirit has to mould is too crude and unworthy, but it will at last give way and the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh will reveal itself in its full splendor.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

**TEACHING MATERIAL TO  
BE APPROVED**

All literature, charts and other material used in Bahá'í teaching should be confined to that which has been approved by the Reviewing Committee or has the recorded sanction of the N. S. A.—N. S. A.

**CREDENTIALS FOR TRAVELING TEACHERS**

Teachers visiting new areas should always have a proper letter of credentials showing that the teacher has authority to hold Bahá'í meetings.—N. S. A.

**REFERENCE TO POLITICAL FIGURES**

The Guardian wishes me to draw the attention of the friends through you that they should be very careful in their public addresses not to mention any political figures—either side with them or denounce them. This is the first thing to bear in mind. Otherwise they will involve the friends in political matters, which is infinitely dangerous to the Cause.—SHOGHI EFFENDI

**PUBLIC CONTACTS**

To approach such well-known and important persons is always an extremely delicate matter, since it requires a good deal of wisdom, courage and ability. But those friends who really feel the urge to do so, and possess the necessary qualifications, should cultivate such friendships which, if properly done, can be of an immense benefit to the Cause. In any case, however, the assistance and help of either the local or the National Assembly is not only useful but necessary, if important contacts of this sort are to be fruitful and promising. The principle of consultation, which constitutes one of the basic laws of the Administration, should be applied to all Bahá'í activities which affect the collective interests of the Faith, for it is through cooperation and continued exchange of thoughts and views that the Cause can best safeguard and foster its interests. Individual initiative, personal ability and resourcefulness, though indispensable are, unless supported and enriched by the collective experience and wisdom of the group, utterly incapable of achieving such a tremendous task.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

To make this comment clearer it should be explained that the believer who received the Guardian's letter had written a personal letter to a well known scientist, enclosing Bahá'í literature.

In connection with the Guardian's emphasis on consultation, it is reported to the American believers that the National Spiritual Assembly has voted that Bahá'ís should seek to make contact with Federal and State officials only through the National Assembly, and refrain from personal activities in-

volving the Cause with officers of the government. In the case of municipal officials, contact should be made only through the Local Assembly.—N. S. A.

**SETTLEMENT OF CIVIL DISPUTES**

The Guardian wishes to emphasize the importance of avoiding reference to civil courts of cases of dispute between believers, even in non-Bahá'í issues. It is the Assembly's function to endeavor to settle amicably such disputes, both in order to safeguard the fair name and prestige of the Cause, and to acquire the necessary experience for the extension of its functions in the future.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

**FORM OF BEQUEST**

The following form has been prepared by the Legal Committee for the use of believers who plan to include a bequest or legacy in their Will. It is recommended that believers consult an attorney in using this form, to be assured that it should be adapted to meet the needs and requirements of the laws of the State in which they reside.

I hereby give and devise the sum of \$..... to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, that is to say, to the several persons who at the time of my death, and from time to time thereafter, shall constitute the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada according to the government and regulations of said Religious Body as existing at the time of my death and from time to time thereafter amended, to be used in accordance with the functions vested in said Assembly for the furtherance of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.—N. S. A.

**DISTINCTION BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE TEACHING**

The National Assembly makes a distinction between public and non-public teaching activities, attempting no jurisdiction over non-public teaching activities outside the jurisdiction of local Assemblies, but in the case of public teaching activities, the National Spiritual Assembly lays down the controlling regulations that in any area outside the jurisdiction of local Assemblies, teachers are not to hold public Bahá'í meetings involving the name of the Cause with-

out the recognition and approval of the Regional Committee, or of the National Teaching Committee, depending upon the area of jurisdiction, and all such public meetings are to be held under the sponsorship of the proper Teaching Committee.—N. S. A.

### **USE OF THE TERM "BAHÁ'Í"**

Use of the term "Bahá'í" as applied to music, painting, poetry and other art forms.

At the present time, there exists no standard by which music, painting, poetry and other art forms can be described as "Bahá'í", as distinguished from other forms of art. Such art forms may deal with Bahá'í subjects, but their excellence as art can be judged only by existing standards which can in no sense of the word be described as "Bahá'í". It, therefore, at present seems wise that music, paintings, poetry and other art products should not be described as Bahá'í music, Bahá'í poetry, etc. Hymns, for instance, should not be published as "Bahá'í Hymns", but should, perhaps, be described as "Hymns—for use in Bahá'í meetings."

It is, of course, desirable that any art products which deal with Bahá'í subjects and which are published or exhibited to the general public, shall not be of so low a standard of artistic merit as to reflect discredit, or bring ridicule, upon the Bahá'í Cause.—N. S. A.

### **TO DISCRIMINATE IN THE USE OF THE TERM "BAHÁ'Í"**

The following ruling has been adopted by the N. S. A.: That the collective activities of Bahá'ís, with which the name Bahá'í is associated, ought not to be extended to activities of non-Bahá'ís which cannot be controlled by the believers through their institutions and under the recognized principles of Bahá'í administration; and further that the public solicitation of funds under Bahá'í auspices, irrespective of the worthiness of the object, may give a wrong impression of the nature of the Cause. When believers wish to show a special respect to any non-believer or non-Bahá'í organization, they should do so as individuals without involving the name of the Cause.—N. S. A.

### **BOOKS FINANCED BY THE AUTHOR**

Voted to approve the recommendation

made by the Publishing Committee, that when books are financed by a Bahá'í author with the idea that the Publishing Committee shall distribute the book, the author is to turn over to the Publishing Committee the cost of printing the work, so that the Committee can supervise the printing. This ruling does not mean that a Bahá'í author cannot publish approved Bahá'í literature through a recognized general publisher. Its aim is to prevent confusion between authors and the Publishing Committee, and enable the Committee to maintain proper standards of printing and binding, and assure accuracy in the text.—N. S. A.

### **APPLICATION OF ECONOMIC TEACHINGS**

With regard to your wish for reorganizing your business along Bahá'í lines, Shoghi Effendi deeply appreciates the spirit that has permitted you to make such a suggestion. But he feels nevertheless that the time has not yet come for any believer to bring about such a fundamental change in the economic structure of our society, however restricted may be the field for such an experiment. The economic teachings of the Cause, though well known in their main outline, have not as yet been sufficiently elaborated and systematized to allow anyone to make an exact and thorough application of them even on a restricted scale.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

### **GENERAL INTERESTS TAKE PRECEDENCE**

As to material sacrifices toward the welfare of the Cause, he wishes you to understand that the general interests of the Cause take precedence over the interests of the particular individuals. For instance, contributions to the welfare of individuals are secondary to contributions to the National and Local Funds and that of the Temple.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF BAHÁ'Í CREDENTIALS**

The N. S. A. regrets to report that one of the American believers has been grossly deceived by a person who represented himself as having a reference from a Bahá'í in another city.

As was pointed out several years ago, such cases will increase in future, as the Bahá'í community grows in strength and resources, unless the believers uphold the rule that all travelers claiming to be Bahá'ís must have

proper credentials, in writing, from their local Assembly. Traveling Bahá'ís not members of a local community, but recorded as isolated believers, can obtain a letter from the N. S. A.

Another principle given us for our protection is that application for financial assistance made in the name of the Cause by individuals personally unknown can be referred to the Spiritual Assembly for consultation before the assistance is given.—N. S. A.

## ASSOCIATION WITH ORIENTALS

I wish to add a few lines and remind you of the necessity of refusing to admit to your Assembly, or associate with, any Oriental who does not have proper credentials from a recognized Spiritual Assembly. No excuse whatever is acceptable. I am sure that a few are trying to cause mischief and bring about a split in the ranks of the believers in these days of stress, and the utmost caution should be exercised, lest these mischief-makers succeed in undermining the foundations of the Cause.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## CONSULTATION ON PERSONAL DIFFICULTIES

He (Shoghi Effendi) was very sorry to learn that you are passing through difficult times, but such seems to be the fate of every single person on the surface of the earth at the present time. When such a crisis sweeps over the world no person should hope to remain intact. We belong to an organic unit and when one part of the organism suffers all the rest of the body will feel its consequences. This is in fact the reason why Bahá'u'lláh calls our attention to the unity of mankind. But as Bahá'ís we should not let such hardships weaken our hope in the future. Read the last general letter of Shoghi Effendi ("The Golden Age of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh") and see the description of the future which he has tried to put before our eyes. We may be suffering at present but that will soon cease and glorious days will dawn.

In all such matters as you mention in your letter, Shoghi Effendi wishes the friends to take the Assemblies into their confidence and discuss it with them. Being on the spot they can judge better and take into consideration all the different aspects of the problem. We should always trust the Assemblies and go to them for advice. Our debts, however, should be considered as sacred and take precedence over any other thing (i. e., pay-

ment of debts comes before contributions to the Cause) for upon this principle does the foundation of our economic life rest.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## CLASSIFICATION OF MATERIALS FOR PRESERVATION IN NATIONAL AND LOCAL BAHÁ'Í ARCHIVES

Note: This classification has been made in order to clarify the nature of the material to be preserved in the Archives, with a suitable distinction between that which should be sent to the National Archives and that which should enter into the Archives established by a local Spiritual Assembly.

I. Tablets and relics of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb, whether original Tablets or reproductions. This material is essentially National in character.

II. Tablets and relics of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The Tablets should be original, signed Tablets, or authentic reproductions such as photostat copies. Tablets should be accompanied by original translation if possible. All original Tablets should be preserved in the National Archives. Photostats of Tablets revealed to the Spiritual Assembly, or to individual believers, might well be placed in the local Archives. As regards the nature of relics, the Guardian has given the following explanation: "The general principle should be that any object used by Him in person should be preserved for posterity, whether in the local or National Archives. It is the duty and responsibility of the Bahá'í Assemblies to ascertain carefully whether such objects are genuine or not, and to exercise the utmost care and caution in the matter."

III. Letters of Shoghi Effendi. These are of three different classes—those written to the N. S. A. and the entire American Bahá'í Community; those written to local Assemblies; and those written to individual believers. The National Assembly is preserving the national letters of the Guardian, particularly as they occasionally contain matters confidential to that body. The N. S. A. plans to photostat all the Guardian's letters, at which time all originals can be gone over with a view to their preservation in the National Archives. Original letters to local Assemblies are for the most part not confidential and can be preserved in the National Archives, with photostats in the local Archives. Letters to individual believers can be sent to the National Archives and photostats obtained for the recipient and for the local Archives.

IV. National events and activities. Such

events as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's American journey, the founding of the Temple, early historical records of Star of the West, Bahá'í Publishing Committee, Green Acre, Geyserville and Louhelen Ranch and other activities of more than local importance constitute an impressive aspect of Bahá'í history, and all original documents and records should be turned over to the N. S. A., if not already done, for its examination and subsequent deposit in the National Archives.

V. Local records and activities. Records and documents pertaining to such activities are of two classes: the Minutes and correspondence of the Spiritual Assembly, which are preserved by the Assembly itself, and non-administrative material of historical interest and importance, such as programs, newspaper clippings, Historical Record Cards, etc. It is recommended that each Spiritual Assembly also provide a bound book in which its Archives Committee can keep a record of enrollments of new believers and also deaths or removals from the community.

VI. Bahá'í publications. A complete file of all publications, such as books, pamphlets, magazines, news letters, etc., of official Bahá'í character is being developed in the National Archives, and the cooperation of the friends is requested to make this complete. Out of print Bahá'í books and pamphlets will be appreciated.

VII. Individual records and papers. Families in possession of the papers belonging to such prominent workers as those named in "America and the Most Great Peace" will appreciate that such records are part of the history of the Cause and might well be turned over to the Archives and History Committee. Other personal records might similarly be turned over to the local Archives Committee.—N. S. A.

## PURPOSE OF SUMMER SCHOOLS

The basic purpose of all Bahá'í Summer Schools, whether in East or West, is to give the believers the opportunity to acquaint themselves, not only by mere study but through whole-hearted and active collaboration in various Bahá'í activities, with the essentials of the Administration and in this way enable them to become efficient and able promoters of the Cause. The teaching of the Administration is, therefore, an indispensable feature of every Bahá'í Summer School and its special significance can be better understood if we realize the great need of every believer today for a more adequate understanding of the social principles and laws of

the Faith. It is now, when the Cause is passing through some of the most difficult stages of its development, that the friends should equip themselves with the necessary knowledge of the Administration.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## NOT AN ECONOMIC SYSTEM

There are practically no technical teachings on economics in the Cause, such as banking, the price system, and others. The Cause is not an economic system, nor can its founders be considered as having been *technical* economists. The contribution of the Faith to this subject is essentially indirect, as it consists of the application of spiritual principles to our present-day economic system. Bahá'u'lláh has given us a few basic principles which should guide future Bahá'í economists in establishing such institutions as will adjust the economic relationships of the world.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## TEMPLE MODELS TO BE APPROVED

The following rulings have been adopted by the Temple Trustees, and are here published with the approval of the National Spiritual Assembly:—

Any model or reproduction of the Temple must be submitted to the Temple Trustees, and the Trustees will then determine whether the model or reproduction is acceptable, and also will determine the conditions under which it can be sold. Local Assemblies, or other Bahá'í bodies, or individual believers, are not to purchase or exhibit any Temple model except through the Temple Trustees.—N. S. A.

## PUBLICATION OF BAHÁ'Í COMPILATIONS

1. A compilation is subject to review by the Reviewing Committee in the same manner as are other Bahá'í works. Every compilation must include the latest available translation of each excerpt, and the source of each excerpt must be supplied. If the plan of the book makes it inconvenient to add the source at the end of each excerpt in the printed work, the source must be noted in the manuscript supplied to the Reviewing Committee.

2. The compiler should not conclude any arrangement with a non-Bahá'í publisher until the compilation has been officially approved. If the compiler intends to print or

publish the compilation outside the Cause, the proposed arrangement is to be submitted to the National Spiritual Assembly through its Publishing Committee for approval.

3. In giving its approval for such printing or publication, the National Spiritual Assembly, in consultation with its Reviewing and Publishing Committee, will consider not merely the question of accuracy in the text, but also the general question of policy involved in allowing Bahá'í literature to be published outside the established Bahá'í facilities.

4. In giving its approval, the National Spiritual Assembly will in each case hereafter request the compiler to assign to the Bahá'í Publishing Committee any copyright taken out on publication of the book or pamphlet. Otherwise, the control of Bahá'í literature would pass outside the Cause.

The purpose of this statement is to assure proper protection of the interests of the Bahá'í Faith, while providing sufficient freedom of action to individual believers under all circumstances.—N. S. A.

## **COOPERATION WITH BAHÁ'Í AUTHORS**

When a Bahá'í author wishes to obtain orders from Assemblies and believers for a book published by a non-Bahá'í firm, the author is to make arrangements satisfactory to the Publishing Committee; and the Publishing Committee, not the author, is to report the matter to the National Spiritual Assembly.

The Publishing Committee will cooperate with a Bahá'í author only when the Reviewing Committee has specifically recommended the book and not merely approved it, and when the National Spiritual Assembly has specifically approved and adopted the Reviewing Committee's recommendation.—N. S. A.

## **NATIONAL FUND**

As the activities of the American Bahá'í community expand, and its worldwide prestige correspondingly increases, the institution of the National Fund, the bedrock on which all other institutions must necessarily rest and be established, acquires added importance, and should be increasingly supported by the entire body of the believers, both in their individual capacities, and through their collective efforts, whether organized as groups or as local Assemblies. The supply of funds, in support of the National Treasury, constitutes, at the present time, the life-blood of these nascent institutions you are laboring to erect. Its importance cannot,

surely, be over-estimated. Untold blessings shall no doubt crown every effort directed to that end.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## **BAHÁ'Í YOUTH AT NINETEEN DAY FEASTS**

With respect to the question of the participation of Bahá'í young people in Nineteen Day Feasts, the following principle has been adopted: that the children of believers can attend the Nineteen Day Feasts and other intimate gatherings and Bahá'í meetings, but when they reach the age of sixteen years, the local Assembly should request from such young people a declaration of their interest in the Cause and their intention to become voting members when they reach the age of twenty-one; and that other young people, not children of Bahá'ís, can also attend Nineteen Day Feasts and other Bahá'í meetings after reaching the age of sixteen years by making a similar declaration to the local Assembly.—N. S. A.

## **THE QUESTION OF HUMANITARIAN RELIEF**

It has been pointed out by a believer who has studied the teachings with unusual care and insight, that in the Bahá'í community when fully developed the practice of "charity" in the narrower meaning of that word will be rendered unnecessary. The House of Justice, from its resources derived not only from voluntary contributions but also from certain specified taxes, will as one of its functions come to the assistance of every deserving believer in distress. That relief will not be as "charity" but as a normal right arising from the very nature of a community based upon oneness and able, by the application of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, to abolish poverty at its source.

But that era has not yet been established. The believers today find themselves in a community whose spiritual laws are known but whose material powers and capacities are limited. The result is that conditions arise which Spiritual Assemblies find themselves apparently powerless to remedy. They are grieved as they feel themselves torn between the claims of true compassion and the need of concentrating their available means upon such vital objects as the Temple.

The National Assembly understands that the Guardian has expressed the view that under present conditions a local Assembly which has before it a case of urgent distress should endeavor, first, to have it relieved by members of the believer's own family, and

second, to exercise the rights of all citizens to employ all civil instruments of help and assistance. In many instances loving consultation will serve to remove certain obstacles which, perhaps unconsciously, have been the cause of the distress.

Most difficult and grievous of all are those cases which concern believers not members of an organized local community. The National Spiritual Assembly does not vote from the National Fund any appropriations for personal relief, for its resources are imperatively demanded for direct Bahá'í purposes the fulfilment of which brings us all gradually nearer the blessed day when the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh shall prevail, and existing causes of suffering be removed. Institutions described in the teachings will in the future be maintained in all communities for those who need home and care.

The subject is one which the National Assembly brings forward at this time in a tentative form, in the hope that suggestions emanating from local consultation will be made. The spirit of the Cause is such that some way must and will be found to remedy a general situation which may become even more serious before it is solved by the development of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. There may be individual believers in a position to offer a home to some believer whose difficulties are known to the National Assembly. Any and all advice and constructive suggestions will be deeply appreciated.—N. S. A.

## ON COMMERCIAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE CAUSE

In view of the fact that the National Assembly had before it several proposals from individual believers which involved methods

of raising Bahá'í funds through commercial activities carried on either in the name of the Cause or making use of Bahá'í administrative facilities, the Assembly felt it necessary to record in its Minutes the fact that it could not recognize nor approve any such commercial undertaking. It was felt inadvisable to sanction commercial activities of a nature tending to divert the interest and attention of the friends from the vital spiritual objects of the Cause, especially in view of the Guardian's standard of sacrifice as the basis of our collective success in building the Temple. Another consideration was the fact that the amounts which might be donated to the Bahá'í Fund from profits of sales made to believers would at best represent only a comparatively small fraction of the money spent in the transaction. On the other hand, the National Assembly encourages all possible enterprise on the part of individual believers in increasing their earnings through legitimate business and professional activities, for the purpose of contributing more to the Fund.—N. S. A.

I feel that only such goods as are *owned* by believers, whether made by Bahá'ís or non-Bahá'ís, may be sold in the interests of the Temple or any other Bahá'í institution, thus maintaining the general principle that non-believers are not, whether directly or indirectly, expected to contribute to the support of institutions that are of a strictly Bahá'í character. As to the manner of the disposal of Bahá'í property for such purposes, and the channel through which the sale may be effected, I feel that no rigid rule should be imposed. Individual Bahá'ís are free to seek the help of private individuals or of Spiritual Assemblies to act as intermediary for such transactions. We should avoid confusion on one hand and maintain efficiency on the other, and lay no unnecessary restrictions that would fetter individual initiative and enterprise.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## THE INSTITUTION OF THE LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

And, now, that this all-important Work may suffer no neglect, but rather function vigorously and continuously in every part of the Bahá'í world; that the unity of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh may remain secure and inviolate, it is of the utmost importance that in accordance with the explicit text of the Kitab-ul-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book, in every locality, be it city or hamlet, where the number of adult (21 years and above) declared believers exceeds nine, a local "Spiritual Assembly" be forthwith established. To it all local matters pertaining to the Cause must be directly and immediately referred for full consultation and decision. The importance, nay the absolute necessity of these local Assemblies is manifest when we realize that in the days to come they will evolve into the local House of Justice, and at present provide the firm foundation on which the structure of the Master's Will is to be reared in future.

The matter of Teaching, its direction, its ways and means, its extension, its consolidation, essential as they are to the interests of the Cause, constitute by no means the only issue which should receive the full attention of these Assemblies. A careful study of Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets will reveal that other duties, no less vital to the interests of the Cause, devolve upon the elected representatives of the friends in every locality.

It is incumbent upon them to be vigilant and cautious, discreet and watchful, and protect at all times the Temple of the Cause from the dart of the mischief-maker and the onslaught of the enemy.

They must endeavor to promote amity and concord amongst the friends, efface every lingering trace of distrust, coolness and estrangement from every heart, and secure in its stead an active and whole-hearted co-operation for the service of the Cause.

They must do their utmost to extend at all times the helping hand to the poor, the sick, the disabled, the orphan, the widow, irrespective of color, caste and creed.

They must promote by every means in their power the material as well as the spiritual enlightenment of youth, the means for the education of children, institute, whenever possible, Bahá'í educational institutions, organize and supervise their work and provide the best means for their progress and development.

They must make an effort to maintain offi-

cial, regular, and frequent correspondence with the various Bahá'í centers throughout the world, report to them their activities, and share the glad-tidings they receive with all their fellow-workers in the Cause.

They must encourage and stimulate by every means at their command, through subscription, reports and articles, the development of the various Bahá'í magazines, such as the "Star of the West" and the "Magazine of the Children of the Kingdom" in the United States of America, the "Bahá'í News" of India, the "Sun of the East" (Khurshid-i Khavar) in Turkestan, the "Star of the East" in Japan, the "Sun of Truth" in Germany.

They must undertake the arrangement of the regular meetings of the friends, the feasts and the anniversaries, as well as the special gatherings designed to serve and promote the social, intellectual and spiritual interests of their fellow-men.

They must supervise in these days when the Cause is still in its infancy all Bahá'í publications and translations, and provide in general for a dignified and accurate presentation of all Bahá'í literature and its distribution to the general public.

These rank among the most outstanding obligations of the members of every Spiritual Assembly. In whatsoever locality the Cause has sufficiently expanded, and in order to insure efficiency and avoid confusion, each of these manifold functions will have to be referred to a special Committee, responsible to that Assembly, elected by it from among the friends in that locality, and upon whose work the Assembly will have to exercise constant and general supervision.

These local Spiritual Assemblies will have to be elected directly by the friends, and every declared believer of 21 years and above, far from standing aloof and assuming an indifferent or independent attitude, should regard it his sacred duty to take part conscientiously and diligently, in the election, the consolidation and the efficient working of his own local Assembly.

Pending its establishment, and to insure uniformity throughout the East and throughout the West, all local Assemblies will have to be re-elected once a year, during the first day of Ridván, and the result of polling, if possible, be declared on that day.

In order to avoid division and disruption, that the Cause may not fall a prey to conflicting interpretations, and lose thereby its purity and pristine vigor, that its affairs may be conducted with efficiency and promptness, it is necessary that every one should conscientiously take an active part in the election of these Assemblies, abide by their decision, enforce their decree, and cooperate with



them wholeheartedly in their task of stimulating the growth of the Movement throughout all regions. The members of these Assemblies, on their part, must disregard utterly their own likes and dislikes, their personal interests and inclinations, and concentrate their minds upon those measures that will conduce to the welfare and happiness of the Bahá'í Community and promote the common weal.

The various Assemblies, local and national, constitute today the bedrock upon the strength of which the Universal House is in future to be firmly established and raised. Not until these function vigorously and harmoniously can the hope for the termination of this period of transition be realized. It devolves upon us whose dearest wish is to see the Cause enter upon that promised era of universal recognition and world achievements, to do all in our power to consolidate the foundations of these Assemblies, promoting at the same time a fuller understanding of their purpose and more harmonious cooperation for their maintenance and success.

Let us also remember that at the very root of the Cause lies the principle of the undoubted right of the individual to self-expression, his freedom to declare his conscience and set forth his views. If certain instructions of the Master are today particularly emphasized and scrupulously adhered to, let us be sure that they are but provisional measures designed to guard and protect the Cause in its present state of infancy and growth until the day when this tender and precious plant shall have sufficiently grown to be able to withstand the unwisdom of its friends and the attacks of its enemies.

Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá'í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candor, and courage on the other.

The duties of those whom the friends have freely and conscientiously elected as their representatives are no less vital and binding than the obligations of those who have chosen them. Their function is not to dictate, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the friends whom they represent. They must regard themselves in no other light but that of chosen instruments for a more effi-

cient and dignified presentation of the Cause of God. They should never be led to suppose that they are the central ornaments of the body of the Cause, intrinsically superior to others in capacity or merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles. They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavor, by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their candor, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win, not only the confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they serve, but also their esteem and real affection. They must, at all time, avoid the spirit of exclusiveness, the atmosphere of secrecy, free themselves from a domineering attitude, and banish all forms of prejudice and passion from their deliberations. They should, within the limits of wise discretion, take the friends into their confidence, acquaint them with their plans, share with them their problems and anxieties, and seek their advice and counsel. And, when they are called upon to arrive at a certain decision, they should, after dispassionate, anxious and cordial consultation, turn to God in prayer, and with earnestness and conviction and courage record their vote and abide by the voice of the majority, which we are told by our Master to be the voice of truth, never to be challenged, and always to be whole-heartedly enforced. To this voice the friends must heartily respond, and regard it as the only means that can insure the protection and advancement of the Cause.—  
SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## THE BASIS OF THE COMMUNITY

We must speak of things that are possible of performance in this world. There are many theories and high ideas on this subject, but they are not practicable; consequently we must speak of things that are feasible.

For example, if some one oppresses, injures, and wrongs another, and the wronged man retaliates, this is vengeance, and is censurable. . . .

But the community has the right of defence and of self-protection; moreover, the community has no hatred nor animosity for the murderer: it imprisons or punishes him merely for the protection and security of others. It is not for the purpose of taking vengeance upon the murderer, but for the purpose of inflicting a punishment by which the community will be protected. . . .

As forgiveness is one of the attributes of the Merciful One, so also justice is one of the

attributes of the Lord. The tent of existence is upheld upon the pillar of justice, and not upon forgiveness. The continuance of mankind depends upon justice and not upon forgiveness. So if, at present, the law of pardon were practised in all countries, in a short time the world would be disordered, and the foundations of human life would crumble.

• • •  
 To recapitulate: the constitution of the communities depends upon justice, not upon forgiveness. Then what Christ meant by forgiveness and pardon is not that, when nations attack you, burn your homes, plunder your goods, assault your wives, children, and relatives, and violate your honor, you should be submissive in the presence of these tyrannical foes, and allow them to perform all their cruelties and oppressions. No, the words of Christ refer to the conduct of two individuals towards each other: if one person assaults another, the injured one should forgive him. But the communities must protect the rights of man.—'ABDU'L-BAHÁ.

## A PROCEDURE FOR THE CONDUCT OF THE LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

### INTRODUCTION

"A perusal of some of the words of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the duties and functions of the Spiritual Assemblies in every land (later to be designated as the local Houses of Justice), emphatically reveals the sacredness of their nature, the wide scope of their activity, and the grave responsibility which rests upon them."—SHOGHI EFFENDI, March 5, 1922.

"The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice be established wherein shall gather counsellors to the number of Bahá. . . . It behooveth them to be the trusted ones of the Merciful among men and to regard themselves as the guardians appointed of God for all that dwell on earth. It is incumbent upon them to take counsel together and to have regard for the interests of the servants of God, for His sake, even as they regard their own interests, and to choose that which is meet and seemly. Thus hath the Lord your God commanded you. Beware lest ye put away that which is clearly revealed in His Tablet. Fear God, O ye that perceive."—BAHA'U'LLAH.

"It is incumbent upon every one not to take any step without consulting the Spiritual Assembly, and they must assuredly obey with heart and soul its bidding and be submissive unto it, that things may be properly ordered and well arranged. Otherwise every

person will act independently and after his own judgment, will follow his own desire, and do harm to the Cause.

"The prime requisites for them that take counsel together are purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrance, humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold. Should they be graciously aided to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen Kingdom of Bahá shall be vouchsafed to them. In this day, Assemblies of consultation are of the greatest importance and a vital necessity. Obedience unto them is essential and obligatory. The members thereof must take counsel together in such wise that no occasion for illfeeling or discord may arise. This can be attained when every member expresses with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument. Should any one oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed. The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions. If, after discussion, a decision be carried unanimously, well and good; but if, the Lord forbid, differences of opinion should arise, a majority of voices must prevail. . . .

"The first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members of the Assembly. They must be wholly free from estrangement and must manifest in themselves the Unity of God, for they are the waves of one sea, the drops of one river, the stars of one heaven, the rays of one sun, the trees of one orchard, the flowers of one garden. Should harmony of thought and absolute unity be non-existent, that gathering shall be dispersed and that Assembly be brought to naught. The second condition:—They must when coming together turn their faces to the Kingdom on High and ask aid from the Realm of Glory. They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views. They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden. The honored members must with all freedom express their own thoughts, and it is in no wise permissible for one to belittle the thought of another, nay, he must with moderation set forth the truth, and should differences of opinion arise a majority of voices must prevail, and all must obey and submit to the majority. It is again not permitted that any one of the honored members object

to or censure, whether in or out of the meeting, any decision arrived at previously, though that decision be not right, for such criticism would prevent any decision from being enforced. In short, whatsoever thing is arranged in harmony and with love and purity of motive, its result is light, and should the least trace of estrangement prevail the result shall be darkness upon darkness. . . . If this be so regarded, that Assembly shall be of God, but otherwise it shall lead to coolness and alienation that proceed from the Evil One. Discussions must all be confined to spiritual matters that pertain to the training of souls, the instruction of children, the relief of the poor, the help of the feeble throughout all classes in the world, kindness to all peoples, the diffusion of the fragrances of God and the exaltation of His Holy Word. Should they endeavor to fulfil these conditions the Grace of the Holy Spirit shall be vouchsafed unto them, and that Assembly shall become the center of the Divine blessings, the hosts of Divine confirmation shall come to their aid and they shall day by day receive a new effusion of Spirit."—'ABDUL-BAHÁ.

"The importance, nay the absolute necessity of these local Assemblies is manifest when we realize that in the days to come they will evolve into the local House of Justice, and at present provide the firm foundation on which the structure of the Master's Will is to be reared in future.

"In order to avoid division and disruption, that the Cause may not fall a prey to conflicting interpretations, and lose thereby its purity and pristine vigor, that its affairs may be conducted with efficiency and promptness, it is necessary that every one (i. e., every member of the Bahá' community) should conscientiously take an active part in the election of these Assemblies, abide by their decision, enforce their decree, and cooperate with them whole-heartedly in their task of stimulating the growth of the Movement throughout all regions. The members of these Assemblies, on their part, must disregard utterly their own likes and dislikes, their personal interests and inclinations, and concentrate their minds upon those measures that will conduce to the welfare and happiness of the Bahá'í community and promote the common weal."—SHOGHI EFFENDI, March 12, 1923.

"Let us recall His explicit and often-repeated assurance that every Assembly elected in that rarified atmosphere of selflessness and detachment is, in truth, appointed of God, that its verdict is truly inspired, that one and all should submit to its decision un-

reservedly and with cheerfulness."—SHOGHI EFFENDI, February 23, 1924.

## I. FUNCTIONS OF THE LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

The various functions of the local Spiritual Assembly, and its nature as a constitutional body, are duly set forth in Article VII of the By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly, and are more definitely defined in the By-Laws of a local Spiritual Assembly approved by the National Spiritual Assembly and recommended by the Guardian. Each local Spiritual Assembly, and all members of the local Bahá'í community, shall be guided and controlled by the provisions of those By-Laws.

## II. MEETINGS OF THE LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

In addition to its observance of the general functions vested in the institution of a Spiritual Assembly, each Spiritual Assembly has need of a procedure for the conduct of its meetings. The following items represent the outline of the parliamentary rules of procedure which the National Spiritual Assembly has adopted and recommends to each and every local Spiritual Assembly throughout the United States and Canada.

### Calling of Meetings

A meeting of the Spiritual Assembly is valid only when it has been duly called, that is, when each and every member has been informed of the time and place. The general practice is for the Assembly to decide upon some regular time and place for its meetings throughout the Bahá'í year, and this decision when recorded in the Minutes is sufficient notice to the members. When the regular schedule cannot be followed, or the need arises for a special meeting, the secretary, on request by the chairman or any three members of the Spiritual Assembly, should send due notice to all the members.

### Order of Business

Roll call by the Secretary (or Recording Secretary).

Prayer.

Reading and approval of Minutes of previous meeting.

Report of Secretary (or Corresponding Secretary), including presentation of letters received by the Assembly since its last meeting, and of any and all recommenda-

tions duly adopted by the community at the last Nineteen Day Feast.  
 Report of Treasurer.  
 Report of Committees.  
 Unfinished business.  
 New business, including conferences with members of the community and with applicants for enrollment as members of the community.  
 Closing Prayer.

## Conduct of Business

A Spiritual Assembly, in maintaining its threefold function of a body given (within the limits of its jurisdiction) an executive, a legislative and a judicial capacity, is charged with responsibility for imitating action and making decisions. Its meetings, therefore, revolve around various definite matters which require deliberation and collective decision, and it is incumbent upon the members, one and all, to address themselves to the subject under discussion and not engage in general speeches of an irrelevant character.

Every subject or problem before an Assembly is most efficiently handled when the following process is observed: *first*, ascertainment and agreement upon the facts; *second*, agreement upon the spiritual or administrative Teachings which the question involves; *third*, full and frank discussion of the matter, leading up to the offering of a resolution; and *fourth*, voting upon the resolution.

A resolution, or motion, is not subject to discussion or vote until duly made and seconded. It is preferable to have each resolution clear and complete in itself, but when an amendment is duly made and seconded, the Chairman shall call for a vote on the amendment first and then on the original motion. An amendment must be relevant to, and not contravene, the subject matter of the motion.

The Chairman, or other presiding officer, has the same power and responsibility for discussion and voting upon motions as other members of the Assembly.

Discussion of any matter before the Assembly may be terminated by a motion duly made, seconded and voted calling upon the Chairman to put the matter to a vote or to proceed to the next matter on the agenda. The purpose of this procedure is to prevent any member or members from prolonging the discussion beyond the point at which full opportunity has been given all members to express their views.

When the Assembly has taken action upon any matter, the action is binding upon all

members, whether present or absent from the meeting at which the action was taken. Individual views and opinions must be subordinated to the will of the Assembly when a decision has been made. A Spiritual Assembly is an administrative unit, as it is a spiritual unit, and therefore no distinction between "majority" and "minority" groups or factions can be recognized. Each member must give undivided loyalty to the institution to which he or she has been elected.

Any action taken by the Assembly can be reconsidered at a later meeting, on motion duly made, seconded and carried. This reconsideration, according to the result of the consultation, may lead to a revision or the annulment of the prior action. If a majority is unwilling to reconsider the prior action, further discussion of the matter by any member is improper.

The Assembly has a responsibility in filling a vacancy caused by the inability of any member to attend the meetings. "It is only too obvious that unless a member can attend regularly the meetings of his local Assembly, it would be impossible for him to discharge the duties incumbent upon him, and to fulfil his responsibilities as a representative of the community. Membership in a local Spiritual Assembly carries with it, indeed, the obligation and capacity to remain in close touch with local Bahá'í activities, and ability to attend regularly the sessions of the Assembly."—SHOGHI EFFENDI, January 27, 1935.

The Spiritual Assembly, as a permanent body, is responsible for maintaining all its records, including Minutes of meetings, correspondence and financial records, throughout its existence as a Bahá'í institution. Each officer, therefore, on completing his or her term of office, shall turn over to the Assembly all records pertaining to the business of the Assembly.

## III. CONSULTATION WITH THE COMMUNITY

A. The institution of the Nineteen Day Feast provides the recognized and regular occasion for general consultation on the part of the community, and for consultation between the Spiritual Assembly and the members of the community. The conduct of the period of consultation at Nineteen Day Feasts is a vital function of each Spiritual Assembly.

From Words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "The Nineteen Day Feast was inaugurated by the Báb and ratified by Bahá'u'lláh, in His Holy Book, the Aqdas, so that people may gather together and outwardly show fellowship and love, that the Divine mysteries may be dis-

closed. The object is concord, that through this fellowship hearts may become perfectly united, and reciprocity and mutual helpfulness be established. Because the members of the world of humanity are unable to exist without being banded together, cooperation and helpfulness is the basis of human society. Without the realization of these two great principles no great movement is pressed forward." (London, England, December 29, 1912. Quoted in *Bahá'í News* No. 33.)

The Nineteen Day Feast has been described by the Guardian as the foundation of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. It is to be conducted according to the following program: the first part, entirely spiritual in character, is devoted to readings from Bahá'í Sacred Writings; the second part consists of general consultation on the affairs of the Cause. The third part is the material feast and social meeting of all the believers, and should maintain the spiritual nature of the Feast.

Bahá'ís should regard this Feast as the very heart of their spiritual activity, their participation in the mystery of the Holy Utterance, their steadfast unity one with another in a universality raised high above the limitations of race, class, nationality, sect, and personality, and their privilege of contributing to the power of the Cause in the realm of collective action.

## Calendar of the Nineteen Day Feast

March 21	July 13	November 23
April 9	August 1	December 12
April 28	August 20	December 31
May 17	September 8	January 19
June 5	September 27	February 7
June 24	October 16	March 2
	November 4	

The Spiritual Assembly is responsible for the holding of the Nineteen Day Feast. If the Bahá'í calendar for some adequate reason cannot be observed, the Assembly may arrange to hold a Feast at the nearest possible date.

Only members of the Bahá'í community, and visiting Bahá'ís from other communities, may attend these meetings, but young people of less than twenty-one years of age, who have studied the Teachings and declared their intention of joining the community on reaching the age of twenty-one, may also attend.

Regular attendance at the Nineteen Day Feast is incumbent upon every Bahá'í, illness or absence from the city being the only justification for absence. Believers are ex-

pected to arrange their personal affairs so as to enable them to observe the Bahá'í calendar.

## Order of Business for the Consultation Period

The chairman or other appointed representative of the Spiritual Assembly presides during the period of consultation.

The Spiritual Assembly reports to the community whatever communications have been received from the Guardian and the National Spiritual Assembly, and provides opportunity for general discussion.

The Assembly likewise reports its own activities and plans, including committee appointments that may have been made since the last Feast, the financial report, arrangements made for public meetings, and in general share with the community all matters that concern the Faith. These reports are to be followed by general consultation.

A matter of vital importance at this meeting is consideration of national and international Bahá'í affairs, to strengthen the capacity of the community to cooperate in promotion of the larger Bahá'í interests and to deepen the understanding of all believers concerning the relation of the local community to the Bahá'í World Community.

Individual Bahá'ís are to find in the Nineteen Day Feast the channel through which to make suggestions and recommendations to the National Spiritual Assembly. These recommendations are offered first to the local community, and when adopted by the community come before the local Assembly, which then may in its discretion forward the recommendation to the National Spiritual Assembly accompanied by its own considered view.

Provision is to be made for reports from committees, with discussion of each report. Finally, the meeting is to be open for suggestions and recommendations from individual believers on any matter affecting the Cause.

The local Bahá'í community may adopt by majority vote any resolution which it wishes collectively to record as its advice and recommendation to the Spiritual Assembly.

Upon each member of the community lies the obligation to make his or her utmost contribution to the consultation, the ideal being a gathering of Bahá'ís inspired with one spirit and concentrating upon the one aim to further the interests of the Faith.

The Secretary of the Assembly records each resolution adopted by the community, as well as the various suggestions advanced during the meeting, in order to report these

to the Spiritual Assembly for its consideration. Whatever action the Assembly takes is to be reported at a later Nineteen Day Feast.

Matters of a personal nature should be brought to the Spiritual Assembly and not to the community at the Nineteen Day Feast. Concerning the attitude with which believers should come to these Feasts, the Master has said, "You must free yourselves from everything that is in your hearts, before you enter." (Bahá'í News Letter of the N. S. A. of Germany and Austria, December, 1934.)

*B.* The annual Meeting on April 21, called for the election of the Spiritual Assembly, provides the occasion for the presentation of annual reports by the Assembly and by all its Committees.

The Chairman of the outgoing Assembly presides at this meeting.

The Order of Business includes: Reading of the call of the meeting, reading of appropriate Bahá'í passages bearing upon the subject of the election, appointment of tellers, distribution of ballots, prayers for the spiritual guidance of the voters, the election, presentation of annual reports, tellers' report of the election, approval of the tellers' report.

*C.* The Annual Meeting for the election of Convention delegate (or delegates) is likewise presided over by the Assembly Chairman, and except for the annual reports the Order of Business is similar to that observed at the meeting held each April 21. It is preferable for the Spiritual Assembly to arrange a special meeting for the election of delegates, and not hold this election during the consultation period of a Nineteen Day Feast.

*D.* In addition to these occasions for general consultation, the Spiritual Assembly is to give consultation to individual believers whenever requested.

During such consultation with individual believers, the Assembly should observe the following principles: the impartiality of each of its members with respect to all matters under discussion; the freedom of the individual Bahá'í to express his views, feelings and recommendations on any matter affecting the interests of the Cause, the confidential character of this consultation, and the principle that the Spiritual Assembly does not adopt any resolution, or make any final decision, until the party or parties have withdrawn from the meeting.

Appeals from decisions of a local Spiritual Assembly are provided for in the By-Laws and the procedure fully described in a statement published in *Bahá'í News*, February, 1933, and reprinted in this work.

When confronted with evidences of unhappiness, whether directed against the Assembly or against members of the community, the Spiritual Assembly should realize that its relationship to the believers is not merely that of a formal constitutional body but also that of a spiritual institution called upon to manifest the attributes of courtesy, patience and loving insight. Many conditions are not to be remedied by the exercise of power and authority but rather by a sympathetic understanding of the sources of the difficulty in the hearts of the friends. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained, some of the people are children and must be trained, some are ignorant and must be educated, some are sick and must be healed. Where, however, the problem is not of this order but represents flagrant disobedience and disloyalty to the Cause itself, in that case the Assembly should consult with the National Spiritual Assembly concerning the necessity for disciplinary action.

Members of the Bahá'í community, for their part, should do their utmost by prayer and meditation to remain always in a positive and joyous spiritual condition, bearing in mind the Tablets which call upon Bahá'ís to serve the world of humanity and not waste their precious energies in negative complaints.

#### IV. BAHÁ'Í ANNIVERSARIES, FESTIVALS AND DAYS OF FASTING

The Spiritual Assembly, among its various duties and responsibilities, will provide for the general observance by the local community of the following Holy Days:

Feast of Ridván (Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh) April 21-May 2, 1863.

Declaration of the Báb, May 23, 1844.

Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, May 29, 1892.

Martyrdom of the Báb, July 9, 1850.

Birth of the Báb, October 20, 1819.

Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, November 12, 1817.

Day of the Covenant, November 26.

Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, November 28, 1921.

Period of the Fast, nineteen days beginning March 2.

Feast of Naw-Rúz (Bahá'í New Year) March 21.—N. S. A.

**DUTIES AND OBLIGATIONS OF A LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY**

**From By-Laws Approved by the Guardian**

Article III—The Spiritual Assembly, in the fulfillment of its obligations and responsibilities under this Corporation, shall have exclusive jurisdiction and authority over all the local activities and affairs of the Bahá'í community of the City of . . . . ., including paramount authority in the administration of this Corporation. It shall be responsible for maintaining the integrity and accuracy of all Bahá'í teaching, whether written or oral, undertaken throughout the local community. It shall make available the published literature of the Faith. It shall represent the community in its relations to the National Spiritual Assembly, in its relation to the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, to other local Bahá'í communities, and to the general public in the City of . . . . . It shall be charged with the recognition of all applicants requesting membership in the local Bahá'í community. It shall pass upon the right of any and all members of the community whose membership is in question to retain their status as voting members of the community. It shall call the meetings of the community, including the Bahá'í Anniversaries and Feasts, the meetings of consultation, the Annual Meeting and the meeting for the election of delegates to the Annual Meeting of the National Spiritual Assembly. It shall appoint and supervise all committees of the Bahá'í community. It shall collect and disburse all funds intended for the maintenance of this Corporation. It shall have full and complete custody of the headquarters or meeting place of the Bahá'í community. It shall report to the National Spiritual Assembly annually, or when requested, the membership roll of the Bahá'í community, for the information and approval of the national Bahá'í body. The Spiritual Assembly, however, shall recognize the authority and right of the National Spiritual Assembly to declare at any time what activities and affairs of the Bahá'í community of the City of . . . . . are national in scope and hence subject to the jurisdiction of the national Bahá'í body. It shall likewise recognize the right of any member of the community to appeal to the National Spiritual Assembly for review and decision of any matter in which the previous decision of the local Spiritual Assembly is felt by the member to be contrary to the explicit teachings

of the Bahá'í Faith or opposed to its best interests. It shall, on the other hand, have the authority and right to appeal from the decision of the National Assembly to the Guardian of the Faith for review and final decision of any matter related to the Faith in the City of . . . . .

Article IV—The Spiritual Assembly, in administering this Corporation, shall ever bear in mind the ideals upheld in the Sacred Writings of the Bahá'í Faith respecting the relationships of a Spiritual Assembly to its Bahá'í community, respecting the relations of Bahá'ís to one another in the community, and the relationships of Bahá'ís to all non-Bahá'ís, without prejudice of race, creed, class or nationality. The Assembly shall therefore above all recognize its sacred duty to maintain full and complete unity throughout the Bahá'í community, to relieve and comfort the sick and distressed, to assist the poor and destitute, to protect the orphans, the crippled and the aged, to educate the children of Bahá'ís according to the highest religious and intellectual standards, to compose differences and disagreements among members of the community, to promulgate the principles of Divine Civilization revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, and to promote in every way possible the Bahá'í aim of the oneness of mankind. It shall faithfully and devotedly uphold the general Bahá'í activities and affairs initiated and sustained by the National Spiritual Assembly. It shall cooperate wholeheartedly with other local Spiritual Assemblies throughout North America in all matters declared by the National Spiritual Assembly to be of general Bahá'í importance and concern. It shall rigorously abstain from any action or influence, direct or indirect, that savors of intervention on the part of a Bahá'í body in matters of public politics and civil jurisdiction. It shall encourage intercourse between the Bahá'í community of the City of . . . . . and other recognized Bahá'í communities, issuing letters of introduction to Bahá'ís traveling from . . . . . and passing upon letters of introduction issued by other Bahá'í Assemblies. It shall regard its authority as a means of rendering service to Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís and not as a source of arbitrary power. While retaining the sacred right of final decision in all matters pertaining to the Bahá'í community, the Spiritual Assembly shall ever seek the advice and consultation of all members of the community, keep the community informed of all its affairs, and invite full and free discussion on the part of the community of all matters affecting the Faith. —N. S. A.

## THE INSTITUTION OF THE SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

For a period of more than ten years, a large portion of our collective effort has been devoted to the task of developing the institutions described in the Master's Will and Testament and the subject matter of most of the general communications issued by the Guardian of the Faith.

At our present state of development there appears to be a need for a more definite and widespread understanding of the institution of a Spiritual Assembly as it affects its own members—as it calls for a new and unique loyalty on the part of its nine members to the Assembly itself.

The National Spiritual Assembly therefore takes the occasion to offer a few remarks on this phase of the subject, in the hope that they will clarify this important matter and assist the believers to appreciate the firm basis on which every local and National Assembly must rest if it is to fulfil its responsibility to the Cause.

It is necessary to bear in mind the fact that the Spiritual Assembly is not a body created by the believers, even though by their votes at elections they determine its membership. The institution itself was created by Bahá'u'lláh. Unlike the institutions set up by a democracy, whose functions and powers are strictly defined by the people, with a definite reservation of certain rights to the body of the citizens—including the right to annul the constitution and adopt an entirely new political charter—a Spiritual Assembly rests upon sanctions higher than that of the voting community. Its functions and powers are unalterable. The responsibility of its members is not to the electorate but to the higher authority resident in the Cause.

This general principle has brought into being the necessity for a definite loyalty on the part of all Assembly members to the institution which collectively they compose. They are trustees of its duties, responsibilities, rights and powers, and not merely representatives of the community nor of any party or faction thereof. In meeting this obligation to the Assembly itself, the members can have utmost confidence that they are rendering the fullest and truest service to the body of the believers concerned.

It is important to note that upon the Bahá'í electors themselves there rests a special responsibility in relation to the election. Thus, in describing the functions of Convention delegates, Shoghi Effendi declared that they should cast their ballots for none save those whom prayer and meditation inspire them

to believe are possessed of certain qualities: "unquestioned loyalty, selfless devotion, a well trained mind, recognized ability, mature experience."<sup>1</sup> The efficiency and integrity of a Spiritual Assembly, therefore, depends upon the degree to which, in every Bahá'í election, the believers conscientiously meet the Guardian's standard.

The Declaration of Trust and By-Laws afford a procedure controlling to a certain extent the methods which should be carried out by members of a Spiritual Assembly in performing their duties at meetings. It is clear, for example, that decisions are made by unanimous vote, but unanimity lacking, by vote of the majority. 'Abdu'l-Bahá revealed a Tablet, quoted by the Guardian<sup>2</sup> in one of his earliest general letters, emphatically commanding every member of an Assembly to abide by its decisions. The teachings recognize no minority rights whatsoever within the body of an Assembly. Every decision made by a Spiritual Assembly is binding upon each and all its members alike, whatever their personal views, prior to the final vote, may have been.

Two observations should be made in connection with the process of consultation leading up to the decision. First, that during the consultation it is not merely the right but the sacred duty of each member to express his or her opinion fully and freely, for only through a true consensus of opinion can all aspects of a question be thoroughly explored. Secondly, that the termination of the period of consultation and the taking of the vote, is a matter which the majority can decide. The right to express one's view fully and freely does not imply the power to prolong the consultation indefinitely and to the point of stubbornness. The majority can direct the chairman to bring the matter to vote whenever it is conscientiously felt that all views have been presented and further discussion would be useless repetition or one-sided argument. Without this clear right vested in the majority, the capacity of a Spiritual Assembly to transact the business before it would be fatally limited.

The opinion is sometimes expressed that Spiritual Assemblies are too prone to maintain an attitude of secrecy and aloofness, in violation of the sacred unity of the Cause.

<sup>1</sup> See "Bahá'í Administration," page 79.

<sup>2</sup> "If after discussion, a decision be carried unanimously, well and good; but if, the Lord forbid, differences of opinion should arise, a majority of voices must prevail. . . . It is again not permitted that any one of the honored members object to or censure, whether in or out of the meeting, any decision arrived at previously, though that decision be not right, for such criticism would prevent any decision from being enforced." See "Bahá'í Administration," pages 21, 22, 23.



This opinion requires clear analysis, if Assemblies are to avoid going from one extreme attitude to the other, in each case failing to attain the true balance.

What is and must be preserved inviolate from mere gossip and rumor are the personal views expressed by the members on any matter before the vote is taken. If any member of an Assembly leaves a meeting and expresses criticism of the attitude expressed by any other member in the period of full and free consultation, this is destructive of the spirit of mutual confidence and trust which must be maintained by every Assembly, and can but lead to disunity and a weakening of its capacity for service to the Cause. So long as a member who had expressed one opinion is willing to abide by the result of unanimous or majority vote, there is no ground of criticism in that his opinion, prior to the vote, was different from that established by the vote.

A Spiritual Assembly is an institution and not merely nine believers who happen to hold office. The great obligations and duties laid upon that institution are superior to any rights assumed by some of its members. Within its sphere of jurisdiction, as the Guardian has said, a Spiritual Assembly has undivided authority.

The difference between secrecy and trustworthiness is again exemplified when we consider the important subject of conferences held by a Spiritual Assembly with individual members of the community. If the believers find by experience that they cannot bring personal matters to an Assembly without having rumor and gossip immediately circulate throughout the community, such a condition is a serious charge for which that Assembly cannot escape responsibility. As the Cause develops, each Assembly will increasingly be called upon to deal with certain matters of a personal and confidential nature, and the time has surely come when a firm foundation of trustworthiness should be laid.

Matters of a general nature coming before a Spiritual Assembly should be reported to the community at each Nineteen Day Feast. It should be readily possible for an Assembly to determine what matters are confidential, and of the nature of a trust, and what matters concern the Cause and are of interest and importance to the entire Bahá'í community. When a matter is recorded as confidential each member should scrupulously preserve it as such. When a matter is recorded otherwise, it should be reported in the form recorded in the minutes and by whatever officer is designated to make the report. Frank discussion of these points, and full agreement as to the conditions under

which Assembly business is to be reported outside the meeting, are obvious requisites to the proper functioning of the institution.

Shoghi Effendi has written that the administrative order of the Faith is still in a condition of infancy.

This may be fully recognized and admitted, but the condition of infancy is not intended to be perpetual. Great blessings will, we are assured, be released when the Bahá'í institutions develop to the point of internal unity and of harmonious relations to the community. The privilege of contributing to the steady evolution of those institutions which are the "pattern and nucleus" of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh is granted to every believer, but more especially to those to whom have been given positions of responsibility and trust. If members of Spiritual Assemblies will attain trustworthiness, and exhibit an individual and collective attitude showing forth both knowledge of the Teachings and scrupulous obedience to them, the long-awaited and long prayed-for renaissance of public teaching, and vital growth in the Cause, will surely follow, as day follows night.

The fact that a Spiritual Assembly is an institution independent of the will of the electoral body does not in any way sanction the spirit of aloofness and separation from the community. On the contrary, it means that the Assembly is left entirely free to seek divine guidance for all its deliberations and decisions, and has been given a truly Providential opportunity to serve the community as a whole. An Assembly, it must be repeated again and again, is not the creature or servant of any limited group or faction. Quite irrespective of how the various members of the community might have cast their ballots for members of the Assembly, the Assembly once elected has an impartial relationship of service to the welfare of the Cause in its city or nation. No institution in human history has ever rested upon a foundation so impregnable to the assaults of ambition, pride, self-interest, envy and malice, whether from without or within.

A Spiritual Assembly, raised above personal emotion and touched with a vision of divine justice, becomes an indestructible link in the chain of peace, economic stability and progress which the Supreme Manifestation has forged for the protection of mankind. Much has been offered to, much will be required from, all who are elected to membership in such an institution.—N. S. A.

## "THE SACRED BASIC PRINCIPLES OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH"

*"If thou desirest to be confirmed in the*

*service of the Kingdom of God, live in accord with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and that is: real love for the world of humanity, and the utmost kindness for the believers of God. This real love, like unto the magnetic power, attracts the Divine confirmations.*"—('AB-DU'L-BAHÁ.)

We realize the vital importance—in these early days when the concept of the Bahá'í World Order is gradually penetrating into the thought and knowledge of all types and classes of world thinkers—of preserving intact the sacred basic principles of Bahá'u'l-láh, fortifying them against compromise, and demonstrating to the world that there are truly divine remedies for the spiritual and mental diseases of the body politic. Among these great principles, two stand out pre-eminently at this time as essential to the successful establishment of the Bahá'í Cause in the West. Each of these two principles is supplementary to the other, and the failure or weakening of one can seriously, if not dangerously, affect the application of the other. These two principles are like unto the body and soul itself, neither of which is capable of performing its true function without the ever-present assistance of the other.

(1) The *administrative order* (one of the two principles referred to), is the indispensable instrumentality through which the glorious *spirit* of the Bahá'í Cause finds expression. This *spirit*, in turn, is the second principle referred to. Should we build up the administrative world order to a point of absolute perfection but at the same time allow it to be hampered or disconnected from the channels within, through which channels the Holy Spirit of the Cause pours forth, we would have nothing more than a perfected body out of touch with and cut off from the finer promptings of the soul or spirit. If, on the other hand, the influxes and goings forth of the spirit are scattered, diffused and subjected wholly to the more or less imperfect guidance and interpretation of individual believers, lacking both the wisdom secured through consultation and also the lights of real unity which shine through consultative action and obedience thereto—a disordered and disorganized activity would be witnessed, which would but dimly reflect the divine purpose for this age, which is no less than the establishment of the reign of divine love, justice and wisdom in the world, under and in conformity to the Divine Law.

In short, such conditions would create countless individual interpretations and, in the end, multitudinous sects and denominations, such as have been witnessed in the former religions, each claiming to possess a greater truth or guidance than any of the

others.

It is manifest, therefore, that neither one of these two great principles is sufficient unto itself but must be combined into an ordered unity, each perfectly supplementary to the other and neither permitted to interpose any rigid barriers to the proper functioning of the other.

In the body of man, which is the true divine example or parallel, the spirit, when in ideal control of all the lesser parts of the organism, finds the utmost harmony throughout the whole body—each part is in perfect reciprocity with the other parts. The commands and impulses of the spirit are obeyed by the body and the body in turn in its actions and function identifies and determines the expression the spiritual impulses shall take. This is divine unity—and this law being universal and found in every created object in the universe, has full application to the universal Bahá'í organism made up of believers everywhere, which has been established by the Manifestation of God.

Therefore, we would emphasize, it behooves all of us—all Assemblies and all believers generally—if we would render the highest service to the Divine Cause in our generation, not only to realize but to apply in our Bahá'í service the most perfect co-ordination and unification of these two great principles in every Bahá'í contact, whether in the processes of consultation or in our mutual dealings with each other.

(2) 'Abdu'l-Bahá once said that the American people because of the system of partisan politics developed an individualism which made it very difficult for them to take counsel together and abide by the results of that counsel. The interruptions of governmental process through the necessities of elections and destructive criticisms by members of one party of the other party, had created a condition wherein true consultation was well-nigh unknown. We know that the Master's criticism was only too true.

(3) The Bahá'í administration is a most advanced step forward toward the elimination of this condition. The National Spiritual Assembly stands squarely behind every essential element of Bahá'í administration, but while no relaxation should be suffered in the application of the administrative principles at any time, we deem it to be doubly important, in these days when this divine method of dealing with religious problems is becoming rooted in American institutions, that those coordinate elements which have been so emphasized by our Guardian in connection with the administration should be most conscientiously applied. We would refer for a moment to the need of having ever in mind

the in-dwelling spirit of the administration, which is the real life and purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation, and is, in reality, the effulgence of the Holy Spirit, itself. Without this Spirit, reflected in every administrative act, the body of the administration becomes rigid, opaque and lifeless, for the Sun of Divine Love finds no responsive mirror upon which to reflect its life-giving rays. This Holy Spirit is the greatest bestowal of God in this age, and for this, the Founders of the Cause, and the martyred believers, endured countless afflictions at the hands of a world that knew not this holy potency. In every administrative act, this Spirit should illumine and warm the believers who are affected. On Page 19 of *Bahá'í Administration*, Shoghi Effendi says we are expected "to obliterate as much as possible all traces of censure, of conflicting discussion, of cooling remarks, of petty unnecessary observations that impede the onward march of the Cause, that damp the zeal of the firm believer and detract from the sublimity of the Bahá'í Cause in the eyes of the inquirer." On page 22, quoting from the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, our Guardian draws our attention to these words, referring to members of Assemblies—

*"They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden. The honored members must with all freedom express their own thoughts, and it is in no wise permissible for one to belittle the thought of another. Should the least trace of estrangement prevail, the result shall be darkness upon darkness."*

Again on Page 30, quoting from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, it is stated—

*"It behooveth the loved ones of God to be enamored of one another and to sacrifice themselves for their fellow-workers in the Cause. They should yearn towards one another even as the sore athirst yearneth for the Water of Life, and the lover burneth to meet his heart's desire."*

On Page 33, our Guardian says, in speaking of Spiritual Assemblies—

*"They must endeavor to promote amity and concord amongst the friends, efface every lingering trace of distrust, coolness and estrangement from every heart, and secure in its stead an active and wholehearted co-operation for the service of the Cause."*

On Page 36, he warns us against extreme orthodoxy on one hand, and irresponsible freedom on the other, lest these cause it ("the Cause") to deviate from the Straight Path which alone can lead it to success.

As bearing upon this delicate balance that

must be maintained, which we referred to in the opening paragraphs of this letter, our Guardian on Page 54 tells us—

*"At the very root of the Cause lies the principle of the undoubted right of the individual to self-expression, his freedom to declare his conscience and set forth his views."*

And again—

*"Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá'í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candor and courage on the other."*

And as to the duties of elected representatives, he says, on Page 55—

*"They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavor, by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their candor, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity—to win, not only the confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they serve, but also their esteem and real affection. They must, at all times, avoid the spirit of exclusiveness, the atmosphere of secrecy, free themselves from a domineering attitude, and banish all forms of prejudice and passion from their deliberations. They should, within the limits of wise discretion, take the friends into their confidence, acquaint them with their plans, share with them their problems and anxieties, and seek their advice and counsel."*

We are quoting these several references as a reminder and aid to all established Assemblies, since various problems are found to a greater or lesser degree in various centers. These injunctions and their observance constitute the divine remedy as applied to the internal affairs of our administrative processes, and we are assured that their due application will open the paths of harmony, happiness and the successful advance of the Cause in the western world.

(4) Our Guardian's letters on administration are replete with clear and unmistakable references to the authority and jurisdiction which rests in every local Assembly over the affairs of the Cause in its vicinity. Every believer who is a member of a local Bahá'í community is under a paramount spiritual duty to cooperate in his or her Bahá'í activities with the duly expressed decisions of a Spiritual Assembly. The para-

mount obligation of every individual believer is to maintain unity. It is the obligation of a believer in a community to bring any matters of complaint or misunderstanding first to his Local Assembly. The believers on their part will realize that the law of God is a just law, and that in this day, it has extended its provisions to every important matter. Thus, not only is every individual believer entitled to the right of electoral franchise in the choice of his local Spiritual Assembly but also in cases where he feels aggrieved at the decision of a body, a right of appeal to the National Spiritual Assembly is provided. Through these means, ultimate justice is assured. The whole fabric of Bahá'í administration rests upon the acceptance by the friends of the considered decisions of their Local Assemblies, and this is the very essence and root of the law of consultation which Bahá'u'lláh has called us to obey. It follows from this that there can be no such thing as non-cooperation with an elected local Assembly inasmuch as such a procedure utterly defeats the central purpose of consultation. Any cause or causes, which might otherwise tend to create an attitude of non-cooperation on the part of a believer, should be at once placed before the Local Assembly, in the spirit of Bahá'í frankness and trust—meanwhile preserving full cooperation, and awaiting the just decision of the Assembly. Grievances when made a matter of appeal to the National Assembly, following an adverse decision of a Local Assembly, should have a substantial basis, affecting the welfare of the Cause, and should be frankly and definitely stated in writing, and sent to the National Secretary.

(5) These matters now being defined, and assuring you that the National Spiritual Assembly will defend and safeguard to every necessary extent these vital requisites of Bahá'í life—we would point out to Assemblies our feeling that one of their essential duties during periods of confusion and unrest, such as the present, is to win the confidence and loyalty of every declared believer. We would urge you this year\* especially to make it your paramount obligation, individually and collectively, to show an attitude of love, compassion and of happiness and harmony toward the beloved of God, without exception. We feel that Bahá'í administration in no sense affords any excuse to confuse the element of loyalty to the representative bodies with irritating discourtesies or an overbearing disposition, or a negative, cold and slighting attitude, under any circumstances, on the part of the Assembly itself.

(6) Any failure of either of the two principles first alluded to, whether firmness in the administration or a lack of the spirit of Bahá'í love, fellowship and happiness in carrying out the measures of the administration, can only serve to prolong and confuse the solution of such a problem as we have encountered. The true balance between these two principles must be invariably found before such a problem or, for that matter, any other problem can be efficiently and promptly settled. Otherwise, justice finds defeat, and needless suffering results.

It is certain that this experience has had its value in a better understanding of all factors which must be considered in dealing with the greater problems that will confront the Cause in the future. It is doubtless too much to expect that any Assembly, whether National or Local, in this early dawn of the establishment of the Bahá'í World Order, with the added factor of the necessity of educating and informing the whole body of believers, could hope to solve complex problems with the utmost simplicity and expedition.

(7) It is our ardent hope that from this hour, the bonds of true union, fellowship and an ever-increasing harmony and happiness will be consciously realized in our common problems, and that the National Spiritual Assembly, together with all the local representative bodies in the west and the great body of believers in every section will, in the words of our Guardian "form one united front and combat wisely and tactfully every force that might darken the spirit of the Movement, cause division in its ranks and narrow it by dogmatic and sectarian belief."

Let us take home to our hearts, anew, this following picture of reality our Guardian has given us, which affirms the presence of God in the Kingdom He is establishing—to a world that has labored vainly to reduce Him to a mere shadow. Our Guardian says:—

*"Are we to doubt that the ways of God are not necessarily the ways of man? Is not faith but another word for implicit obedience, whole-hearted allegiance, uncompromising adherence to that which we believe is the revealed and expressed will of God, however perplexing it might first appear, however at variance with the shadowy views, the impotent doctrines, the crude theories, the idle imaginings, the fashionable conceptions of a transient and troublous age? If we are to falter or hesitate, if our love for Him should fail to direct us and keep us within His path, if we desert Divine and emphatic principles, what hope can we any more cherish for healing the ills and sicknesses of this world?"*

\* 1930.

We cannot close this statement without appealing to all the beloved of God to renew, in this critical period of humanity's history, the altar flame of Divine love in each individual heart; to cleanse the chamber of the soul for His indwelling; to ever remember that God is concerned with the redemption of the wandering and straying sheep, and to show forth to all such the wondrous power of His Love and Generosity; holding fast to the divine principles without compromise or deviation, but making our service a benediction and a blessing to every inquirer and needy one, and demonstrating the security of our faith by the evidences of happiness, serenity and the bestowals of the Holy Spirit. This is the hour for a new and unprecedented delivery of the Great Message. Let us fortify our efforts by now realigning our nucleus, rank upon rank, in the bonds of the Divine Unity, each to each.—N. S. A.

## OBLIGATION TO FORM A SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

Shoghi Effendi feels that in any locality where the number of adult believers reaches nine, a Local Assembly *should* be established. He feels this to be an obligation rather than a purely voluntary act. Only in exceptional cases has the National Spiritual Assembly the right to postpone the formation of an Assembly if it feels that the situation does not warrant such a formation. This right, however, should be exercised if the situation absolutely demands it. As to the principle according to which the area of the jurisdiction of a Local Assembly is to be determined, he feels this to be the function of the National Spiritual Assembly; whatever principle they uphold should be fairly applied to all localities without any distinction whatever.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

For the future, the election of new Spiritual Assemblies by members of local groups which contain nine or more recognized believers is to be conducted in the light of the following procedure adopted by the National Spiritual Assembly.

"It was moved, seconded and voted to adopt and record the following ruling in order to prevent confusion on the part of new Bahá'í communities, that hereafter applications from Bahá'í groups for election of a Spiritual Assembly must be made directly to the National Assembly not later than February first of any year, in order to allow time for this body to discharge its responsibility in preparing the group."

Groups having exactly nine declared believers establish a Spiritual Assembly by joint declaration, using a special form pro-

vided by the N. S. A. for that purpose. Those having more than nine elect the Assembly by secret ballot, and report the election on the form issued to all Assemblies prior to April 21.—N. S. A.

Regarding the formation of local Assemblies, the Guardian does not advise any departure from the principle that every civil community should have its own independent Assembly.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

(In answer to the question whether, in the case of a new Assembly, the membership of the community could reside in two or more adjoining civil communities.)

## INCORPORATION OF LOCAL ASSEMBLY

It is surely very important to give to the Local Spiritual Assemblies some legal standing, for as the Cause progresses and its adherents increase, they will be confronted with duties they cannot even imagine at present. Not only will they have to make contracts for acquiring halls for their meeting place, but also they will be obliged to create new institutions to care for their sick, poor and aged people. We hope that before long the Bahá'ís will even (be able to) afford to have schools that would provide the children the intellectual and spiritual education as prescribed in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master.

For such duties that will naturally devolve upon the Local Spiritual Assemblies there will be an increasing need for a legal standing. They will have to be considered as a legal person with the power of making binding contracts.

In small centers where the friends are still few, the taking of such steps is rather premature and may add to the complexity of Bahá'í administration.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

The National Spiritual Assembly has voted to publish in *Bahá'í News* the statement that local Assemblies are advised to engage expert legal assistance in adapting the local By-Laws to the Religious Statutes of their particular State; and also that meanwhile the National Assembly feels it advisable and necessary for all local Assemblies without exception to abide by the set of By-Laws approved by the Guardian.

Local Assemblies are to submit to the National Assembly for final approval their plans for local incorporation before the legal action is consummated.

The Legal Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly, in passing upon the sufficiency of the incorporation papers of a local Spiritual Assembly, desires to impress upon all local Assemblies contemplating local in-

corporation that a copy of the State statute under which the corporation is being set up, should be, in all cases, forwarded to the National Spiritual Assembly with the proposed incorporation papers.

Consideration and approval of any local incorporation papers cannot be completed without such copies of the State law.—N. S. A.

### **ANNUAL ELECTION**

Until further notice, the annual meeting called on April 21 for the election of the local Spiritual Assembly is to be conducted by the officers of the outgoing Assembly and not by officers elected by those present at this meeting.

It has also been voted to record the decision that in the election of the National and local Assemblies, when the result of the ballot is that eight members are elected but two or more believers are tied for the ninth membership, the second ballot taken to eliminate the tie vote must be limited to voting for one of the two or more names who happen to have received a tie vote for the ninth place.

Members of a local community have the right to the local membership list at local elections. The list can be prepared alphabetically, and copies handed out for use only during the period of balloting.

When a believer is admitted into membership in a Bahá'í community, he thereby receives all the rights, privileges and duties of Bahá'í membership, and it is for the Spiritual Assembly to postpone the admission of applicants until they have familiarized each applicant with the members of the community. In other words, it is part of the teaching responsibility of a local Assembly to make applicants acquainted with their fellow believers. Otherwise a new believer is unable to use his voting right intelligently.—N. S. A.

Concerning the institution of new Assemblies, Shoghi Effendi believes that the present form of the By-laws which considers April 21 as the only date on any year, though it has some disadvantages, yet as a whole is better than otherwise. One year of experience will better enable it to participate in the important national (Bahá'í) affairs. Then there will be a sort of uniformity throughout the Bahá'í world.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

### **ASSEMBLY MEMBERS TO ATTEND MEETINGS**

When a member or officer of a local Spiritual Assembly cannot function for an indefinite period, and there is no certainty of re-

turn to service, the Assembly should recognize the vacancy and arrange a meeting of the community to elect a new member.—N. S. A.

He believes that your Assembly was well advised in adopting such a ruling. For it is only too obvious that unless a member can attend regularly the meetings of his local Assembly, it would be impossible for him to discharge the duties incumbent upon him, and to fulfill his responsibilities, as a representative of the community. Membership in a local Spiritual Assembly carries with it, indeed, an obligation and capacity to remain in close touch with local Bahá'í activities, and ability to attend regularly the session of the Assembly.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

### **VOTING LIST**

Hereafter the annual voting list furnished by local Assemblies to the N. S. A. should be accompanied by a separate list of all believers transferred to and from each Assembly.

It was moved, seconded and voted to record in these Minutes as the consensus of opinion of the National Assembly, that the removal of voting members by local Assemblies should be made conditional upon prior report to and recommendation by this body, and that the removal of any believer from the voting list does not involve passing upon such person's spiritual status but only affects his local relationship to the administrative order of the Cause and that in the Guardian alone is vested the right to pass upon an individual's spiritual condition.—N. S. A.

### **ADMITTANCE OF NEW BELIEVERS**

As regards the admittance of new members into the different groups as declared Bahá'ís, and the expulsion of any from the community, Shoghi Effendi believes that the Assemblies should not act hurriedly. They should be wise and most considerate, otherwise they can do much harm to the body of the Cause. They should see to it that the new-comer is truly conversant with the teachings, and when he expresses his belief in the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, knows what he is saying and what are the duties he undertakes.

On the other hand when any person is expelled, the Assembly should not act hurriedly. There is a great spiritual responsibility attached to the act. The Assemblies do not have only rights against the individuals, they have great duties also. They should act like the good shepherd whom Christ mentions in His well-known parable. We also have the example of the Master before us. The indi-

vidual Bahá'ís were organic parts of His spiritual being. What befell the least one of the friends brought deep affliction and sorrow to him also. If by chance one of them erred he counselled him and increased His love and affection, if the Master saw that that friend is still stubbornly refusing to reform his ways, and that his living among the other Bahá'ís endangered the spiritual life of the rest, then He would expel him from the group. This should be the attitude of the Assemblies toward the individuals. The best criterion whereby you can measure the spiritual attainment of an Assembly is the extent its members feel themselves responsible for the welfare of the group. And perchance they feel forced to deprive a person from his vote it should be only to safeguard the rest and not merely to inflict punishment.—**SHOGHI EFFENDI.**

### **RESIDENTIAL REQUIREMENT FOR NEW ASSEMBLIES**

When a Spiritual Assembly is dissolved by reason of decrease in the membership of the community, the same requirements shall come into operation before an Assembly can again be elected, namely that the community must consist of at least nine members resident within the civil limits of the city, town or village; that the provision in the By-laws allowing believers residing in out-lying districts to apply for membership in a local Bahá'í community pending the formation of an Assembly in their own locality does not apply at the time when a Bahá'í community convenes for the election of a Spiritual Assembly for the first time.—**N. S. A.**

### **QUALIFICATIONS OF MEMBERSHIP IN A BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY**

On October 24, 1925, in response to a request for information on how Local Spiritual Assemblies should determine the qualifications of those to be enrolled as voting members of a Bahá'í community, the Guardian (Bahá'í Administration, page 81) gave the following explanation: "Regarding the very delicate and complex question of ascertaining the qualifications of a true believer, I cannot in this connection emphasize too strongly the supreme necessity for the exercise of the utmost discretion, caution and tact, whether it be in deciding for ourselves as to who may be regarded as a true believer or in disclosing to the outside world such considerations as may serve as a basis for such a decision. I

would only venture to state very briefly and as adequately as present circumstances permit the principal factors that must be taken into consideration before deciding whether a person may be regarded as a true believer or not. Full recognition of the station of the Forerunner, the Author, and the True Exemplar of the Bahá'í Cause, as set forth in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Testament; unreserved acceptance of, and submission to, whatsoever has been revealed by their Pen; loyal and steadfast adherence to every clause of our Beloved's sacred Will; and close association with the spirit as well as the form of the present day Bahá'í administration throughout the world—these I conceive to be the fundamental and primary considerations that must be fairly, discreetly and thoughtfully ascertained before reaching such a vital decision. Any attempt at further analysis and elucidation will, I fear, land us in barren discussions and even grave controversies that would prove not only futile but even detrimental to the best interests of a growing Cause. I would therefore strongly urge those who are called upon to make such a decision to approach this highly involved and ever-recurring problem with the spirit of humble prayer, and earnest consultation, and to refrain from drawing rigidly the line of demarcation except on such occasions when the interests of the Cause absolutely demand it."

With the adoption of the Declaration of Trust, which required some clear definition whereby the National Assembly might establish the status of voting members of the local communities, the problem of applying the Guardian's standard became one of the most important duties of a Spiritual Assembly. That this problem is being considered very seriously is evident from the number of inquiries which have come to the National Assembly for specific instructions on method and procedure.

It is evident that if the Guardian's standard is too rigidly applied, a community will be choked and stifled, while if it is too loosely applied, the result will be to make a Bahá'í community lose its distinctive character, its spiritual integrity, its very reason for existence.

For some months the members of the National Assembly have given special thought to this subject, in the hope that it might be found possible to lay before all Local Assemblies some statement in the form of suggestions and recommendations that will prove useful to their members in meeting what the Guardian has termed a "very delicate and complex question."

First of all, we feel, should be emphasized

the fact that the enrollment of new voting members is the function of a Spiritual Assembly as a whole. Such a matter cannot be left to one or more members, or be met by passively accepting the endorsement of a teacher, no matter how well-informed and loyal the teacher may be.

The act of passing upon the qualifications of one who seeks enrollment surely involves consultation, the distinctive attribute of a Spiritual Assembly, followed by decision representing unanimous or at least majority vote. The members of an Assembly assume no higher responsibility than in determining the character of their community by controlling its new growth. In admitting a new voting member, they recognize and affirm his or her right to be eligible to every office in the Cause. Since those elected delegates to the Convention elect the members of the National Assembly, and since later on the National Assembly will be one of the electoral bodies constituting the International House of Justice (see Article I, By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly), the degree of this responsibility is manifest.

The question has been raised as to whether a Spiritual Assembly may not most effectively meet this responsibility by having the applicant sign an application blank which sets forth the exact qualifications of membership.

The question has also been raised as to whether it would not be well to lay down a definite period of time—for example, a year—before an Assembly can act upon an application after it is received.

Both these suggestions are admirable; but the National Assembly is not yet prepared to adopt any standardized system. The Cause is too new and inexperienced to justify such an important step at this time. The chief requisite is that each Local Assembly shall possess sufficient insight to discriminate between those who are qualified to serve in the Cause and those not qualified to serve. The Master has warned us that the time will come when hypocrites will seek to enter the Cause in order to work destruction, consequently it is the capacity of the Spiritual Assembly in each case, and not the operation of any standardized system of enrollment, which stands as the safeguard against such invasion.

One requirement, however, the National Assembly does lay down at this time: that Local Assemblies shall read to applicants the qualifications of voting membership as defined in the By-Laws, and record in their minutes the full and complete acceptance by each applicant. This appears to be the irreducible minimum of procedure in the admis-

sion of new voting members. In reporting new members to the National Assembly, Local Assembly Secretaries are requested to submit, in each case, an extract from the minutes proving that this procedure has been followed.

The essence of the matter seems to be that each Assembly is called upon faithfully to stand as witness that the spirit of the person seeking membership has turned to Bahá'u'llah and become quickened for life in His Cause. Quality, and not numerical quantity, must ever determine the power of a Bahá'í community.

Therefore we are not a board of examiners on the one hand nor a mere committee of welcome on the other. The qualifications do not imply that the applicant must please us personally, nor satisfy our human ideas as to whom we would like to associate with in Bahá'í service. The qualifications have come from the Manifestation Himself: to the degree that we are ourselves true Bahá'ís, we can determine who else is likewise a true Bahá'í.

The National Assembly has been vested with the responsibility of passing upon local membership rolls, and thus in cases where a Local Assembly has clearly been in error in enrolling a member, the mistake can be corrected and the matter transferred to a Bahá'í body not affected by exclusively local conditions.

Being charged with this ultimate responsibility, the National Assembly feels great concern that all the Local Assemblies function as wisely as possible in carrying out their share of the Guardian's instructions. The members of the National Assembly see no way to establish definite procedures and uniform methods for the performance of a spiritual task. It is for each Local Spiritual Assembly to take whatever steps it deems necessary and advisable in conferring with each applicant, ascertaining his or her acceptance of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the provisions of the Master's Testament, and association with the world-wide Bahá'í community. Before the application can be made, there exists the prior and vitally important problem of how inquirers are *taught*. Thus, attempting to follow the sequence of all the steps leading to enrollment of new members, we realize how urgent it is for Assemblies to assure themselves that those serving as Bahá'í teachers make the focal point of all their efforts the preparation of souls for service in the Bahá'í community. It is not enough to promulgate the "principles" of the Cause, most of which have already been adopted by the liberal public unconscious of their Source—a teaching



program must include classes in which inquirers are brought into full acceptance of the Faith.

We are dealing with matters of deep mystery, as one perceives on reading the following words which Bahá'u'lláh uttered in the presence of Nabil (*The Dawn-Breakers*, page 586) —

*"Be thankful to God for having enabled you to recognize His Cause. Whoever has received this blessing must, prior to his acceptance, have performed some deed which, though he himself was unaware of its character, was ordained by God as a means whereby he has been guided to find and embrace the Truth. As to those who have remained deprived of such a blessing, their acts alone have hindered them from recognizing the truth of this Revelation. We cherish the hope that you, who have attained to this light, will exert your utmost to banish the darkness of superstition and unbelief from the midst of the people. May your deeds proclaim your faith and enable you to lead the erring into the paths of Eternal salvation."*—N. S. A.

Concerning the qualifications required for voting, Shoghi Effendi has laid down the essential conditions already in his letters, no further restrictions should be added to them. It is for the Local Assembly to decide in this matter. They should exercise this right with extreme tact and caution and avoid rigidity and formalism. There is no distinction in this respect between new and old believers, nor should contributions to the national or local funds be made a condition for voting.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## PREPARATION OF NEW BELIEVERS FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY

In the August, 1932 issue of *Bahá'í News* the National Spiritual Assembly published an important statement entitled, "Qualifications of Membership in a Bahá'í Community." The purpose of that statement, prepared in response to many requests for information made by local Assemblies, was to emphasize the importance of the vital function vested in the local Spiritual Assembly, of enrolling applicants as voting members of the community.

Reference to that statement will make it clear that at that time the need was to deepen the sense of responsibility felt by all Assemblies in applying the Guardian's definite qualifications of Bahá'í membership. What the National Spiritual Assembly

sought to accomplish was to remind local Assemblies that they could not leave this matter to any one or more of their members, or to any teacher, no matter how well informed and loyal the teacher might be. It was therefore stated that "The members of an Assembly assume no higher responsibility than in determining the character of their community by controlling its new growth . . . One requirement, however, the National Assembly does lay down at this time: that Local Assemblies shall read to applicants the qualifications of voting membership as defined in the By-Laws, and record in their minutes the full and complete acceptance by each applicant."

During recent months the National Spiritual Assembly has been receiving requests for further information on one particular phase of this general question: how best to prepare new believers for enrollment as voting Bahá'ís.

The suggestion has been made, in fact, that it would be well if the National Assembly could make a ruling that a certain period of time must elapse before any newly enrolled believer may exercise the voting right. It has been felt, with considerable justice, that even though a new believer may be entirely qualified as far as loyalty and knowledge of the teachings is concerned, nevertheless the wise use of the voting right calls for another essential qualification, namely, acquaintance with the local community and complete assimilation into its spirit and activities.

While recognizing the importance of this view, the National Spiritual Assembly must point out that it has no sanction or authority whatsoever to establish different classifications of voting membership. There is only one class or character of membership in the Bahá'í community—full and complete membership, with no distinction between the voting rights of a new and an old and more experienced Bahá'í. As soon as a believer is enrolled, he receives this voting right without the slightest qualification or exception.

To prepare applicants for the right use of their membership, consequently, the enrollment must be deferred until acquaintance with the community has been gained. This question, it is clear, arises more particularly in the case of the few large Bahá'í communities than in the case of the smaller ones where personal acquaintance is readily gained merely by attendance at study classes and public meetings.

For the larger communities—and in time every Bahá'í community will have a large membership in comparison with its present voting list—the National Spiritual Assembly

now wishes very sincerely and earnestly to offer a few constructive suggestions which it is hoped each local Assembly will take to heart for the sake of the highest interests of the beloved Faith.

1. As years of experience have shown, intellectual acceptance of the formal standards of Bahá'í faith alone is not sufficient to constitute a true believer. A true believer will, in addition, endeavor whole-heartedly to abide by the results of Bahá'í consultation as maintained by the institutions of the Cause. A true believer, furthermore, will seek to contribute to the unity of the entire community, and find his own development in the growth of the Cause, and not attempt to make the community revolve around his own personality, nor himself revolve around the human personality of any one believer. This capacity for spiritual association is not an additional qualification for membership—it is the real test of the believer's profoundest spiritual faith. All teachers responsible for preparing applicants for membership will do well to emphasize this vital point, for the aim of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is to establish oneness of spirit and unity of action throughout the world.

2. An applicant who is enrolled as voting member of a local Bahá'í community is thereby given association not merely in that community alone, but by his enrollment becomes a Bahá'í world citizen—a member of the Bahá'í Commonwealth maintained by the central institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice. If he travels, the enrolled believer is given credentials which will be recognized and honored by National and local Spiritual Assemblies without distinction, whether in the East or the West. How important, therefore, in the preparation of applicants for membership, that they be made conscious of this supreme privilege, this most vital responsibility assumed by all who voluntarily seek the shade of the Divine Tree, who would contribute to the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh! This consideration is likewise a reminder to all of the present believers, especially those who are members of local Assemblies, how essential it is to avoid merely local and personal issues and situations which might conceal from an applicant the true universality of the Faith of God.

3. The same consideration likewise gives due emphasis to the fact that no local Spiritual Assembly is to be regarded as an independent, self-sufficient Bahá'í institution, but rather as one important link in the series of institutions which constitute the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Local Assemblies are dependent upon the National Spiritual As-

sembly, as the National institutions are dependent upon the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice. It is because of this organic dependence that the national By-Laws make enrollment conditional upon final approval by the National Spiritual Assembly.

4. In order to assure the entrance of each new believer into the Bahá'í community upon the soundest basis possible, it is recommended that local Assemblies, wherever conditions permit, provide a final step for the preparation of applicants already interested by home study classes or some teacher's individual instruction. This final step consists in the holding of a special study class under the Assembly's own direct supervision and control, where the applicants can be trained in the Administrative principles and their knowledge of the basic teachings carefully reviewed. By this method, the new believers will experience the wise and impersonal functioning of the institution, and profit also by contact with other teachers. Later on, when local communities are larger and their collective undertakings more proficient, perhaps all applicants, before enrollment, will be able to receive this final, supervised instruction. At present, conditions vary so much among the communities that this suggestion must be developed in accordance with local circumstances. It would be well, however, for individual members of each local Assembly to feel a more positive responsibility in following all local teaching activities, visiting each class or group as frequently as possible, in order to have direct knowledge of this vital aspect of Assembly responsibility. By consultation it would then be possible for the Assembly to assist each group or class conducted by individual teachers in planning their subjects so as to lead up to the central study class held by the Assembly itself. Success depends upon the unity of the Assembly and the willing cooperation of all teachers, old and young, in striving to enlarge the Bahá'í community year by year.

5. It has been realized by discerning Bahá'ís that one essential aspect of Bahá'í community life, the social aspect, has so far remaining practically undeveloped. As local communities become larger and more experienced, their Assemblies will be able to arrange social meetings and gatherings to satisfy the innate human need of friendly association, thus supplementing the Nineteen Day Feasts and the Anniversaries which at present are the only recognized Bahá'í gatherings. The larger local Assemblies might even now arrange occasional feasts, in addition to those in the Bahá'í calendar, to provide occasions for informal association

of believers and also to enable applicants to become acquainted with the local community. So far, such informal gatherings have been arranged mostly by individual believers in their own homes, which tends to make the social aspect of the community too onesided and personal, in distinction to the universality of the formal Bahá'í meetings. The National Assembly regrets deeply that Bahá'ís are still compelled to develop a social life either outside or on a basis of restricted intimacy within the Cause. But through social gatherings arranged by the local Spiritual Assembly, the social life of Bahá'ís will reinforce and strengthen their spiritual and ethical lives, and moreover such gatherings will not only bring the applicants and the older believers together but also demonstrate the vital fact that Bahá'u'lláh's Faith, in the Guardian's own words, inculcates a standard which "incline it to neither East nor West, neither Jew nor Gentile, neither rich nor poor, neither white nor colored."

6. Last but by no means least in importance is the fact that when new applicants are enrolled, not merely are they to be adjusted to the Bahá'í community, but the older believers are also to adjust to the new friends. This consideration, in fact, must receive increasing attention as indications multiply that the era of more rapid growth has begun. Courtesy, true Bahá'í love and the spirit of cooperation are due every new Bahá'í, without the slightest tincture of aloofness, separateness or, on the other hand, undue favoritism, from those who have longer shared the privilege of adherence to the Faith.

The National Spiritual Assembly offers these remarks as suggestions deserving of thoughtful attention. In no sense are they put forth as rulings or commands, because formal legislation can not be carried into the realm of the heart and the conscience. In essence, this statement is an appeal, an urgent call for new and higher spiritual attitudes on the part of all members of the American Bahá'í Community.—N. S. A.

The administrative responsibilities of local Spiritual Assemblies enjoins upon them to maintain their voting lists in full conformity with the qualifications of a voting believer as defined by the Guardian and this function does not involve passing upon the spiritual reality of any individual, which function is reserved to the Guardian alone.—N. S. A.

## CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE GUARDIAN

It has been voted that the believers are to be reminded that the Guardian's original in-

structions concerning letters written to him by local Assemblies and National Committees were that such letters were to be sent him through the National Spiritual Assembly. The National Assembly is convinced that full respect paid to this principle will redound to the spirit of unity and confidence throughout the Cause in America. Direct correspondence with the Guardian on the part of local Assemblies, and on the part of Committees appointed by the N. S. A., introduces an element of duality into our Bahá'í activities which . . . the Guardian expressly forbids.—N. S. A.

## SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES AND THE RIGHTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER

In our collective haste to establish one of the fundamental principles of Bahá'í administration, the authority of Spiritual Assemblies, another important principle, the rights of the individual believer, seems here and there to be occasionally overlooked.

To correct this over-emphasis upon authority at the expense of rights, the National Spiritual Assembly reminds the American believers that the Guardian has more than once definitely upheld an area of individual rights which the authority vested in Spiritual Assemblies cannot invade. While that area can not be marked off with finality, like boundaries on a map, nevertheless by careful reflection we can at least grasp the essential principle which must be applied in all cases where the exercise of authority upon individual believers is questioned.

Generally speaking, an Assembly's authority extends throughout the realm of collective Bahá'í activities—the actions undertaken by the local Bahá'í community and those actions which express the Cause in the eyes of the public. The question of authority can not legitimately be raised in connection with the holding of Nineteen Day Feasts, public teaching programs, the raising of Bahá'í Funds, the approval of publicity put forth in the name of the Cause, the calling of Bahá'í elections and all other similar matters which concern the local Bahá'í body as a whole. Such matters are clearly subject to the authority vested in the Spiritual Assembly.

There is, however, a realm which is primarily personal in character, where the exercise of Assembly authority has sometimes been exceeded. For example, a Spiritual Assembly has no authority over any individual believer's private property, neither his income nor his home or business establishment. Neither can an Assembly hope to ex-

ercise any useful authority over the efforts of individual believers to spread the Teachings by employing the opportunities which arise in the course of daily life. These considerations lead the National Spiritual Assembly to feel that each and every believer is free to arrange informal gatherings in his own home, for the promotion of the Cause, without formal approval or action by the Spiritual Assembly. If in such cases a believer feels it desirable to invite another believer to deliver the Message at a home gathering, the believer's choice of teachers can clearly not be restricted arbitrarily by the Assembly, for such restriction would invade the privacy of the home.

As a matter of fact, since the element of personal initiative is an integral and infinitely precious part of the Faith, the Spiritual Assembly itself is in duty bound to uphold and protect the rights of individual believers just as it is in duty bound to uphold and protect any other organic Bahá'í teaching or principle.

This is not to sanction a lesser degree of loyalty to the institution of a Spiritual Assembly on the part of any individual believer, nor should these remarks be taken to imply that "authority" and "rights" are mutually exclusive and incompatible realities. Rather is this statement a plea for more mutual consideration, more encouragement of individuals by Assemblies, more respect for Assemblies by individuals. The inter-relationship of an Assembly and members of the local Bahá'í community can not be mechanical, for it is based upon the fundamental principle of unity which, if it is to be achieved and preserved, bids an Assembly deal with all believers in kindness and forbearance, and bids every individual Bahá'í maintain an attitude of true respect for an institution created by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, and as such not to be judged by the personalities of those called to administer the institution during these difficult days of its infancy.

Just as authority and power can be abused, so can individuals abuse their God-given rights. Thus, while the holding of home meetings is a sacred right, there might be an instance in which a home meeting could result in the raising of personal issues affecting the Cause in that Community. As the Guardian has declared, "Let us also remember that at the very root of the Cause lies the principle of the undoubted right of the individual to self-expression, his freedom to declare his conscience and set forth his views . . . Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving

consultation. Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá'í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candor, and courage on the other."—N. S. A.

## THE RESIDENTIAL QUALIFICATION OF VOTING MEMBERSHIP IN A BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY

In *Bahá'í News*, January, 1935, the National Spiritual Assembly published a statement entitled "Interpretation of the By-Law on Residential Qualification of Voting Believers" in which was expressed the view that the requirement of residence as one of the qualifications of a voting believer should be based upon definite proof of capacity to associate with the Bahá'í community.

It appears that this interpretation has led to some confusion in a number of local communities. The National Spiritual Assembly has therefore given the subject further consideration and now offers the following supplementary statement in clarification of the January publication. This statement is the outcome of consultation with the Guardian and has been submitted to and approved by him. It is based upon what he considers "a fundamental principle" of Bahá'í Administration,—that no adult believer may be deprived of "the sacred right of participating in Bahá'í elections," unless he reside in a community not itself qualified for such participation or has permanently withdrawn or been removed from further association with the activities of the Faith.

1. The enrollment of voting members in accordance with the By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly is a responsibility vested in the Local Spiritual Assembly, but is made subject to approval by the National Assembly. Otherwise, the matter of an individual's voting right does not come before the latter unless on appeal from a decision made by a Local Assembly.

2. Previous statements published in *Bahá'í News* have sought to clarify the action of Local Assemblies in determining the applicant's qualifications for voting membership in a Bahá'í community with respect to his faith and his acceptance of the Cause in general. The question now under discussion deals exclusively with the matter of *residence*, and how Local Assemblies are to apply the residential qualifications as set forth in the By-Laws.

3. The requirement of residential qualifications is recorded in Article II, Section (a) of the By-Laws, which reads as follows:

"To become a voting member of a Bahá'í community a person shall

- a. Be a resident of the locality defined by the area of jurisdiction of the Local Spiritual Assembly, as provided by Article VII, Section 12, of this instrument."

Article VII, Section 12, referred to, provides:

"The sphere of jurisdiction of a Local Spiritual Assembly, with respect to residential qualification of membership and voting rights of a believer in any Bahá'í community, shall be the locality included within the civil limits of the city, town or village; but Bahá'ís who reside in adjacent, outlying or suburban districts and can regularly attend the meetings of the local Bahá'í community, may be enrolled on the membership list of the adjacent Spiritual Assembly and enjoy full voting rights pending the establishment of a Local Spiritual Assembly in their community."

4. Under these provisions of the By-Laws, residential qualification for voting membership in a Bahá'í community thus becomes a question of fact. In order to assist Local Spiritual Assemblies in determining whether an applicant for such membership comes within these requirements in any particular case, the National Spiritual Assembly offers the following interpretation of certain specific situations which experience has shown are likely to arise.

- A. Where a believer lives sufficiently near a Bahá'í community to take an active share in its activities and there is no organized Spiritual Assembly in his own community, he should be enrolled and continued upon the voting list of that community until a Spiritual Assembly is established in his own immediate neighborhood.
- B. Where a believer, actually a resident of a particular community, is temporarily absent from his community but honestly regards his residence there as continuing and fully intends to return to and resume his activities in that community, he retains his voting rights in the community without interruption. He may not, however, during his absence vote in any other Bahá'í community.
- C. Where a believer spends practically half of the year within the jurisdiction of one Bahá'í community and the other half within the jurisdiction of another he must choose which of the two locali-

ties he considers to be his place of residence, and exercise his voting rights in that city alone. Naturally, he should take part in all other Bahá'í activities in whichever place he may be.

- D. Where a believer claims residence in a particular community for the purpose of exercising voting rights but is actually domiciled elsewhere and makes only occasional visits to the community, insufficient to bring him within the provision of paragraph A above, a question of fact arises which the Local Spiritual Assembly may find it difficult to decide. In such cases the Local Assembly may take counsel with the National Assembly before making a final decision.
- E. A Local Spiritual Assembly confronted by any other unusual situation involving the question of residence can at any time seek advice from the National Spiritual Assembly before making a final decision.

5. In connection with the foregoing interpretations, though not involving the specific question of residence exclusively, the following point has been brought to the attention of the National Spiritual Assembly by the Guardian.

- a. A believer who has been absent for some time from the community of which he is a resident, or a new believer not yet sufficiently well acquainted with the local community, is not obliged to vote in a Bahá'í election when conscientiously feeling incapable of voting intelligently.

It is hoped that these supplementary explanations will remove the misunderstandings which the January statement appears to have caused and may be of assistance to Local Spiritual Assemblies in dealing with this important question of residence.—N.S.A.

The National Spiritual Assembly calls the attention of the local Assemblies and believers to the Article in the By-Laws which defines the area of jurisdiction of the local Spiritual Assembly, which definition provides that believers living in adjacent and outlying districts can be enrolled as voting members of a local Assembly, pending the establishment of a local Assembly in their own city. This By-Law clearly makes it impossible for a believer living in a city which has a local Spiritual Assembly to hold membership in any other Bahá'í community. In accordance with this constitutional provision, the National Spiritual Assembly requests local Assemblies to adjust their voting list at their early convenience. This general instruction does not in any way mean that believers are

not free to attend a Bahá'í meeting in any city, but merely controls their voting rights.—N. S. A.

## THE CHARACTER OF BAHÁ'Í ELECTIONS

“Let us recall His explicit and often-repeated assurance that every Assembly elected in that rarified atmosphere of selflessness and detachment, is in truth, appointed of God, that its verdict is truly inspired, that one and all should submit to its decision unreservedly and with cheerfulness . . . The elector . . . is called upon to vote for none but those whom prayer and reflection have inspired him to uphold . . . Hence it is incumbent upon the chosen delegates to consider without the least trace of passion and prejudice, and irrespective of any material consideration, the names of only those who can best combine the necessary qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience . . . Nothing short of the all-encompassing, all-pervading power of His Guidance and Love can enable this newly enfolded order to gather strength and flourish amid the storm and stress of a turbulent age, and in the fulness of time vindicate its high claim to be universally recognized as the one Haven of abiding felicity and peace.”—*Shoghi Effendi*.

From time to time the question is placed before the National Spiritual Assembly as to what a Local Assembly should do when it has evidence that some believer has attempted to exert influence upon other believers in order to affect their votes in a Bahá'í election.

In deliberating upon this important matter, the National Assembly has sought to arrive at and define, in the light of the Guardian's instructions, the true Bahá'í attitude toward all elections held within the Cause, whether they are elections for members of a Local Spiritual Assembly, of Convention delegates or of members of the National Spiritual Assembly.

The Guardian's words quoted above, all taken from the volume “Bahá'í Administration,” clearly create the spiritual standard which each and every voting member of a Bahá'í community must endeavor to attain. Such a standard compels us to leave behind many practices to which we have become accustomed through the influence of the political society existing throughout the world.

Thus, the Bahá'í Faith contains no partisan factions corresponding to the political parties dominating the civil community. The issue before a Bahá'í electoral body is never the obligation to choose between rival candi-

dates nor rival platforms and policies. The sole issue is the spiritual problem consisting in the obligation of each believer to uphold those *qualities* which the Guardian has enumerated in the selected passages quoted above. If we would meet this obligation faithfully, we must eliminate our own personal likes and dislikes and rise to the station of pure and selfless vision.

Such vision, as Shoghi Effendi declares, is inspired by prayer and reflection. The voter's vision will only be clouded if he permits any other believer, directly or indirectly, to influence his choice. If it is contrary to the Bahá'í standard for any believer to attempt to influence the votes of other believers, it is likewise contrary to that standard for any believer to allow himself to be influenced.

The character of Bahá'í elections is such that the National Spiritual Assembly feels profoundly that its maintenance depends upon the loyal faithfulness of all believers in the community much more than upon the vigilance and authority of the Spiritual Assembly alone. Methods and practices contrary to the true Bahá'í standard can in any locality be quickly extirpated if the believer approached with improper influence and suggestion will immediately, in every instance, not merely reject such invasion of his spiritual rights and duties but also sternly rebuke the wrong doer. It is not the few wrong doers here and there who can do injury to the Cause, but the negative and passive attitude of his or her fellow-believers who fail to assert the power of the Teachings.

A World Order still in its infancy must inevitably pass through all manner of test and experience in order to become mature and strong, able to detect error and fallacy from any and every source and prevent the entrance of even the subtlest negative suggestion. For this reason the National Spiritual Assembly believes that whatever evidences there may be in any locality at present of un-Bahá'í electoral practices, the problem in essence is one of educating the believers to understand, appreciate and uphold the Guardian's standard rather than of disciplinary action on the part of the Local or National Assembly.

As the Guardian recently advised, it is only when repeated warnings are unheeded, and deliberate disloyalty has become manifest, that the extreme measure of expulsion should be undertaken. The test of our collective wisdom now is the capacity to distinguish between deliberate disloyalty and the errors that proceed from lack of knowledge, heedlessness or immaturity.

The National Spiritual Assembly will never fail to assist with all its power any

Local Assembly confronted by conditions arising from deliberate disloyalty; but the view expressed here is that most misconduct surrounding Bahá'í elections can be extirpated entirely by wise action on the part of the believers themselves.

The concrete suggestion is however made that each Local Spiritual Assembly, immediately preceding elections, shall remind the friends of the Guardian's words concerning their spiritual character. Indeed, the importance of developing the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh is so vital that the question of whether a Bahá'í should or should not vote in political elections is merely secondary.—N. S. A.

**REPORTS FROM LOCAL ASSEMBLIES**

The National Spiritual Assembly requests each local Assembly hereafter to send it a copy of all important notices covering policies, rules or regulations as well as important announcements having to do with elections and organizations under Bahá'í administration, which the local Assembly may issue to the Bahá'í community from time to time.—N. S. A.

**TRANSFER OF BELIEVERS**

The transfer of believers involved in unfinished matters proceeding under the local Assembly's jurisdiction is to be postponed pending a report of the circumstances to the National Assembly and its approval of the transfer.

The purpose of the above ruling is to make it possible for a local Spiritual Assembly to retain jurisdiction of a case until the matter is concluded. For example, if an Assembly is endeavoring to settle some difference between two believers, and knows all the circumstances of the case, but before a decision is made one of the believers moves to another city, where the Assembly is naturally uninformed of the problem, the believer who moves is not to be given a letter of transfer by his former Assembly until the National Assembly has opportunity to learn the circumstances and approve the time when the transfer can be made—when, in other words, the Assembly in the city where the believer has taken up his or her new residence is to exercise jurisdiction over the affairs of that believer.—N. S. A.

**HOW TO ENROLL NEW BELIEVERS**

Following the outline supplied by the National Spiritual Assembly in its article on

"The Qualifications of a Voting Believer," published a few months ago, the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Chicago have recorded in their minutes the acceptance of a new believer in such a clear and comprehensive manner that an excerpt from these minutes is now published as a model that might well be followed by other Assemblies.

"This is to certify that on . . . (date), 19 . . . , the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of . . . . . met in consultation with . . . who had made application for affiliation with the . . . . . Bahá'ís, and in compliance with suggestions made by the National Spiritual Assembly, the following procedure was carried out: The Chairman, . . . . . , read to the applicant excerpts from Bahá'í Administration, the qualifications for voting membership in a Bahá'í Community as outlined in the By-Laws and excerpts from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and gave a very interesting and complete explanation of Bahá'í organization.

"It was ascertained that Mr. . . . had carefully studied Bahá'í Administration and the Will of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as well as much other Bahá'í literature, and following the above procedure acknowledged his understanding and complete acceptance of the tenets of Bahá'í Faith. It is thereupon the unanimous vote of those present that Mr. . . . be accepted as a voting member of the . . . . . Bahá'í Community."—N. S. A.

**RELATION OF THE LOCAL TO THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY**

Concerning local Bahá'í news letters, the Guardian strongly feels that they should be primarily devoted to the spread of local news and activities, and should under no circumstances contain any statement implying criticism of or even interference with the policy of the N. S. A. They may occasionally refer to items of a national scope, but this should be done only with the view of assisting and not hindering the national body of the Cause to carry out effectively its program and decisions. There is thus a definite line of demarcation between correspondence initiated by local and National Assemblies. Local activities should always be subordinated to those of a national character and importance. This is intended not to minimize the rôle of the local Assembly in the administrative order, but to establish and insure a sane relationship between that body and the national organism of the Cause.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

As to the problem which has arisen in con-

nection with the News Letter published and circulated by the . . . . . Assembly, the Guardian has already written about it to your N. S. A., expressing the view that under no circumstances should any local Assembly be given the right to criticize and much less oppose, the policy duly adopted and approved by the N. S. A. It is his hope that henceforth the problem of the relationship between the N. S. A. and the local Assemblies in matters of this nature will, in the light of his instructions, be carefully understood by individuals and Assemblies alike.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

Just as the local Bahá'í fund must under all circumstances be subordinated to the national fund, so also, every local circular letter should be considered as subsidiary to the national report of Bahá'í activities in every country. Such a coordination between local and national efforts is indispensable, not only because of its economic advantages, but essentially due to the fact that upon the application of the principle underlying this process must inevitably depend the effective working of the entire administrative machinery of the Faith. There is order, coordination and system in the Cause, and not a jungle of conflicting interests and of continually clashing wills.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## REVIEW AND PUBLICATION OF BAHÁ'Í LITERATURE BY LOCAL ASSEMBLIES

With the development of the Cause, the increased opportunity for teaching arising among local Bahá'í Communities will from time to time bring up the question of whether a Local Spiritual Assembly has the right to publish Bahá'í literature. This question, in turn, brings up the parallel question of how far the jurisdiction of a Local Spiritual Assembly involves the right of review.

In order to anticipate these and similar questions, the National Spiritual Assembly has noted in its minutes a general policy which is now brought to the attention of the believers.

By "publication" several different activities are implied. Many Local Spiritual Assemblies already issue printed programs and bulletins which contain excerpts from the literature. In this case no questions arises as to the jurisdiction of the local body. Each Assembly has not only the right but also the duty and responsibility of presenting its activities to the Bahá'í Community and to the public in the most dignified and effective form.

Similarly, a Local Spiritual Assembly is

responsible for the accuracy of the teachings as presented by members of its Community or by visiting believers. This, in a way, corresponds to the function of review. Moreover, a Local Spiritual Assembly alone can pass upon the material furnished to the press on behalf of its Bahá'í Community.

What the National Spiritual Assembly had in mind in adopting a general policy was the more formal publication represented by pamphlets and books. The question this policy attempted to answer is whether a Local Spiritual Assembly can issue Bahá'í literature of a general character on its own responsibility.

The Guardian's instructions in *Bahá'í Administration* make it clear that all Bahá'í literature of a general character, that is, aside from programs and bulletins, are to be reviewed by a committee of the National Spiritual Assembly. This makes it evident that, as far as the review function is concerned, a Local Spiritual Assembly (apart from local teaching and publicity work) is subject to the general jurisdiction of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Still another point to be considered is whether a Local Spiritual Assembly can publish, as a pamphlet or book, any literature (such as excerpts from the recognized Writings) already approved by the Reviewing Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Here the policy adopted by the National Spiritual Assembly makes a distinction between publishing for sale and publishing as free literature. According to this policy, the publishing of Bahá'í literature for sale is vested solely in the Publishing Committee appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly, as otherwise it would be impossible to develop one well-organized, responsible and efficient national publishing activity.

On the other hand, if it is a matter of a Local Spiritual Assembly publishing a pamphlet for free distribution, as part of its teaching activity, the National Spiritual Assembly feels that this is permitted by Bahá'í administrative principles, *provided* that the material so published has already been approved by the National Reviewing Committee. To sum up the attitude of the National Spiritual Assembly, Local Spiritual Assemblies are requested, for the sake of the well being and orderly progress of the Cause in the United States and Canada, to observe this policy. Aside from evidently local matters, like programs, a Local Spiritual Assembly has no right of review or publication of Bahá'í literature except in the one case that it may issue, as free literature, printed leaflets and pamphlets containing material al-



ready, in its entirety, approved by the National Reviewing Committee and subsequently confirmed by action of the National Spiritual Assembly. The members of the National Spiritual Assembly sincerely hope that this policy will be entirely acceptable to all Bahá'í Communities, as a just and reasonable attitude based upon the Guardian's instructions.—N. S. A.

## **INSTRUCTION IN WILL AND TESTAMENT**

Local Assemblies are directed to instruct new believers in the meaning of this new compilation (i. e., the Will and Testament in the new edition) and furthermore, that local Assemblies are to be responsible for providing new believers with copies.—N. S. A.

## **TO STUDY REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In transmitting to the National Spiritual Assembly reports and recommendations emanating from the local community, a local Spiritual Assembly should not be merely a passive medium used by believers to bring matters to the attention of the N. S. A. but should make its own independent study of such reports and recommendations and forward them with a statement of its own attitude and comment. Such a procedure will not only save the National Assembly much valuable time, but will also enable local Assemblies to develop necessary experience and capacity.—N. S. A.

## **TO APPROVE RADIO PROGRAMS**

All radio broadcasts of a direct Bahá'í character shall be approved by the local Assembly before delivery.—N. S. A.

## **ANNUAL MEMORIAL MEETINGS**

It has been voted to record the attitude of the N. S. A. that local Assemblies would not be justified in sanctioning annual memorial meetings to commemorate individual believers.—N. S. A.

## **ON COLLECTION OF BAHÁ'Í FUNDS**

Shoghi Effendi wishes me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated May 8th, 1932, telling him of some incidents that transpired during the Convention this year,

especially when funds were collected for the Temple. He was very glad to learn of the wonderful spirit that prevailed in those gatherings; for it is only through such a spirit of devotion and sacrifice that the Cause can prosper and its message embrace the whole world. It was also wonderful to see the interest shown by the public in the general gatherings that formed part of the Convention program.

Shoghi Effendi hopes that as the Temple is gradually completed this interest will increase and they will try to share in the spirit that motivates the friends and, accepting the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, arise to serve it and dedicate their life to its spread.

Such gatherings for collections of funds are permissible if it is done with a true spirit of sacrifice, not when the audience is especially aroused to a frenzy and mob psychology is used to induce them to pay.

Shoghi Effendi has repeatedly stated that no pressure should be used upon the friends and psychological pressure falls under that category. But there is much difference between such gatherings often used by religious bodies, and a true quiet, prayerful atmosphere when a person is, of his own accord, aroused to make some sacrifice. The distinction is very delicate, but it is for the Chairman to use his power to see that one desirable form is not corrupted into the other. All the activities of the Cause should be carried through in a dignified manner.

Shoghi Effendi is sure that the funds gathered at the last Convention was not due to the play of mob psychology but to the prayerful attitude of the friends and their desire to make further sacrifice.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## **CONTACT WITH INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES**

A local Assembly may be represented through a delegate at an inter-organization conference, the purpose of which is in full harmony with the Bahá'í teachings and principles and the organization of which in no way limits the spirit of freedom of the Bahá'í delegate or veils the identity of the Spiritual Assembly participating.—N. S. A.

## **COLLECTION OF TABLETS**

Local Spiritual Assemblies are requested to announce the following recommendation, and do their utmost to see that it is carried into effect:—that individual believers (and Assemblies themselves) who have in their possession original Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

with the necessary original translations, original letters of Shoghi Effendi, or other sacred records and objects, take steps to have them preserved in the Bahá'í Archives. The Guardian has said that the collection and publication of Tablets is one of the most important duties of this generation.—N. S. A.

## **LOCAL ARCHIVES**

a. Such records as the local Assembly may wish to make available bearing upon the local activities, all records of importance in connection with the growth of the Cause locally.

b. Accurate individual records of all members of the local Bahá'í community.

c. Relics, photographs, etc., associated with the experiences of individual Bahá'ís, unless gifts of the Master or the Guardian.—N. S. A.

## **STATUS OF BAHÁ'Í CENTERS**

Any public meeting place entirely controlled by the believers should in its function be regarded in the light of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and its accessory activities.—N. S. A.

## **PERMANENT LOCAL ADDRESS**

Voted to request local Assemblies which have no permanent headquarters to take a Post Office Box which can be used as a permanent address for Bahá'í correspondance, the Box to be made accessible to the duly elected secretary from year to year.—N. S. A.

## **CONTACT WITH CIVIL AUTHORITIES**

Individual believers and also local Assemblies can only make contact with Federal and State officials on Bahá'í matters through the National Assembly, in accordance with the recommendation made by those present on September 3, 1933.—N. S. A.

## **ON MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS**

In every Bahá'í community, misunderstandings and differences between individual believers arise from time to time, and the

Cause of Bahá'u'lláh provides spiritual principles and also administrative institutions for the preservation of the unity of the believers under all conditions. As the members of the community, one and all, conscientiously abide by the Teachings such disturbances will result in strengthening our collective capacity and deepening our spirit of faith, but whenever the Teachings are not fully applied, personal grief and perhaps even injustice may result.

The members of the Spiritual Assembly feel that it will be helpful to summarize briefly its understanding of the principles which control this important matter of personal differences between believers.

In the first place, the spiritual law of the Cause, which 'Abdu'l-Bahá so frequently explained, is that whenever two Bahá'ís have any difference, they themselves are in duty bound to try and attain true harmony. The Master even said that if two believers are unwilling to be reconciled, both will eventually leave the Cause. He did not say that they would be removed from the Cause by administrative action; His words meant that such an offense against divine law would be punished by loss of faith leading eventually to an abandonment of the Cause by the offenders.

The Spiritual Assembly, in the second place, has a great responsibility in all matters of dispute between believers which are referred to it for settlement. The Assembly, when it receives a complaint from a member of the community about another believer, must spare no effort to learn the facts and, when possible, make a decision. It is clear that an Assembly cannot make a decision in cases which arise merely from personal antagonism or unfriendliness, but in such cases can only insist that the grief or unhappiness should not be allowed to become a cause of disunity within the community as a whole. The Assembly also must in these cases point out the Master's interpretation of the spiritual law and urge the two believers concerned in the dispute to realize the gravity of their mutual antagonism.

Some disputes, on the other hand, may arise from business or other relations between believers and involve charges of some definite unfairness or injustice committed by one believer against another. When such charges can be proved, it is surely the duty of the Assembly to remove the injustice and place the matter upon a proper Bahá'í basis.

No doubt all of us still need to be reminded of the fact that when a matter has been referred to a Spiritual Assembly for decision, the individual believers concerned must await the Assembly's decision and abide by it, un-

less and until that decision is altered on appeal to the National Spiritual Assembly. But whether the matter is being handled by the local or by the National Assembly, none of the believers involved in the trouble should agitate their case among the friends. Nothing so disrupts a Bahá'í community as personal agitation. The only solution of this problem is for every faithful believer, when approached by another believer with complaints and criticisms, to remind that believer of his or her duty to refer the difficulty to the Assembly, and not share that believer's personal agitation.

Nine times out of ten, the spirit of calm and serene faith on the part of other Bahá'ís whom the agitated believer approaches will allay the feeling of trouble, but when the personal agitation is shared by others, the original problem becomes multiplied into an issue which disturbs the whole community.

When a believer brings a problem to the Assembly, it is not sufficient to make charges and complaints against another believer,—every charge must be proved before the Assembly can act. No Spiritual Assembly could possibly allow itself to be a mere passive instrument for any one believer to use as a weapon against another. The Assembly has the same duty of justice and consideration toward the one against whom the charges are made as toward the one who makes the charges.

In looking into the problem which has been referred to it, the Assembly must call in for consultation all the individual Bahá'ís who may be involved. However deep the feeling one believer may have against another, and no matter what may be the reasons for that feeling, no faithful Bahá'í will refuse to meet with the Spiritual Assembly for such consultation, because it is consultation with the Assembly itself and not with the believer against whom the complaint is made. Should the one making the complaint refuse to consult with the Assembly, the Assembly in that case must dismiss the complaint, since one of the necessary steps leading to eventual justice and unity has been refused by a party to the dispute; unless of course the truth of the charges is self-evident. If the Bahá'í who makes the complaint is willing to come for consultation, but the other Bahá'í—that is, the one against whom the complaint is made—refuses the Assembly's invitation, this refusal would be serious, because on the one hand it would create a strong impression that the believer could not answer the charges made against him or her, and on the other hand it would mean unwillingness to recognize the authority of the Assembly to act in a matter affecting Bahá'ís and consequently

affecting the Cause itself.

To carry the explanation one step farther: if all the believers concerned in a personal problem have met with the Assembly, and if the Assembly, after looking into the matter from all sides, makes a decision, the believers are clearly obligated to accept that decision and abide by it. An appeal, of course, can be made to the N. S. A. and eventually to the Guardian, but whatever the Bahá'í authority which is invoked, a matter referred to a Bahá'í institution for settlement is outside the realm of personal feeling and individual conscience. If we do not trust the Bahá'í institutions created by Bahá'u'lláh, we do not have real faith in Bahá'u'lláh Himself. Moreover, even when an Assembly makes a decision in a case of personal dispute, the spiritual law laid upon all Bahá'ís is still operating, and the believers involved in the problem should pray for divine compassion and illumination in addition to whatever actions they take in relation to administrative procedure. We Bahá'ís live in the spiritual world which Bahá'u'lláh created in His Revelation, and we must do our utmost to learn and obey its mysterious laws which control our destiny.

"Every eye, in this Day, should seek what will best promote the Cause of God. He, Who is the Eternal Truth, beareth me witness! Nothing whatever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this Cause than dissension and strife, contention, estrangement and apathy, among the loved ones of God. Flee them, through the power of God and His sovereign aid, and strive to knit together the hearts of men, in His Name, the Unifier, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise." (Bahá'u'lláh.)—N. S. A.

## ON SLANDER AND BACKBITING

One of the most important of all divine commandments, specially stressed in the Bahá'í Teachings, is: "Breathe not the sins of others so long as thou art a sinner. Shouldst thou transgress this command, accursed art thou and to this I testify." (Hidden Words, 27.) Bahá'u'lláh further warns that: "Backbiting queneth the light of the heart and extinguisheth the life of the soul." (Gleanings, p. 265.) In His Will and Testament, 'Abdu'l-Bahá adds: "According to the direct command of God, we are forbidden to utter slander." The Master further elucidates this vital subject in a Tablet wherein He states: "How blessed are these aims, especially the prevention of backbiting. I hope that you may become confirmed therein. Because the worst human quality and the most great sin

is backbiting, more especially when it emanates from the tongues of the believers of God. If some means were divine (devised?) so that the doors of backbiting could be shut eternally and each one of the believers of God unsealed his tongue in the praise of the other, then the teachings of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh would be spread, the hearts illumined, the spirits glorified and the human world would attain to everlasting felicity." (Tablet to Dr. M. S. C., Washington, D. C. Translated August 12, 1913.)

In order to distinguish between legitimate reports to a Bahá'í administrative body which may affect the welfare of a Bahá'í community or an individual member thereof and unwarranted rumors, negative and hearsay gossip, slander and backbiting, intentionally or thoughtlessly circulated, the National Spiritual Assembly has adopted the following rule of action for the guidance of the Bahá'í Assemblies and communities under its jurisdiction.

1. In no case should the friends speak to their fellow-believers in the community of any matter involving personal delinquencies, alleged or actual, of another member of the community, nor permit believers to speak to them of such matters. If a complaint is warranted, it should be brought directly to the local Assembly for consideration.

2. A local Assembly should assume jurisdiction only when the acts or words of a member of the Bahá'í community are such as to threaten the integrity of the Cause itself, or to undermine the good name and reputation of a believer.

3. This rule of action also applies for the protection of believers, from any discussion of their alleged personal shortcomings in Bahá'í communities other than that in which such believers reside.

4. All such personal matters are strictly barred from discussion at the Nineteen Day Feasts.

5. In applying the law of Bahá'u'lláh relative to the bringing of complaints and information to a local Assembly concerning the alleged or actual shortcomings of individual believers, the Assembly should not en-

ertain or listen to any complaint based upon hearsay or rumor, but should, in all cases, insist that the complainant or witness speak only of such matters and present such evidence as he or she knows to be true, of his or her own knowledge.

6. In the event that a local Assembly is unable to stop or prevent the continued discussion or circulation of criticisms and unfounded rumors after it has taken jurisdiction of the matter, it is to report such cases immediately to the National Spiritual Assembly. The National Spiritual Assembly, after careful investigation, will take vigorous action to remove the misunderstandings and misrepresentations that have arisen and render full justice to the individual believer or believers concerned.

The new World Order is and must be held sacred and free from this grave defect in human relationships, which not only often inflicts unmerited injury and suffering upon the individual but, more important, destroys the solidarity of the Bahá'í community. Whispering and backbiting is equivalent to separation among the friends of God, and, in the final analysis, is the will to harm and to alienate the hearts.

The National Spiritual Assembly feels assured and confident that all the friends will make every effort to realize in their individual and community lives a greater love and unity of purpose, and be ever mindful of Bahá'u'lláh's injunction: "Attribute not to any soul that which thou wouldst not have attributed to thee, and say not that which thou doest not. This is My Command to thee, do thou observe it." (Hidden Words, 29.)

"O my servants! Deprive not yourselves of the unfading and resplendent Light that shineth within the Lamp of Divine Glory. Let the flame of the love of God burn brightly within your radiant hearts. Feed it with the oil of Divine guidance, and protect it within the shelter of your constancy. Guard it within the globe of trust and detachment from all else but God, so that the whisperings of the ungodly may not extinguish its light." (Gleanings, pp. 325-326.)—N. S. A.

## THE NATURE AND AIMS OF THE ANNUAL BAHÁ'Í CONVENTION

### Compiled from the Guardian's Letters to Conventions, to the General Body of Believers and to the National Spiritual Assembly

1. You stand at this challenging hour in the history of the Cause at the threshold of a new era; the functions you are called upon to discharge are fraught with immense possibilities; the responsibilities you shoulder are grave and momentous, and the eyes of many people are turned, at this hour, towards you, expectant to behold the dawning of a Day that shall witness the fulfilment of His Divine Promise.

Forgetful of the past and its vicissitudes, conscious of the need for renewed and combined effort, freed from all earthly limitations and motives, with every lingering trace of ill-feeling forever banished from our hearts, freshly united and determined, let us join in deep and silent communion with the ever-watchful Spirit of our beloved 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and with humility and earnestness supplicate for the guidance that will enable us to fulfil the task which is now committed to our charge.

2. It is expressly recorded in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Writings that these National Assemblies must be indirectly elected by the friends; that is, the friends in every country must elect a certain number of delegates, who in their turn will elect from among all the friends in that country the members of the National Spiritual Assembly. In such countries, therefore, as America, Great Britain and Germany, a fixed number of secondary electors must first be decided upon (95 for America, including the Pacific Islands; 95 for Germany; and 19 for Great Britain). The friends then in every locality where the number of adult declared believers exceeds nine\* must directly elect its quota of secondary electors assigned to it in direct proportion to its numerical strength. These secondary electors will then, either through correspondence, or preferably by gathering together, and first deliberating upon the affairs of the Cause throughout their country (as the delegates to the Convention), elect

\* The Guardian's first instruction was that a Spiritual Assembly should be elected in communities having more than nine declared believers; this instruction was later modified by the statement that a group of exactly nine believers may constitute themselves a Spiritual Assembly by joint declaration.—EDITOR.

from among all the friends in that country the nine who will be the members of the National Spiritual Assembly.

3. I am deeply convinced that if the Annual Convention of the friends in America, as well as the National Spiritual Assembly, desire to become potent instruments for the speedy realization of the Beloved's fondest hopes for the future of that country, they should endeavor, first and foremost to exemplify, in an increasing degree, to all Bahá'ís and to the world at large the high ideals of fellowship and service which Bahá'u'lláh and the beloved Master repeatedly set before them. They can claim the admiration, the support and eventually the allegiance of their fellow-countrymen only by their strict regard for the dignity, the welfare, and the unity of the Cause of God, by their zeal, their disinterestedness, and constancy in the service of mankind, and by demonstrating, through their words and deeds, the need and practicability of the lofty principles which the Movement has proclaimed to the world.

4. Again I earnestly appeal to every one of you, and renew my only request with all the ardor of my conviction, to make, before and during the coming Convention, yet another effort, this time more spontaneous and selfless than before, and endeavor to approach your task—the election of your delegates, as well as your national and local representatives—with that purity of spirit that can alone obtain our Beloved's most cherished desire. Let us recall His explicit and often-repeated assurance that every Assembly elected in that rarified atmosphere of selflessness and detachment is, in truth, appointed of God, that its verdict is truly inspired, that one and all should submit to its decision unreservedly and with cheerfulness.

Let us first strive to fulfill these conditions, difficult yet essential, in our lives, so that, contented and assured, we may make of this new year of activity a year of abundant blessings, of unprecedented achievements.

May this dearest wish be fulfilled!

5. Hitherto the National Convention has been primarily called together for the consideration of the various circumstances attending the election of the National Spiritual Assembly. I feel, however, that in view of the expansion and the growing importance of the administrative sphere of the Cause, the general sentiments and tendencies prevailing among the friends, and the signs of increasing interdependence among the National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world, the assembled accredited representatives of the American believers should exercise not only the vital and responsible right

of electing the National Assembly, but should also fulfill the functions of an enlightened consultative and cooperative body that will enrich the experience, enhance the prestige, support the authority and assist the deliberations of the National Spiritual Assembly. It is my firm conviction that it is the bounden duty, in the interest of the Cause we all love and serve, of the members of the incoming National Assembly, once elected by the delegates at Convention time, to seek and have the utmost regard, individually as well as collectively, for the advice, the considered opinion and the true sentiments of the assembled delegates. Banishing every vestige of secrecy, of undue reticence, of dictatorial aloofness, from their midst, they should radiantly unfold to the eyes of the delegates, by whom they are elected, their plans, their hopes, and their cares. They should familiarize the delegates with the various matters that will have to be considered in the current year, and calmly and conscientiously study and weigh the opinions and judgments of the delegates. The newly elected National Assembly, during the few days when the Convention is in session and after the dispersal of the delegates, should seek ways and means to cultivate understanding, facilitate and maintain the exchange of views, deepen confidence, and vindicate by every tangible evidence their one desire to serve and advance the common weal. Not infrequently, nay oftentimes, the most lowly, untutored and inexperienced among the friends will, by the sheer inspiring force of selfless and ardent devotion, contribute a distinct and memorable share to a highly involved discussion in any given Assembly. Great must be the regard paid by those whom the delegates call upon to serve in high position to this all-important though inconspicuous manifestation of the revealing power of sincere and earnest devotion.

The National Spiritual Assembly, however, in view of the unavoidable limitations imposed upon the convening of frequent and long-standing sessions of the Convention, will have to retain in its hands the final decision on all matters that affect the interests of the Cause in America, such as the right to decide whether any local Assembly is functioning in accordance with the principles laid down for the conduct and the advancement of the Cause. It is my earnest prayer that they will utilize their highly responsible position, not only for the wise and efficient conduct of the affairs of the Cause, but also for the extension and deepening of the spirit of cordiality and wholehearted and mutual support in their cooperation with the body of their co-workers throughout the land. The

seating of delegates to the Convention, *i. e.*, the right to decide upon the validity of the credentials of the delegates at a given Convention, is vested in the outgoing National Assembly, and the right to decide who has the voting privilege is also ultimately placed in the hands of the National Spiritual Assembly, either when a local Spiritual Assembly is for the first time being formed in a given locality, or when differences arise between a new applicant and an already established local Assembly. While the Convention is in session and the accredited delegates have already elected from among the believers throughout the country the members of the National Spiritual Assembly for the current year, it is of infinite value and a supreme necessity that as far as possible all matters requiring immediate decision should be fully and publicly considered, and an endeavor be made to obtain after mature deliberation unanimity in vital decisions. Indeed, it has ever been the cherished desire of our Master, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that the friends in their councils, local as well as national, should by their candor, their honesty of purpose, their singleness of mind, and the thoroughness of their discussions, achieve unanimity in all things. Should this in certain cases prove impracticable the verdict of the majority should prevail, to which decision the minority must, under all circumstances, gladly, spontaneously and continually, submit.

Nothing short of the all-encompassing, all-pervading power of His Guidance and Love can enable this newly-enfolded order to gather strength and flourish amid the storm and stress of a turbulent age, and in the fullness of time vindicate its high claim to be universally recognized as the one Haven of abiding felicity and peace.

6. Regarding the method to be adopted for the election of the National Spiritual Assemblies, it is clear that the text of the Beloved's Testament gives us no indication as to the manner in which these Assemblies are to be elected. In one of His earliest Tablets, however, addressed to a friend in Persia, the following is expressly recorded:—

“At whatever time all the beloved of God in each country appoint their delegates, and these in turn elect their representatives, and these representatives elect a body, that body shall be regarded as the Supreme Baytu'l-Adl (Universal House of Justice).”

These words clearly indicate that a three-stage election has been provided by 'Abdu'l-Bahá for the formation of the International House of Justice, and as it is explicitly provided in His Will and Testament that the “Secondary House of Justice (*i. e.*, National

Assemblies) must elect the members of the Universal One," it is obvious that the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies will have to be indirectly elected by the body of the believers in their respective provinces. In view of these complementary instructions the principle, set forth in my letter of March 12, 1923, has been established requiring the believers (the beloved of God) in every country to elect a certain number of delegates who, in turn, will elect their national representatives (Secondary House of Justice or National Spiritual Assembly) whose sacred obligation and privilege will be to elect in time God's Universal House of Justice.

Should the appointing of the delegates be made a part of the functions of local Spiritual Assemblies, who are already elected bodies, the principle of a four-stage election would be introduced which would be at variance with the provisions explicitly laid down in the Master's Tablet. On the other hand, were the local Spiritual Assemblies, the number of whose members is strictly confined to nine, to elect directly the members of the National Spiritual Assembly—thus maintaining the principle of a three-stage election—all Bahá'í localities, which must necessarily differ in numerical strength, would then have to share equally in the election of the National Spiritual Assembly—a practice which would be contrary to fairness and justice. Moreover, the central principle guiding for the present the administration of the Cause has been to make the Bahá'í National Spiritual Assemblies as independent as possible in the conduct of such affairs as fall within their province, and to lessen the hampering influence of any institution within their jurisdiction that might, whether directly or indirectly, impair their authority and prestige.

7. And now regarding this forthcoming Convention, I feel that the dominating purpose inspiring the assembled friends, delegates and visitors alike, should be a twofold one. The first is a challenge to the individual, the second a collective responsibility. The one seeks to reinforce the motive power of our spiritual activities, the second aims at raising the standard of administrative efficiency so vitally needed at this advanced stage of our work. We should first and foremost endeavor by every means to revitalize our precious Cause, rudely shaken by the constant vicissitudes attending the outward departure of a vigilant and gracious Master. Our next object should be to seek to approach, through more intimate association, fuller and more frequent consultation, and a closer familiarity with the character, the mission and the teachings of the Cause, that

standard of excellence which should characterize the cooperative efforts of Bahá'í Communities in every land.

High aims and pure motives, however laudable in themselves, will surely not suffice if unsupported by measures that are practicable and methods that are sound. Wealth of sentiment, abundance of good-will and effort, will prove of little avail if we should fail to exercise discrimination and restraint and neglect to direct their flow along the most profitable channels. The unfettered freedom of the individual should be tempered with mutual consultation and sacrifice, and the spirit of initiative and enterprise should be reinforced by a deeper realization of the supreme necessity for concerted action and a fuller devotion to the common weal.

It would be impossible at this stage to ignore the indispensability or to over-estimate the unique significance of the institution of the National Spiritual Assembly—the pivot round which revolve the activities of the believers throughout the American continent. Supreme is their position, grave their responsibility, manifold and arduous their duties. How great the privilege, how delicate the task of the assembled delegates whose function it is to elect such national representatives as would by their record of service ennoble and enrich the annals of the Cause! If we but turn our gaze to the high qualifications of the members of Bahá'í Assemblies, as enumerated in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets, we are filled with feelings of unworthiness and dismay, and would feel truly disheartened but for the comforting thought that if we rise to play nobly our part every deficiency in our lives will be more than compensated by the all-conquering spirit of His grace and power. Hence it is incumbent upon the chosen delegates to consider without the least trace of passion and prejudice, and irrespective of any material consideration, the names of only those who can best combine the necessary qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience.

8. In connection with the annual holding of the Bahá'í Convention and Congress, I feel that although such a representative body need not be convened necessarily every year, yet it is highly desirable, in view of the unique functions it fulfills in promoting harmony and good-will, in removing misunderstandings and in enhancing the prestige of the Cause, that the National Spiritual Assembly should exert itself to gather together annually the elected representatives of the American believers. It would in some ways be obviously convenient and eminently de-

sirable though not absolutely essential, if the National Spiritual Assembly could arrange that the holding of such a Congress should synchronize with the time at which the national elections are renewed, and that both events should take place, if not on the first of Ridván, at least during the twelve joyous days of what may be justly regarded as the foremost Bahá'í Festival. Apart from the local elections which universally are to be renewed on the 21st day of April, it is entirely left to the discretion of the National Spiritual Assembly to decide, after having given due consideration to the above mentioned observations, on whatever time and place the Bahá'í Convention as well as the annual elections are to be held. Were the National Spiritual Assembly to decide, after mature deliberation, to omit the holding of the Bahá'í Convention and Congress in a given year, then they could, only in such a case, devise ways and means to insure that the annual election of the National Spiritual Assembly should be held by mail, provided it can be conducted with sufficient thoroughness, efficiency and dispatch. It should, however, be made clear to every elected delegate—who should be continually reminded—that it is a sacred responsibility and admittedly preferable to attend if possible in person the sessions of the Convention, to take an active part in all its proceedings, and to acquaint his fellow-workers on his return with the accomplishments, the decisions and the aspirations of the assembled representatives of the American believers. It would also appear to me unobjectionable to enable and even to require in the last resort such delegates as cannot possibly undertake the journey to the seat of the Bahá'í Convention to send their votes, for the election of the National Spiritual Assembly only, by mail to the National Secretary, as in my view the advantages of such a procedure outweigh the considerations referred to in your letter.

9. In connection with the best and most practical methods of procedure to be adopted for the election of Bahá'í Spiritual Assemblies, I feel that in view of the fact that definite and detailed regulations defining the manner and character of Bahá'í elections have neither been expressly revealed by Bahá'u'lláh nor laid down in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, it devolves upon the members of the Universal House of Justice to formulate and apply such system of laws as would be in conformity with the essentials and requisites expressly recorded by the Author and Interpreter of the Faith for the conduct of Bahá'í administration. I have consequently refrained from establishing a

settled and uniform procedure for the election of the Assemblies of the East and the West, leaving them free to pursue their own methods of procedure which in most cases had been instituted and practised during the last two decades of the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

The general practice prevailing throughout the East is the one based upon the principle of plurality rather than absolute majority, whereby those candidates that have obtained the highest number of votes, irrespective of the fact whether they command an absolute majority of the votes cast or not, are automatically and definitely elected. It has been felt, with no little justification, that this method, admittedly disadvantageous in its disregard of the principle that requires that each elected member must secure a majority of the votes cast, does away on the other hand with the more serious disadvantage of restricting the freedom of the elector who, unhampered and unconstrained by electoral necessities, is called upon to vote for none but those whom prayer and reflection have inspired him to uphold. Moreover, the practice of nomination, so detrimental to the atmosphere of a silent and prayerful election, is viewed with mistrust inasmuch as it gives the right to the majority of a body that, in itself under the present circumstances, often constitutes a minority of all the elected delegates, to deny that God-given right of every elector to vote only in favor of those who he is conscientiously convinced are the most worthy candidates. Should this simple system be provisionally adopted, it would safeguard the spiritual principle of the unfettered freedom of the voter, who will thus preserve intact the sanctity of the choice he first made. It would avoid the inconvenience of securing advance nominations from absent delegates and the impracticality of associating them with the assembled electors in the subsequent ballots that are often required to meet the exigencies of majority vote.

I would recommend these observations to your earnest consideration, and whatever decision you arrive at, all local Assemblies and individual believers, I am certain, will uphold, for their spiritual privilege is not only to consult freely and frequently with the National Spiritual Assembly, but to uphold as well with confidence and cheerfulness whatever is the considered verdict of their national representatives.

10. The Guardian wishes the N. S. A. to remind, and make it quite clear to, the believers in that land that the supreme body in the United States and Canada, whose privilege and function is to lay down, amend and abrogate the administrative principles of the



Faith with the approval of the Guardian, is not the Convention, however representative it may be, but the N. S. A. On the other hand, it is the sacred obligation and the primary function of the National Assembly not to restrict under any circumstances, the freedom of the assembled delegates, whose twofold function is to elect their national representatives and to submit to them any recommendations they may feel inclined to make. The function of the Convention is purely advisory and though the advice it gives is not binding in its effect on those on whom rest the final decision in purely administrative matters, yet, the utmost caution and care should be exercised lest anything should hamper the delegates in the full and free exercise of their function. In discharging this sacred function no influence whatever, no pressure from any quarter, even though it be from the National Assembly, should under any circumstances affect their views or restrict their freedom. The delegates must be wholly independent of any administrative agency, must approach their task with absolute detachment and must concentrate their attention on the most important and pressing issues.

The Guardian believes that the right to elect the chairman and the secretary of the Convention should be vested in the assembled delegates, lest any objection be raised that the members of the outgoing National Assembly are seeking to direct the course of the discussion in a manner that would be conducive to their own personal interests. The National Assembly, however, must at all times vigilantly uphold, defend, justify and enforce the provisions of the Declaration of Trust and By-Laws which are binding on the Convention no less than on themselves. The N. S. A. has the right to lay down, enforce and interpret the National Constitution of the Bahá'ís in that land. It cannot, if it wishes to remain faithful to that Constitution, lay down any regulations, however secondary in character, that would in the least hamper the unrestricted liberty of the delegates to advise and elect those whom they feel best combine the necessary qualifications for membership of so exalted a body.

Non-delegates, however, according to the Guardian's considered opinion, should not be given the right to intervene directly during the sessions of the Convention. Only through an accredited delegate they should be given indirectly the chance to voice their sentiments and to participate in the deliberations of the Convention. Much confusion and complications must inevitably result in the days to come, if such a restriction be not imposed

on a gathering which is primarily intended for the accredited delegates of the Bahá'í communities. Bearing this restriction in mind, it is the duty of the N. S. A. to devise ways and means which would enable them to obtain valuable suggestions, not only from the total number of the elected delegates, but from as large a body of their fellow-workers as is humanly possible.

Shoghi Effendi has not departed from any established Administrative principle. He feels he has neither curtailed the legislative authority of the N. S. A. nor invested the Convention with undue powers enabling it to rival or supersede those whom it has to elect. What the Guardian is aiming at is to remind the friends, more fully than before, of the two cardinal principles of Bahá'í Administration, namely, the supreme and unchallengable authority of the N. S. A. in national affairs working within the limits imposed by the Declaration of Trust and By-Laws, and the untrammelled freedom of the Convention delegates to advise, deliberate on the actions, and appoint the successors of their National Assembly. The Guardian is confident that you will elucidate and give the widest publicity to these already established principles, upon which the progress, the unity and welfare of Bahá'í administrative institutions must ultimately depend.

The utmost care and vigilance should be exercised lest any fresh misunderstandings arise regarding these fundamental issues. The root principle of Bahá'í Administration is unreservedly maintained. No departure from its established tenets is contemplated. The undisputed authority of America's supreme Bahá'í administrative body has been reaffirmed, while on the other hand, the untrammelled freedom of individual believers and delegates to exercise their functions has been once again reaffirmed and strengthened. On the continuous and harmonious cooperation of the two leading Bahá'í institutions in America, the growth and success of the administration bequeathed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá must ultimately depend. May next year's Convention witness the triumph of these basic principles.

11. Concerning the status, rights and prerogatives of the Annual Bahá'í Convention, the Guardian wishes to make it quite clear to all the believers that this annual meeting of the delegates is by no means a continuous consultative body all through the year; that its twofold function of electing the body of the National Spiritual Assembly, and of offering any constructive suggestions in regard to the general administration of the Cause is limited to a definite period; and that consequently the opinion current among

some of the believers that the delegates are to serve as a consultative body throughout the year is at variance with the fundamental, though as yet unspecified, principles underlying the Administration. Shoghi Effendi firmly believes that consultation must be maintained between the N. S. A. and the entire body of the believers, and that such consultation, while the Convention is not in session, can best be maintained through the agency of the local Assemblies, one of whose essential functions is to act as intermediaries between the local communities and their national representatives. The main purpose of the Nineteen Day Feasts is to enable individual believers to offer any suggestion to the local Assembly which in its turn will pass it to the N. S. A. The local Assembly is, therefore, the proper medium through which local Bahá'í communities can communicate with the body of the national representatives. The Convention should be regarded as a temporary gathering, having certain specific functions to perform, during a limited period of time. Its status is thus limited in time to the Convention sessions, the function of consultation at all other times being vested in the entire body of the believers through the local Spiritual Assemblies.

12. I wish to affirm without the least hesitation or ambiguity, that the annual convention is not to be regarded as a body entitled to exercise functions similar to those which an ordinary parliament possesses under a democratic form of government. The administrative order which lies embedded in the Teaching of Bahá'u'lláh, and which the American believers have championed and are now establishing, should, under no circumstances, be identified with the principles underlying present-day democracies. Nor is it identical with any purely aristocratic or autocratic form of government. The objectionable features inherent in each of these political systems are entirely avoided. It blends, as no system of human polity has as yet achieved, those salutary truths and beneficial elements which constitute the valuable contributions which each of these forms of government have made to society in the past. Consultation, frank and unfettered, is the bedrock of this unique order. Authority is concentrated in the hands of the elected members of the National Assembly. Power and initiative are primarily vested in the entire body of the believers acting through their local representatives. To generate those forces which must give birth to the body of their national administrators, and to confer, freely and fully and at fixed intervals, with both the incoming and outgoing national Assemblies, are the twofold functions, the su-

preme responsibility and sole prerogative of the delegates assembled in Convention. Nothing short of close and constant interaction between these various organs of Bahá'í administration can enable it to fulfill its high destiny.

13. Concerning the status of members of the N. S. A. at Convention sessions, the Guardian feels that the members both of the incoming and the outgoing Assemblies should be given the full right to participate in the Convention discussions. Those members of the N. S. A. who have been elected delegates will, in addition to the right of participation, be entitled to vote. The Guardian wishes thereby to render more effective the deliberations and the recommendations of the national representatives. He feels that the exercise of such a right by the members of the N. S. A. will enable them to consult more fully with the assembled delegates, to exchange fully and frankly with them their views, and to consider collectively the interests, needs and requirements of the Cause. This he believes is one of the primary functions of the Convention.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## THE ANNUAL BAHÁ'Í CONVENTION

1. The Annual Bahá'í Convention has two unique functions to fulfill, discussion of current Bahá'í matters and the election of the National Spiritual Assembly. The discussion should be free and untrammled, the election carried on in that spirit of prayer and meditation in which alone every delegate can render obedience to the Guardian's expressed wish. After the Convention is convened by the Chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly, and after the roll call is read by the Secretary of the Assembly, the Convention proceeds to the election of its chairman and secretary by secret ballot and without advance nomination, according to the standard set for all Bahá'í elections.

2. Non-delegates may not participate in Convention discussion. All members of the National Spiritual Assembly may participate in the discussion, but only those members who have been elected delegates may vote on any matter brought up for vote during the proceedings.

3. The outgoing National Spiritual Assembly is responsible for rendering reports of its own activities and of those carried on by its committees during the past year. The annual election is to be held at a point midway during the Convention sessions, so that the incoming Assembly may consult with the delegates.

The Convention is free to discuss any

Bahá'í matter, in addition to those treated in the annual reports. The Convention is responsible for making its own rules of procedure controlling discussion; for example, concerning any limitations the delegates may find it necessary to impose upon the time allotted to or claimed by any one delegate. The National Assembly will maintain the rights of the delegates to confer freely and fully, free from any restricted pressure, in the exercise of their function.

5. The Convention as an organic body is limited to the actual Convention period. It has no function to discharge after the close of the sessions except that of electing a member or members to fill any vacancy that might arise in the membership of the National Spiritual Assembly during the year.

6. The Convention while in session has no independent legislative, executive or judicial function. Aside from its action in electing the National Spiritual Assembly, its discussions do not represent actions but recommendations which shall, according to the Guardian's instructions, be given conscientious consideration by the National Assembly.

7. The National Spiritual Assembly is the supreme Bahá'í administrative body within the American Bahá'í community, and its jurisdiction continues without interruption during the Convention period as during the remainder of the year, and independently of the individuals composing its membership. Any matter requiring action of legislative, executive or judicial nature, whether arising during the Convention period or at any other time, is to be referred to the National Spiritual Assembly. The National Assembly is responsible for upholding the administrative principles applying to the holding of the Annual Convention as it is for upholding all other administrative principles. If, therefore, a Convention departs from the principles laid down for Conventions by the Guardian, and exceeds the limitations of function conferred upon it, in that case, and in that case alone, the National Spiritual Assembly can and must intervene. It is the National Spiritual Assembly, and not the Convention, which is authorized to decide when and why such intervention is required.

8. The National Spiritual Assembly feels that it owes a real duty to the delegates, and to the entire body of believers, in presenting any and all facts that may be required in order to clarify matters discussed at the Convention. There can be no true Bahá'í consultation at this important meeting if any incomplete or erroneous view should prevail.

9. The National Assembly in adopting and issuing this statement, does so in the sincere

effort to assure the constitutional freedom of the Convention to fulfill its high mission. The path of true freedom lies in knowing and obeying the general principles given to all Bahá'ís for the proper conduct of their collective affairs. While the entire world plunges forward to destruction, it is the responsibility of the National Spiritual Assembly to uphold that Order on which peace and security solely depends.—N. S. A.

Your statement on the Convention is admirable. The Guardian fully endorses it and wishes you to send as promptly as you can a copy of it to the Persian N. S. A. for their instruction and guidance.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## A PROCEDURE FOR THE CONDUCT OF THE ANNUAL BAHÁ'Í CONVENTION INTRODUCTION

The Guardian's references to the Annual Convention have been compiled and published in two issues of *Bahá'í News*—November, 1933 and February, 1934.\*

### I. THE ANNUAL BAHÁ'Í CONVENTION

A summary of the constitutional basis of the Convention has been made by the National Spiritual Assembly and approved by the Guardian. It was published in *Bahá'í News* for April, 1935. Special reference is made to the seven numbered paragraphs in that summary.\*\*

### II. CONVENTION CALL

The National Spiritual Assembly determines the date, duration and place of the Annual Convention and provides for such meetings in connection with the Convention as it may feel are desirable.

### III. CONVENTION PROCEDURE

The Twenty-sixth Annual Convention, held in 1934, voted a recommendation calling upon the National Spiritual Assembly to supply a parliamentary procedure for the conduct of the Annual Convention, and the present material has been prepared to meet the need indicated by that recommendation.

\* This compilation has likewise been reproduced in the present work.

\*\* See previous pages in the present work.

## Order of Business

Prayer and devotional readings, provided by the outgoing National Spiritual Assembly.

Opening of Convention by Presiding Officer of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Roll call of delegates by the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Election by secret ballot of Convention Chairman and Secretary. The Convention Officers are to be elected by the assembled delegates from among the entire number of delegates who are present at the Convention.

Annual Report of National Spiritual Assembly.

Annual Financial Report of National Spiritual Assembly.

Convention message to the Guardian of the Faith.

Annual Committee Reports: these are to be considered as part of the Report of the National Spiritual Assembly. They are whenever possible published in *Bahá'í News* in advance of the Convention date, for the information of the delegates.

Subjects for Consultation. Any delegate may, before the Convention convenes, recommend to the National Assembly such topics as he deems of sufficient importance to be included in the Convention agenda; and the National Spiritual Assembly, from the list of topics received from delegates, and also suggested by its own knowledge and experience, is to prepare an agenda or order of business as its recommendation to the Convention.

This agenda may include, as part of the National Assembly's Annual Report, the presentation of special subjects by well qualified members, committee representatives or non-Bahá'í experts whose exposition is necessary or desirable for the information of the delegates.

On motion duly made, seconded and voted, any such subject may be omitted, and also on motion duly made, seconded and voted, any other subject may be proposed for special consultation.

Annual election. The election of members of the National Spiritual Assembly is to take place approximately midway during the Convention sessions, so as to enable the delegates to consult with both the outgoing and incoming Assemblies, in accordance with the Guardian's expressed desire.

## Conduct of Business

Every deliberate body, to fulfill its functions, must conduct its deliberations in accordance with some established rules of

order. The parliamentary procedure here set forth for the Convention is based upon the procedure already adopted for meetings of local Assemblies and communities. It accordingly extends to sessions of the Annual Convention the same procedure under which the delegates, in their other Bahá'í activities, are accustomed to conduct discussion and consultation.

The purpose of consultation at the Annual Convention is threefold: to arrive at full and complete knowledge of the current conditions, problems and possibilities of the Faith in America; to give to the incoming National Assembly the benefit of the collective wisdom, guidance and constructive suggestions of the assembled delegates; and to contribute to the unity, in spirit and in action, of the entire American Bahá'í community.

The freedom of each and every delegate to take part in discussion and to initiate motions is untrammelled save as the undue activity of one delegate might hamper the rights of the other delegates. Any necessary limitation to be placed upon individual discussion shall be determined by the Chairman in the absence of any specific motion duly voted by the delegates themselves.

It shall be the duty of the Chairman to encourage general consultation and make possible the active participation of the greatest possible number of delegates.

The Chairman has the same power and responsibility for discussion and voting upon motions as other delegates. Members of the outgoing and incoming National Assembly who are not delegates may participate in the consultation but not vote.

A resolution, or motion, is not subject to discussion or vote until duly made and seconded. It is preferable to have each resolution clear and complete in itself, but when an amendment is duly made and seconded, the Chairman shall call for a vote on the amendment first and then on the motion. An amendment must be relevant to, and not contravene, the subject matter of the motion.

The Chairman shall call for votes by oral expression of ayes and nays, but where the result of the vote is doubtful by a show of hands or a rising vote. A majority vote determines.

Discussion of any matter may be terminated by motion duly made, seconded and voted, calling upon the Chairman to bring the matter to an immediate vote or proceed to other business.

The transactions of the Convention shall be recorded by the Secretary, and when cer-

tified by the Convention officers shall be given to the National Spiritual Assembly.

## Annual Election

The electors in the Annual Election shall consist of those delegates included in the Roll Call prepared by the National Spiritual Assembly.

Ballots and tellers' report forms shall be provided by the National Assembly.

The election shall be conducted by the Convention, but delegates unable to attend the Convention shall have the right to vote by mail.

The Chairman shall appoint three tellers, chosen from among the assembled delegates.

The electoral method shall be as follows:

1. The Convention Secretary shall call the roll of delegates, whereupon each delegate, in turn, shall place his or her ballot in a ballot box; and as the names are called ballots received by mail shall be placed in the ballot box by the Secretary of the National Assembly.

2. The ballot box shall then be handed to the tellers, who shall retire from the Convention Hall to determine the result of the election.

3. The result of the election is to be reported by the tellers, and the tellers' report is to be approved by the Convention.

4. The ballots, together with the tellers' report, certified by all the tellers, are to be given the National Spiritual Assembly for preservation.

## IV. THE CONVENTION RECORD

The permanent record of each successive Annual Convention shall consist of the following:—(1) Convention Call as issued by the National Spiritual Assembly, including list of Participating Bahá'í Communities; (2) list of accredited delegates; (3) Annual Reports of the National Spiritual Assembly and of its Committees; (4) Messages sent to and received from the Guardian; (5) Resolutions and other transactions of the assembled delegates; (6) The result of the Annual Election.—N. S. A.

## NO REFERENCE TO PERSONALITIES

I feel that reference to personalities before the election would give rise to misunderstanding and differences. What the friends should do is to get thoroughly acquainted with one another, to exchange views, to mix freely and discuss among themselves the requirements and qualifications for such a membership without reference or application, however indirect, to particular individuals. We should refrain from influencing the opinion of others, of canvassing for any particular individual, but should stress the necessity of getting fully acquainted with the qualifications of membership referred to in our Beloved's Tablets and of learning more about one another through direct, personal experience rather than through the reports and opinions of our friends.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## THE INSTITUTION OF THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

Regarding the establishment of "National Assemblies," it is of vital importance that in every country, where the conditions are favorable and the number of friends has grown and reached a considerable size, such as America, Great Britain and Germany, that a "National Spiritual Assembly" be immediately established, representative of the friends throughout that country.

Its immediate purpose is to stimulate, unify and coordinate by frequent personal consultations, the manifold activities of the friends as well as the local Assemblies; and by keeping in close and constant touch with the Holy Land, initiate measures, and direct in general the affairs of the Cause in that Country.

It serves also another purpose, no less essential than the first, as in the course of time it shall evolve into the National House of Justice (referred to in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will as the "secondary House of Justice"), which according to the explicit text of the Testament will have, in conjunction with the other National Assemblies throughout the Bahá'í world, to elect directly the members of the International House of Justice, that Supreme Council that will guide, organize and unify the affairs of the Movement throughout the world.

This National Spiritual Assembly, which, pending the establishment of the Universal House of Justice, will have to be re-elected once a year, obviously assumes grave responsibilities, for it has to exercise full authority over all the local Assemblies in its province, and will have to direct the activities of the friends, guard vigilantly the Cause of God, and control and supervise the affairs of the Movement in general.

Vital issues, affecting the interests of the Cause in that country such as the matter of translation and publication, the Mashriqu'l-Adhikár, the Teaching Work, and other similar matters that stand distinct from strictly local affairs, must be under the full jurisdiction of the National Assembly.

It will have to refer each of these questions, even as the local Assemblies, to a special Committee, to be elected by the members of the National Spiritual Assembly, from among all the friends in that country, which will bear to it the same relation as the local committees bear to their respective local Assemblies.

With it, too, rests the decision whether a certain point at issue is strictly local in its nature, and should be reserved for the con-

sideration and decision of the local Assembly, or whether it should fall under its own province and be regarded as a matter which ought to receive its special attention. The National Spiritual Assembly will also decide upon such matters which in its opinion should be referred to the Holy Land for consultation and decision.

With these Assemblies, local as well as national, harmoniously, vigorously, and efficiently functioning throughout the Bahá'í world, the only means for the establishment of the Supreme House of Justice will have been secured. And when this Supreme Body will have been properly established, it will have to consider afresh the whole situation, and lay down the principle which shall direct, so long as it deems advisable, the affairs of the Cause.

The need for the centralization of authority in the National Spiritual Assembly, and the concentration of power in the various local Assemblies, is made manifest when we reflect that the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh is still in its age of tender growth and in a stage of transition; when we remember that the full implications and the exact significance of the Master's world-wide instructions, as laid down in His Will, are as yet not fully grasped, and the whole Movement has not sufficiently crystallized in the eyes of the world.

It is primarily upon the elected members of the National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the Bahá'í world that this highly important duty devolves, as in their hands the direction and management of all spiritual Bahá'í activities have been placed and centralized, and as they constitute in the eyes of the people of their country the supreme body in that land that officially represents, promotes and safeguards the various interests of the Cause, it is my fervent prayer and my most cherished desire, that the un-failing guidance of Bahá'u'lláh and the blessings of our beloved Master will enable them to set a high and true example to all other Bahá'í institutions and local Assemblies, and will show them what absolute harmony, mature deliberation and whole-hearted cooperation can achieve.

Should such a representative and responsible body fail to realize this fundamental requisite for all successful achievement, the whole structure is sure to crumble, and the Great Plan of the Future, as unfolded by the Master's Will and Testament, will be rudely disturbed and grievously delayed.

The Guardian wishes me to again affirm his view that the authority of the N. S. A. is undivided and unchallengeable in all matters pertaining to the administration of the Faith throughout the United States and

Canada, and that, therefore, the obedience of individual Bahá'ís, delegates, groups and Assemblies to that authority is imperative, and should be wholehearted and unqualified. He is convinced that the unreserved acceptance and complete application of this vital provision of the Administration is essential to the maintenance of the highest degree of unity amongst the believers, and is indispensable to the effective working of the administrative machinery of the Faith in every country.

I wish to reaffirm in clear and categorical language, the principle already enunciated upholding the supreme authority of the National Assembly in all matters that affect the interests of the Faith in that land. There can be no conflict of authority, no duality under any form or circumstances in any sphere of Bahá'í jurisdiction whether local, national or international. The National Assembly, however, although the sole interpreter of its Declaration of Trust and By-Laws, is directly and morally responsible if it allows any body or institution within its jurisdiction to abuse its privileges or to decline in the exercise of its rights and privileges. It is the trusted guardian and the mainspring of the manifold activities and interests of every national community in the Bahá'í world. It constitutes the sole link that binds these communities to the International House of Justice, the supreme administrative body in the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh.

Anything whatsoever affecting the interests of the Cause and in which the National Assembly as a body is involved should, if regarded as unsatisfactory by local Assemblies and individual believers, be immediately referred to the National Assembly itself. Neither the general body of the believers, nor any local Assembly, nor even the delegates to the Annual Convention, should be regarded as having any authority to entertain appeals against the decision of the National Assembly. Should the matter be referred to the Guardian it will be his duty to consider it with the utmost care and to decide whether the issues involved justify him to consider it in person, or to leave it entirely to the discretion of the National Assembly.

This administrative principle which the Guardian is now restating and emphasizing is so clear, so comprehensive and simple that no misunderstanding as to its application, he feels, can possibly arise. There are no exceptions whatever to this rule, and the Guardian would deprecate any attempt to elaborate or dwell any further upon this fundamental and clearly-enunciated principle.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## LEGAL CONSTITUTION OF NATIONAL AND LOCAL ASSEMBLIES

In this connection he wishes me to inform you that at his repeated directions the National Assemblies of Egypt, Iraq and Persia are adopting the exact text of your Assembly's Declaration of Trust and By-Laws, as well as the local By-Laws, and are taking the necessary steps for incorporating their Assemblies as duly recognized bodies empowered to administer the national and local affairs of the Faith in their respective countries. The Indian N. S. A., as well as the Bombay Spiritual Assembly, have already set the example in this respect, both in the matter of incorporation, and in the adoption of the text of the constitutions of the American Bahá'í Assemblies.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Shoghi Effendi has never said that the members of the National Assembly have to be renewed partially every year. The important thing is that they should be properly elected. It would be nice if there should be new members elected, for new blood always adds to the energy of the group and will keep up their spirit. But this depends entirely upon the will of the delegates as represented in the result of their voting.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## THE NATIONAL BAHÁ'Í FUND

And as the progress and extension of spiritual activities is dependent and conditioned upon material means, it is of absolute necessity that immediately after the establishment of local as well as national Spiritual Assemblies, a Bahá'í Fund be established, to be placed under the exclusive control of the Spiritual Assembly. All donations and contributions should be offered the Treasurer of the Assembly, for the express purpose of promoting the interests of the Cause, throughout that locality or country. It is the sacred obligation of every conscientious and faithful servant of Bahá'u'lláh who desires to see His Cause advance, to contribute freely and generously for the increase of that Fund. The members of the Spiritual Assembly will at their own discretion expend it to promote the Teaching Campaign, to help the needy, to establish educational Bahá'í institutions, to extend in every way

possible their sphere of service. I cherish the hope that all the friends, realizing the necessity of this measure, will bestir themselves and contribute, however modestly at first, towards the speedy establishment and the increase of that Fund.—*Bahá'í Administration*, pp. 36-37.

We must be like the fountain or spring that is continually emptying itself of all that it has and is continually being refilled from an invisible source. To be continually giving out for the good of our fellows undeterred by the fear of poverty and reliant on the unfailing bounty of the Source of all wealth and all good—this is the secret of right living.—*Bahá'í News*, September, 1926.

With regard to the Bahá'í Fund, recently established amongst the friends, I trust that the matter now stands clear to everyone throughout the country. As I have previously intimated, although individual friends and local Assemblies are absolutely free to specify the object and purpose of their donations to the National Spiritual Assembly, yet, in my opinion, I regard it of the utmost vital importance that individuals, as well as local Assemblies, throughout the land should, in view of the paramount importance of National Teaching and as an evidence of their absolute confidence in their national representatives, endeavor, however small at first, to contribute freely towards the upkeep and the increase of the National Bahá'í Fund, so that the members of the National Assembly may at their full discretion expend it for whatever they deem urgent and necessary.—*Bahá'í Administration*, p. 47.

In connection with the institution of the National Fund and the budgetary system set forth in the Minutes of the National Spiritual Assembly, I feel urged to remind you of the necessity of ever bearing in mind the cardinal principle that all contributions to the Fund are to be purely and strictly voluntary in character. It should be made clear and evident to every one that any form of compulsion, however slight and indirect, strikes at the very root of the principle underlying the formation of the Fund ever since its inception. While appeals of a general character, carefully worded and moving and dignified in tone are welcome under all circumstances, it should be left entirely to the discretion of every conscientious believer to decide upon the nature, the amount, and purpose of his or her contribution for the propagation of the Cause.—*Bahá'í Administration*, p. 92.

He wishes you particularly to impress the believers with the necessity of maintaining the flow of their contributions to the Temple, and also to stress the importance of the in-

stitution of the National Bahá'í Fund which, in these early days of the administrative development of the Faith, is the indispensable medium for the growth and expansion of the Movement. Contributions to this fund constitute, in addition, a practical and effective way whereby every believer can test the measure and character of his faith, and to prove in deeds the intensity of his devotion and attachment to the Cause.—*Bahá'í News*, November, 1934.

As the activities of the American Bahá'í community expand, and its worldwide prestige correspondingly increases, the institution of the National Fund, the bedrock on which all other institutions must necessarily rest and be established, acquires added importance, and should be increasingly supported by the entire body of the believers, both in their individual capacities, and through their collective efforts, whether organized as groups or as local Assemblies. The supply of funds, in support of the National Treasury, constitutes, at the present time, the life-blood of these nascent institutions you are laboring to erect. Its importance cannot, surely, be over-estimated. Untold blessings shall no doubt crown every effort directed to that end.—*Bahá'í News*, October, 1935.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## ANONYMOUS CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NATIONAL FUND

In view of the Guardian's instruction that contributions are not to be accepted from non-Bahá'ís for the Temple and other organic work of the Cause, but be used for humanitarian purposes, a difficulty is created for the N. S. A. whenever the Treasurer receives a contribution from an unknown source. Unless it knows the actual donor, the Assembly is compelled to regard anonymous contributions as coming from a non-Bahá'í. Such contributions have recently been applied to the Publishing Committee for making gift subscriptions of World Order to Public Libraries and institutions of general welfare.—N. S. A.

## COMMITTEES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Large issues in such spiritual activities that affect the Cause in general in that land, such as the management of the "Star of the West" and any periodical which the National Body may decide to be a Bahá'í organ, the matter of publication, of reprinting Bahá'í literature and its distribution among the various Assemblies, the means whereby the teaching campaign may be stimulated and



maintained, the work of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, the racial question in relation to the Cause, the matter of receiving Orientals and association with them, the care and maintenance of the precious film exhibiting a phase of the Master's sojourn in the United States of America as well as the original matrix and the records of His voice, and various other national spiritual activities, far from being under the exclusive jurisdiction of any local Assembly or group of friends, must each be minutely and fully directed by a special board, elected by the National Body, constituted as a committee thereof, responsible to it and upon which the National Body shall exercise constant and general supervision.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## REPORTS OF ACTIVITIES

I shall always await from the members of the National Spiritual Assembly, collective, official and comprehensive reports on their manifold activities, sent to me at frequent intervals, and bearing upon the inner and outward currents of the Movement, the relations of Assemblies to one another, and the general standing and the various aspects of the progress of the Cause throughout the land. I would welcome more specific reports sent to me by the various committees of the National Spiritual Assembly, enclosed in the National Assembly's letter, and approved by all its members.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## RELATIONS OF COMMITTEES TO ASSEMBLY

Touching the recent decision of the National Spiritual Assembly to place as much as possible of the current details of the work in the hands of its national committees, I feel I should point out that this raises a fundamental issue of paramount importance, as it involves a unique principle in the administration of the Cause, governing the relations that should be maintained between the central administrative body and its assisting organs of executive and legislative action. As it has been observed already, the rôle of these committees set up by the National Spiritual Assembly, the renewal, the membership and functions of which should be reconsidered separately each year by the incoming National Assembly, is chiefly to make thorough and expert study of the issue entrusted to their charge, advise by their reports, and assist in the execution of the decisions which in vital matters are to be exclusively and directly rendered by the National Assembly. The utmost vigilance, the most strenuous exertion is required by them if they wish to fulfill as befits their high and responsible

calling, the functions which it is theirs to discharge. They should, within the limits imposed upon them by present-day circumstances, endeavor to maintain the balance in such a manner that the evils of over-centralization which clog, confuse and in the long run depreciate the value of the Bahá'í services rendered shall on one hand be entirely avoided, and on the other the perils of utter decentralization with the consequent lapse of governing authority from the hands of the national representatives of the believers definitely averted. The absorption of the petty details of Bahá'í administration by the personnel of the National Spiritual Assembly is manifestly injurious to efficiency and an expert discharge of Bahá'í duties, whilst the granting of undue discretion to bodies that should be regarded in no other light than that of expert advisers and executive assistants would jeopardize the very vital and pervading powers that are the sacred prerogatives of bodies that in time will evolve into Bahá'í National Houses of Justice. I am fully aware of the strain and sacrifice which a loyal adherence to such an essential principle of Bahá'í administration—a principle that will at once ennoble and distinguish the Bahá'í methods of administration from the prevailing systems of the world—demands from the national representatives of the believers at this early stage of our evolution. Yet I feel I cannot refrain from stressing the broad lines along which the affairs of the Cause should be increasingly conducted, the knowledge of which is so essential at this formative period of Bahá'í administrative institutions.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

The focal point of effort on the part of the National Spiritual Assembly is to encourage greater initiative and activity among all local Bahá'í communities.

In the gradual application of this principle, the Assembly has found it desirable to make a distinction between the special services rendered by each National Committee and the general problem of making these services available throughout the body of the Cause.

It has therefore been voted to record the fact that the function of each Committee is of an advisory rather than of an administrative character. The results of Committee consultation are to be referred to the National Spiritual Assembly for approval, and then (as far as possible) after approval, issued to the friends in *Bahá'í News*. Thus will be established one definite, responsible channel of communication representing the National Assembly and its committees as one spiritual unit and organism.

The National Spiritual Assembly assumes responsibility for applying Committee recommendations and plans to the conditions of local community life, and also for meeting any administrative problems that may arise therefrom. Each Committee is requested to submit, as far as possible its recommendations and suggestions in a form adapted to publication in *Bahá'í News* for the information and encouragement of all believers.

In explaining this general principle, the National Assembly is conscious of the fact that the National Committees are entrusted with different types of activity. For example, the three Summer School Committees not only make programs but carry them out in classes, while the Publishing Committee has its own continuous and direct contact with communities and individual believers through the sale of the literature. The essential principle, however, is clear, and the members of the Assembly believe that as time goes on the result will be a tremendous concentration of our collective spiritual and material resources for the development of the Cause along the lines laid down by the Guardian.—N. S. A.

## THE UNITY OF THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY

As we gather our energies in order to strive for a full measure of success in Temple construction and other national Bahá'í activities, it is highly important to understand clearly the new attitudes and principles of action which Shoghi Effendi has established in the communications describing the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

Let us begin with these words found on page 12 of "America and the Most Great Peace";—"The remaining ten years (1923-1933), distinguished throughout by further internal development, as well as by a notable expansion of the international activities of a growing community, witnessed the completion of the superstructure of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár—the Administration's mighty bulwark, the symbol of its strength and the sign of its future glory."

This description of the Temple as the "bulwark" of the Administrative Order carries a profound significance. It can only mean that it is imperative for us to carry the construction forward to the first resting place—the external decoration of the entire dome unit, including the clerestory section—in order to create a means of protecting the Faith from the dire onslaughts it is destined to suffer in these coming years.

With that quotation let us consider another excerpt from page 64 of "The Dispen-

sation of Bahá'u'lláh."

"The rise and establishment of this Administrative Order—the shell that shields and enshrines so precious a gem—constitutes the hall-mark of this second and formative age of the Bahá'í era. It will come to be regarded, as it recedes farther and farther from our eyes, as the chief agency empowered to usher in the concluding phase, the consummation of this glorious Dispensation."

Here the Guardian makes it clear that the fundamental aim of the Cause at this stage is to establish the Order which will (page 52 of the same communication) "assert its claim and demonstrate its capacity to be regarded not only as the nucleus but the very pattern of the New World Order destined to embrace in the fulness of time the whole of mankind." What the Guardian feels it necessary for Bahá'ís to realize and appreciate is that this Faith is a reality in no wise merely repeating and duplicating the Revelations of the past. "It should be noted (page 53) in this connection that this Administrative Order is fundamentally different from anything that any Prophet has previously established, inasmuch as Bahá'u'lláh has Himself revealed its principles, established its institutions, appointed the person to interpret His Word and conferred the necessary authority on the body designed to supplement and apply His legislative ordinances. . . . Nowhere in the sacred scriptures of any of the world's religious systems, nor even in the writings of the Inaugurator of the Bábi Dispensation, do we find any provisions establishing a covenant or providing for an administrative order that can compare in scope and authority with those that lie at the very basis of the Bahá'í Dispensation."

Thus it is clear that any believer who might seek to understand his relation to the Bahá'í Faith by reproducing the attitudes and principles controlling the early and most faithful Christians, would fail to base his faith and practice upon the new foundation. What we have given us today is not only the spiritual Revelation for the renewal of the inner life but also the social Revelation for the attainment of citizenship in the world community.

A vivid light is thrown upon the significance of the Administrative Order by this reference which the Guardian made on page 21 of the "America and the Most Great Peace":—"In a world writhing with pain and declining into chaos this community—the vanguard of the liberating forces of Bahá'u'lláh—succeeded in the years following 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing in raising high

above the institutions established by its sister communities in East and West what may well constitute the chief pillar of that future House of Justice—a House which posterity will regard as the last refuge of a tottering civilization.”

How different an institution the House of Justice is from any church or other religious organization in the past! It is this element of responsibility for the preservation and welfare of humanity itself that makes membership in the Bahá'í Faith so much more than the passive acceptance of any articles of creed or than any subjective happiness that might arise from the practise of personal mysticism. “Alone of all the Revelations gone before it,” the Guardian declared on page 54 of “The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh,” “this Faith has, through the explicit directions, the repeated warnings, the authenticated safeguards incorporated and elaborated in its teachings, succeeded in raising a structure which the bewildered followers of bankrupt and broken creeds might well approach and critically examine, and seek, ere it is too late, the invulnerable security of its world-embracing shelter.”

In the light of these explanations, every devoted believer might well inquire, how can the individual Bahá'í, conscious of his own weaknesses and limitations, reach out to receive some portion of that Bounty which the Supreme Manifestation has brought to the world?

An indication of the true answer is given in the Will and Testament, in those passages which establish the Guardianship and inaugurate, under his direction, the House of Justice established by Bahá'u'lláh. “They (members of the House of Justice), and not the body of those who either directly or indirectly elect them, have thus been made the recipients of the divine guidance which is at once the life-blood and ultimate safeguard of this Revelation.” (Dispensation, page 61).

Just as the power of the Holy Spirit inspired those who endeavored faithfully to carry out the Master's instructions in His day, and was withdrawn from those who sought to worship Bahá'u'lláh without recognition of the Center of the Covenant, so now the confirming spirit is with those who center their lives upon the Guardian's general instructions, and find it possible to unite a spiritual attitude with the outer task of developing the World Order already, though so weak and immature, living in the Bahá'í administrative institutions.

What is vitally needed at this time is for us all to receive the new and more potent impetus that pours forth from the Guardian

to bless all workers fully active and conscious of their mission. It is no longer sufficient for any Bahá'í to say that he “accepts” the authority of his local Assembly. This passive attitude must be transformed into a devoted and sincere effort to assist in carrying out every activity and plan which the local Assembly adopts. The word “authority” perhaps blinds us to the deeper reality, that the Spiritual Assembly is the instrument through which the divine blessings flow to every member of the community from the higher source. There is a world of difference between mere willingness *not to disobey* and a heartfelt and passionate yearning to help with all our force the Spiritual Assembly in all its capacity to serve the Cause. The Holy Spirit permeates the universe, but it blesses with its mysterious forces only those who are *inwardly and outwardly part of the oneness* which Bahá'u'lláh has created in this Day. To transmute passive acceptance into active and dynamic loyalty of action is the supreme issue confronting every member of the American Bahá'í community.

Similarly, the local Assembly and its community, to be fully and completely Bahá'í, must not simply “accept the authority of the National Spiritual Assembly” and refrain from infringing that authority—the local community must make the general plans and activities of the National Assembly its first and most vital concern. Only in so doing does it stand in the station of receiving the spiritual reinforcements reaching humanity through the Guardian. A local Bahá'í community is not an independent body chartered to maintain activities entirely distinct from those in other local communities, but every local community is part of one larger body administered by the National Spiritual Assembly, which in turn possesses no independence but on the contrary is engaged in carrying out the Guardian's instructions and advices.

Let us recall Shoghi Effendi's words concerning the relation of local to National Spiritual Assembly reported on page 13 of *Bahá'í News*, June, 1934: “However, in view of the principle that local activities should always be subordinated to the national interests, needs and requirements of the Faith . . .” etc. And “Just as all local institutions, whether administrative or otherwise, must under all circumstances be considered as subsidiary to national organizations, so also local circular letters should be viewed as secondary in importance compared to the national organ of Bahá'í activities. This principle, however, should not be interpreted as being detrimental to the local interests of the Bahá'í community, but as an essen-

tial, nay indispensable means whereby the administrative system of the Cause can work with efficiency and order." And, "Just as the local Bahá'í fund must under all circumstances be subordinated to the national fund. . . . Such a coordination between local and national efforts is indispensable, not only due to its economic advantages, but essentially due to the fact that upon the application of the principle underlying this process must inevitably depend the effective working of the entire administrative machinery of the Faith. There is order, coordination and system in the Cause, and not a jungle of conflicting interests and of continually clashing wills. . . . Local activities should always be subordinated to those of a national character and importance. This is intended not to minimize the rôle of the local Assembly in the administrative order, but to establish and insure a sane relationship between that body and the national organism of the Cause."

Since the Guardian has given emphasis to this matter, we may be certain that it represents an important step to be taken in our collective attitude toward the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Therefore the friends are urged to study carefully the Guardian's list of the objectives and aims which the National Assembly is to adopt at this time, because without a truly united and active national community the Assembly can have no power to carry out such important and difficult tasks.

It is in the development of the National Fund that the local communities can render the most direct assistance at this time. For as we complete the dome unit we create the "mighty bulwark" of the administrative order, and as we develop and safeguard the administrative order we contribute to the World Order upon which the life of humanity itself depends.

There is no intention in this statement to minimize the importance of local Bahá'í activities. The teaching programs now being carried out by many Spiritual Assemblies are truly notable and are producing an increase in the active membership of the Faith. The major purpose of the National Spiritual Assembly, in fact, consists in reinforcing in every possible way the capacity of the local Assemblies to serve the Cause. But the fact remains that the twigs cannot prosper if the branch upon which they depend is deprived of any portion of its allotted strength. Through the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, in its spiritual mystery and its outward and visible glory, our combined efforts have in the past few years multiplied a hundred fold the power of every teacher to convey the divine Message. The Temple has created a magnet at-

tracting the confirmation of the Holy Spirit upon the services of every loyal believer, without distinction of geographical nearness or remoteness from the physical edifice.

Now we are called upon to complete that portion of the task which represents the perfect crown of the Temple—the external decoration of the dome unit. This task can only be completed if we become one organic national Bahá'í community, imbued with one aim and inspired by one spirit. Therefore let us consider afresh the relations of the local community to the central national body, that the many small lakes may become one great sea, every drop of which moves under the one same impulse. Such a degree of unity will overcome our separate weaknesses and limitations, and the effect will be one of irresistible, forward-moving power. Many and urgent are the demands upon the National Assembly to contribute to the protection of the Faith in other countries, and these demands will increase during the years to come. By meeting the Guardian's standard of achievement now, our united capacity for service to Bahá'u'lláh will forge a mighty instrument for the Guardian's use in establishing *World Order*.

"The National Assembly is the trusted guardian and the mainspring of the manifold activities and interests of every national community in the Bahá'í world. It constitutes the sole link that binds the communities to the International House of Justice, the supreme administrative body in the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh."—N. S. A.

## OBLIGATION TO ENFORCE LAWS OF FAITH

With regard to the closing of the Tarbiat Schools: the school authorities have, in enforcing the observance of Bahá'í anniversaries, acted on the advice and direction of the Guardian. These Schools, being *independent and official* Bahá'í institutions, could not very well ignore, much less violate the express provisions and laws of the Aqdas. Had they any connection with government institutions, or had their ownership and control been shared by non-Bahá'ís, the situation would have been different. This distinction between institutions that are under full or partial Bahá'í control is of a fundamental importance. Institutions that are entirely managed by Bahá'ís are, for reasons that are only too obvious, under the obligation of enforcing all the laws and ordinances of the Faith, especially those whose observance constitutes a matter of conscience. There is no reason, no justification whatever, that they should act otherwise, and any restric-

tion which the government may impose upon them in this connection would necessarily constitute a violation of the individual's right to freedom in matters of religious belief. The situation is different when an institution is run partly by Bahá'ís, or is completely owned by the government. In this case the believers, while anxious to observe all prescribed Bahá'í Feasts and Anniversaries, should also take into consideration the rights and interests of their non-Bahá'í partners and associates, and not to force these to stop working when they are under no moral or religious obligation to do so.—**SHOGHI EFFENDI.**

### **FUTURE TEMPLE CONTRACTS**

He also wishes me to express his approval of your suggestion that as soon as the ornamentation work of the clerestory section of the Temple is completed no new contract be signed for the next unit unless the entire sum required for the contract has already been collected. Economic conditions, both within and without the Cause, are nowadays too unstable to allow us to undertake any extensive scheme before insuring its uninterrupted and successful prosecution.—**SHOGHI EFFENDI.**

### **FUNCTION OF REVIEWING COMMITTEE**

The functions of the Reviewing and Editorial Committees have been combined in one committee, which is to carry out the following general procedure: —

1. Determine whether a manuscript conforms to the Bahá'í teachings.
2. Determine whether the manuscript conforms to adequate standards of literary style and taste.
3. Determine whether the manuscript meets a real need in the Cause.—**N. S. A.**

### **ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES**

As regards the activities of the economic committee of the National Assembly; Shoghi Effendi fully sympathizes with the desire of some of the members to see the committee find ways and means to put into practice the economic teachings of the Cause, as explained in some of the recorded writings and sayings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master. But he believes that the time is not yet ripe for such activities. First we have to study the economic teachings in the light of modern problems more thoroughly so that we may advocate what the Founders of the Faith say

and not what we conjecture from their writings. There is great difference between sounding a great general principle and finding its application to actual prevailing conditions.

Secondly, the Cause is not financially in a position to launch itself in such undertakings at present. Such plans need great financial backing to be worked out in a permanent form. In time, Shoghi Effendi hopes all these things will come to pass. For the present we have to consolidate our basic institutions and spread the teachings and spirit of the Faith among the public.—**SHOGHI EFFENDI.**

### **QUALIFICATIONS OF TEACHERS**

Whenever local Assemblies desire the services of any Bahá'í teacher not under its own jurisdiction the Assembly shall apply for a teacher through the National Teaching Committee, and the National Teaching Committee in providing teachers on such requests is to apply the following standard of qualifications: Full knowledge of the teachings, including the World Order letters of the Guardian; full loyalty to the administrative order of the Cause; sincerity and severance from all local situations and problems.—**N. S. A.**

### **ATTACKS FROM FORMER BELIEVERS**

As a principle the Guardian wishes the N. S. A. to disregard such futile attacks which those who have dissociated themselves from the Administration feel inclined to direct against it. This is a rule which applies not only to a few individuals but to all those who reject the Administrative Order after having identified themselves with the Faith.—**SHOGHI EFFENDI.**

### **PUBLISHING ACTIVITIES**

1. The Publishing Committee from this date is to be regarded as a producer and distributor of Bahá'í literature on a wholesale as distinguished from a retail basis; retail sales being more economically handled through local Bahá'í libraries, general book sellers and other sales agencies.

2. Literature intended for free distribution shall be, in the first instance, recommended by the Teaching Committee, and upon approval and appropriation by the N. S. A. printed by the Publishing Committee. Appropriations for or apportionments of free literature from editions of works already in hand or already authorized to be

printed will be made by the N. S. A. as occasion arises.

3. On the larger standard books, recommendations for reprints or new issues of single books may be made by the Publishing Committee to the N. S. A. and are subject to the approval of that body prior to any undertaking or contract being made for printing.

4. The Publishing Committee before printing any new book or pamphlet, or reprinting any existing book or pamphlet, shall obtain from this body a specific and final resolution authorizing its publication, which resolution shall include the record of its adequate and proper review by the Reviewing Committee of this body, and after such authorization has been obtained, no changes nor modifications shall be made in the text or general make-up of any book or pamphlet.

5. Whenever the National Assembly orders a publication, such as "America's Spiritual Mission" or "The Unfoldment of World Civilization" for free distribution to believers, it shall pay the cost in cash; whenever the National Assembly votes a literature budget to any Committee, it shall likewise pay the Publishing Committee the value of such budgets in cash; and whenever the National Assembly finances a book like "The Bahá'í World" which the Publishing Committee cannot at present undertake, each of such works shall be handled like "The Dawn-Breakers", namely, as a separate item, with the cash income from sales either paid back to the National Assembly or put into a special fund of the Publishing Committee for the financing of future books.—N. S. A.

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

a. The "Real Bahá'í Archives," i. e., the writings of the Founders of the Cause. These would include any original writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh that may come into the possession of the National Archives; also, photostatic copies and authoritative illuminated copies of Their original writings. Under this heading may also be classed the Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed to American Assemblies and believers, and the letters of the Guardian to National and local Assemblies and to individual believers.

b. Such National Spiritual Assembly records as from time to time may be turned over by that body, and copies of all National Bahá'í publications.

c. Records, objects, and photographs of particular national interest, as those dealing with the Temple, the work of national and international teachers, and The Bahá'í World.

d. Individual records and relics of any form only when touched by (directly associated with) the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, the Master, the Guardian, or the N. S. A.

The cooperation of local corresponding secretaries is requested in the collecting and forwarding of material which should be preserved in the National Archives. The attention and active interest of the friends should be encouraged in both local and National Archives through consultation in Spiritual Assemblies and at Nineteen-Day Feasts.—N. S. A.

## STATUS OF REGIONAL COMMITTEES

In order to prevent confusion between the functions of the National and Regional Committees, it is recorded that each Regional Committee is to be responsible for all decisions involving action, and need not consult the National Teaching Committee with reference to activities within the region. It is also recorded that the Regional Committees have no administrative authority over local Assemblies but are to assist the local Assemblies in every possible way and also make possible a coordination of Inter-Assembly activity.—N. S. A.

## YOUTH ACTIVITIES

There are two important points which Shoghi Effendi would like you always to emphasize. In the first place he would strongly urge you to cooperate, heart and soul, with all the various Assemblies, groups and committees throughout the Bahá'í world, to ask for their assistance and help for the successful discharge of your duties and obligations, and in this way to try to build up an active and ready mind among the Bahá'í youth throughout the world. In other words, you should not confine your activities to the national sphere but you should strive to create under the supervision of your N. S. A. an international body of active young Bahá'í men and women who, conscious of their manifold and sacred responsibilities, will unanimously arise to spread the Holy Word. The second point which the Guardian wishes you to stress and to keep always in mind is the necessity for every loyal and active member of your committee to fully concentrate on the thorough study and understanding of the spiritual and administrative principles of the Faith, as a necessary step for active and fruitful teaching. You should first equip yourself with the necessary amount of knowledge about the Cause, and then, and only then, try to teach.—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

## RESPONSIBILITY OF NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

The institution of National Spiritual Assemblies has been established in the Bahá'í teachings for the fulfilment of a number of important functions. These functions are described in the Declaration of Trust and By-laws which, after approval by the Guardian, became the controlling instrument for the affairs of the Cause in the United States and Canada.

As set forth in that instrument, the National Spiritual Assembly is a body having a continuous and uninterrupted existence and possessing paramount authority within the physical area of its jurisdiction, the exercise of this authority being expressly subject to the higher authority of the Guardian and also of the Universal House of Justice when that body comes into existence.

A summary of the duties and responsibilities of the Assembly reveals how vitally important it is for its own members to have full mutual understanding and agreement of and loyalty to their individual and collective rights and obligations as trustees under the Declaration of Trust.

1. The Assembly has final power over the voting right and Bahá'í membership of every believer in the United States and Canada.
2. The Assembly recognizes the existence or non-existence of every local Spiritual Assembly.
3. The Assembly can take jurisdiction of any matter affecting two or more believers or two or more local Assemblies.
4. The Assembly makes final decision on all plans and suggestions advanced by individual believers, local communities, local Assemblies and Convention delegates.
5. The Assembly administers the collective funds of the Cause in the United States and Canada.
6. The Assembly legislates when procedures and detailed laws are necessary.
7. The Assembly is executive as well as legislative and judicial in character.
8. The Assembly represents the believers and local Spiritual Assemblies in relation to the Guardian, and the Guardian in relation to the believers and local Assemblies.
9. The Assembly is the American electoral body for the election of the Universal House of Justice.

In discharging these several functions, the Assembly seeks the ideal of unanimity in all

its decisions. It however permits action to be taken by majority vote when a quorum exists in any duly called meeting. It has recorded its obligation to obtain the views and record the votes of absent members on all matters of vital importance, in order to have final decision in such matters made by a majority of the entire membership and not by a majority of a quorum.

The right of a majority to carry a decision is derived from Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and from the same source is derived the obligation of the minority to accept and obey the will of the majority. No distinction between majority and minority votes or views is recognized after final decision has been made.

From time to time the Assembly has taken cognizance of the fact that this principle has not fully been observed, when informed that some member has expressed dissatisfaction to other believers with actions duly taken at various meetings. The minutes of the meeting held on November 12 and 13, 1932, for example, contain the following statement: "It was the sense of the meeting that matters presented at meetings of this body do not become actions of the Assembly until a unanimous or majority vote has been cast after which they are actions of all the members and, therefore, it would destroy the spiritual power of the National Assembly to discriminate between the individual attitudes on any question after the question is settled, or to make public any record of attitudes held before the vote is taken. In order to maintain the true character of the institution of the National Spiritual Assembly no member is authorized to discuss outside of the meeting the individual opinions of any of the members. There should be no discussion about the activities of the National Spiritual Assembly except its actions as recorded in votes."

In practice, full liberty has been given each member to express his views and advance his opinion during the period of discussion preceding the casting of votes, even to the extent of encroachment upon the rights of other members.

The Master, in a Tablet quoted by Shoghi Effendi on page 21 of "Bahá'í Administration", referred to the subject of Assembly decisions as follows: "The members . . . must take counsel together in such wise that no occasion for ill-feeling or discord may arise. This can be attained when every member expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument. Should any one oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed. The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the

clash of differing opinions. If after discussion, a decision be carried unanimously, well and good; but if, the Lord forbid, differences of opinion should arise, a majority of voices must prevail."

Experience has made it clear that the Assembly can not fulfill any of its duties and responsibilities with more than partial success, and above all can not set an example of unity to the body of believers, so long as any member expresses dissatisfaction and objection to its decisions in conversation with other believers, and so long as any member by word or attitude conveys directly or indirectly, a spirit of criticism of the Assembly or its individual members. The highest obligation of every member of the Assembly is to the institution of the National Spiritual Assembly itself. No member can justifiably assert any higher loyalty, whether to his local Assembly, his local Community or to personal friends among the believers. It is the understanding of the members now in office that the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, unlike political democracies, does not make its elected representatives mere agents of their electors, and unlike political aristocracies contains no institutions of special privilege whose members' personal or class interests are made ends unto themselves, while unlike religious hierarchies the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh recognizes no persons or institutions or offices possessing authority to establish dogma, claim spiritual rights over others or otherwise change and nullify any part of His Revelation. The National Spiritual Assembly exists in order to uphold the Cause, promote its interests and safeguard the unity of the entire American Bahá'í community. In order to render this service, its attention is directed to the Bahá'í teachings and to the instructions received from the Guardian, and its responsibility cannot be limited by the wishes and views of any believer or group of believers.

The National Spiritual Assembly, having attained definite understanding of the nature of the institution, records its conviction that the fundamental principle of unity, manifested in full and complete loyalty on the part of its members to the results of decisions made by unanimous or majority vote, must be upheld at all costs by every person holding office as member of this Bahá'í body.

In any case of internal controversy affecting the membership of the National Assembly which cannot be remedied by full and frank consultation of all the members, the matter shall be reported to the Guardian and his advice sought before final action is taken.  
—N. S. A.

## ASSEMBLY CONSULTATION

It is recorded that the following statement was drawn up and presented and unanimously adopted:

1. Consultation as defined by the Master in a passage quoted by the Guardian on page 21 of "Bahá'í Administration" means the discussion and frank expression of opinion by Assembly members personally present at a meeting. Consultation does not mean the exchange of views through correspondence.
2. An Assembly meeting is defined in Article VI of the By-Laws as follows: "Five members of the National Assembly present at a meeting shall constitute a quorum, and a majority vote of those present and constituting a quorum shall be sufficient for the conduct of business, except as otherwise provided in these By-Laws, and with due regard to the principle of unity and cordial fellowship involved in the institution of a Spiritual Assembly."
3. Actions taken by the Assembly at a meeting in conformity with the provisions of this By-Law are equally binding upon all Assembly members, whether present or absent from the meeting at which the actions are taken.
4. Any member may ask for reconsideration of any Assembly action by requesting the Secretary to add this as one of the subjects on the Agenda of a later meeting. The action questioned, however, stands as an Assembly action until changed by vote at a meeting. The Master enjoins upon all members of Local and National Assemblies the solemn obligation to abandon personal views after decisions have been made.  
—N. S. A.
5. There is no immunity from responsibility for any member of the National Assembly at any time from the collective actions of this body.
6. Matters presented at meetings of this body do not become actions of the Assembly until a unanimous or majority vote has been cast, after which they are actions of all the members and, therefore, it would destroy the spiritual power of the National Assembly to discriminate between the individual attitudes on any question after the question is settled, or to make public any record of attitudes held before the vote is taken. In order to maintain the true character of the institution of the National Spiritual Assembly no member



is authorized to discuss outside of the meeting the individual opinions of any of the members. There should be no discussion about the activities of the National Spiritual Assembly except its actions as recorded in votes.

## INTERNAL PROCEDURE

(Compiled from Minutes)

### I. International Activities

This body shall refrain from action on matters having an international Bahá'í scope until after consultation with the Guardian.

#### 2. Publication of Guardian's Letters

All communications from the Guardian intended for the believers should be issued as quickly as possible for general distribution.

#### 3. Calendar of Annual Actions

1. Notice of first meeting. Immediately following the election, the member receiving the highest number of votes shall give notice of the first meeting to the other eight members, by telegraph or telephone if necessary. Members unable to attend the meeting shall have opportunity to cast votes for the election of Officers by telegraph or telephone. In the event that a tie vote makes a second ballot necessary, the vote cast by the absent members in the first ballot shall be counted by the teller in the second ballot.
2. The principal business to be taken up at the first meeting following the Annual Election shall be the election of officers.
3. The first meeting shall also act to notify the Trustees of the names of the Trustees who have been elected.
4. The first meeting shall also act to secure all Assembly records in the possession of officers and members of the outgoing Assembly.
5. The first meeting shall also act to audit the Annual Financial Report and as soon as convenient to issue copies thereof to the Guardian and to Local Spiritual Assemblies.
6. The first meeting shall also act to direct the Secretary to secure a full and complete result of the election of Local Spiritual Assemblies held on the previous twenty-first day of April and report that result to the Assembly for its early consideration, that a Directory

may be published for the use of the Assembly, its Committees, and of the Local Spiritual Assemblies.

7. The first meeting shall also act to direct the Treasurer to secure the Annual Financial Reports of the Trustees and present these Reports to the Assembly for its early consideration.
8. The first meeting shall also take steps toward the preparation of an Annual Budget to be adopted for the guidance of the Assembly in its financial affairs.
9. The first meeting shall also direct the Secretary to submit as soon as convenient a full and complete list of all Committees appointed by the outgoing Assembly, with the date or dates of expiration of their respective appointments, for the information of the Assembly in making its committee appointments.
10. The first meeting shall also act to adopt a National Office for the conduct of affairs of the Assembly and the maintenance of its files and records.
11. The date and place of the next Annual meeting shall be selected at a meeting held at such time during the Assembly's term of office as shall permit the Secretary to observe the following schedule of actions:—
  - A. Four and one half months prior to the Annual Meeting, an Application for Participation in the Annual Convention to be issued to all Local Spiritual Assemblies, this application to be returned within thirty days, to furnish the Assembly with the data necessary for assigning the 95 delegates to local Bahá'í communities by proportionate representation.
  - B. Notice of the Annual Meeting to be issued at least sixty days prior to the Convention date. This Notice to include the following matters: *One*, time and place of the Convention; *Two*, request that Local Assemblies call a meeting for the election of delegates; *Three*, list of Participating Communities, with number of delegates assigned to each; *Four*, a Certificate of Election to be filled out by each Assembly.
  - C. As soon as possible after April 1, a blank ballot, a copy of the Convention Agenda, and information about voting to be sent each delegate.
  - D. Preparation of Annual Report, including Annual Reports by Committees, in time to be published and dis-

tributed to delegates in advance of the Convention.

- E. Appointment of Convention Committees.
  - F. Preparation of Convention Agenda, the principal item of which is the election of the National Spiritual Assembly.
12. The Assembly shall direct the Secretary by April first, to issue to Local Spiritual Assemblies and groups a Certificate of Election of Local Spiritual Assemblies, with the request that this Certificate be returned as soon as possible after the election.
  13. Temple, Green Acre, Malden, Wilhelm and Bosch Trustees to file Certificate of election with County Clerk.

#### **4. Distribution of Bahá'í News**

The Secretary was directed to make it clear that the distribution of *Bahá'í News* should be confined to declared and recognized believers.

#### **5. Pilgrims' Notes**

N. S. A. will not in the future ask for the authentication of any pilgrims' notes nor cooperate in their distribution but refer exclusively to the Guardian's general communications to this body and the American believers for its source of information and guide of action.

#### **6. Form of Minutes**

Each letter, document, or other item coming before the Assembly and requiring action is to be listed and described in weekly reports from the Secretary, and these items when considered at meetings are to carry the descriptive number given them in the weekly reports without other description or identification. The weekly reports therefore are to be considered as part of the Minutes. Any numbered items listed in the reports but not referred to in the Minutes represent either unfinished business or subjects not requiring action but merely mentioned in the reports for purposes of record.

#### **7. Weekly Reports**

Voted to direct the Secretary to issue to each member a weekly letter including a brief financial statement and a report of current correspondence and other matters before the Assembly, these weekly letters to refer to these items in numbered sequence, so that reference to any item in the Minutes can be

made by simply referring to the number of the item in the weekly letters, and these weekly letters are to take the place of the agenda hitherto issued before each meeting.

#### **8. Recording of Votes**

Voted that future records of all votes passed by the Assembly, whether majority or unanimous, should be simply expressed as voted, without other qualifications or details of the vote.

#### **9. Acceptance of Declaration of Trust**

In connection with the approval of new local Assemblies the Secretary was instructed to submit in each case a blank form to be filled out by the local community, formally recording their acceptance of the Declaration of Trust and By-laws as the legal structure of the Bahá'í Cause in the United States and Canada.

#### **10. Report of Individual Attendance**

The question of whether individual attendance of members of the National Assembly should be reported to the Convention was discussed and it was the sense of the meeting that while the National Assembly is responsible for its collective actions, it is not responsible for making reports of the actions of its individual members.

#### **11. Correspondence with Individuals**

The Secretary requested advice and instruction in dealing with letters to this body by individual believers who object to or complain about matters of National Bahá'í policy. After consideration it was moved, seconded and voted to instruct the Secretary in these cases to inform such individuals that the N. S. A. has adopted the policy that these general Bahá'í matters must be first discussed with their own local Spiritual Assembly and the National Assembly will respond to all such matters presented through the local Assembly; it being understood that communications from individual believers on personal matters are to be answered direct.

#### **12. Consultation with Believers**

Voted to record the following procedure in connection with consultation between the Assembly and Committees and individual believers: the committee representative, or in-

dividual believer, is to report as fully as possible, and the Chairman is to represent the Assembly in asking any necessary questions. Members of the Assembly desiring to ask further questions are to refer them to the Chairman and not to the group or individual present for consultation.

### 13. Office of Treasurer

The Treasurer of this body shall observe the following procedure in making payment of funds from any fund or funds held in the name of the National Spiritual Assembly:

1. All appropriations included in the Annual Budget duly adopted by the Assembly are payable when due by the Treasurer without further authority or specific action on the part of the Assembly.

2. All extra-budget appropriations duly voted by the Assembly are payable when due by the Treasurer without further authority or specific action on the part of the Assembly, unless in voting the appropriation the Assembly specifically made it payable by the Treasurer after approval by some other member, committee, agent or representative, in which case the Treasurer is bound to secure the specified approval before making any payment on such appropriation.

3. After examining the budget adopted by this body, the Treasurer may request the Assembly to include provision for approval before payment of any item or items in the budget which in the Treasurer's judgment cannot efficiently be passed upon by the Treasurer alone.

In all business arrangements entered into by the N. S. A., where salary or other form of financial allowance is involved over an extended period of time, the Assembly shall make the agreement in writing and for a term not exceeding one year, and also that expense accounts contingent upon the holding of office come to an end with the expiration of the term of said office.

After consideration of the advantage on the one hand of allowing believers to express their devotion by gifts of jewelry and other merchandise, and of the disadvantage on the other hand of assuming responsibility for the sale of such articles, for which the National Assembly has no facilities other than the individual believers who make such donations, it was moved, seconded and voted to direct the Treasurer to accept as contributions to the National Fund only donations made in currency or marketable securities and to refer to the National Assembly for specific action in each case, all proposals for donations to be made in the form of real estate, whether land or buildings alone or

land and buildings.

Voted to empower and authorize the Treasurer to sell on behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly for the benefit of the National Bahá'í Fund any and all such stocks, bonds and other securities as from time to time are sent him as contributions to said fund.

A monthly report to be embodied in the Minutes, based upon the Annual Budget and recording all sums paid out under each budget item. A list of checks issued by the Treasurer during the month. Total contributions received since the last meeting and from the beginning of the fiscal year. A calendar of fixed amounts payable during the fiscal year, with due dates, including sums payable by the Temple and all other Trustees; insurance premiums, wages, personal expense accounts, interests on loans and mortgages, taxes, etc. Specific request for vote on all appropriations needed during the current month not already voted under the Annual Budget.

In case of any contribution of funds from interested friends who are not members of a local Bahá'í community, such contributions can be accepted with the understanding that they will be used for the purpose of comforting and aiding people in distress or for other social welfare work, in accordance with the Guardian's letter of Oct. 25, 1929.

Voted to direct the Treasurer to pay only actual traveling expenses of Assembly members in connection with their attendance at meetings, and other expenses of Assembly members are only to be paid by special vote of the National Assembly.

Henceforth if any believer offers to finance an activity which has been approved but which cannot be financed directly from the National Fund, the National Assembly shall accept such an offer without permitting any change in the conditions under which the activity in question should be carried on in accordance with the principles and methods of Bahá'í administration; and that the believer shall turn such a donation over to the National Fund and not pay the expenses direct, so that the responsibility shall rest upon the National Assembly.

All payments under contract and all contractual relations shall be under the direct control of the N. S. A. and not of any committee and all contracts incurred by this body shall be made with forms quoting Article 2, Sections 1 and 2 of the Declaration of Trust. It is understood that this latter provision will not apply in cases where this body had voted a definite appropriation to a committee for an itemized budget duly recorded in these Minutes.

**14. Holding of Real Estate**

In cases of gifts of land in the future to the Cause, separate Indentures shall be made in each case.

**15. Application for Leases**

Applications from Bahá'ís for lease of land for building sites on property controlled by Bahá'í Trustees will be acted on in the order received. The form of lease to be given will provide for the following factors: Term of lease, use of site and annual rental; minimum and maximum amounts to be spent for construction; provision of water and light; a fee for reservation of sites with a time limit; maintenance of Bahá'í control over the ownership and occupancy of homes, with a predetermined method of valuation in the event that a cottage is sold or comes under the management of the Trustees through a property owner's repudiation of the Faith.

**16. Tax Exemption on Donations**

A letter was presented from the U. S. Treasury Department, dated December first, 1927, recognizing the National Assembly as a duly organized religious body qualified to receive donations and bequests and granting the usual tax exemption to donations received by the Treasurer of this body.

**17. Changing Date of Meetings**

When the date of the Meeting has been recorded in the Minutes, no individual member shall request, between Meetings, to have the date altered, but every member shall be in duty bound to report to the Chairman not later than ten days before the Meeting if he or she is unable to attend; and in the event that such reports indicate that a quorum cannot be obtained for the date already fixed, the Chairman shall determine the date when the Meeting is to be called.

**18. Correspondence in Matters Already Clarified**

Letters addressed to the National Assembly on matters which the Assembly has already decided by specific vote or on which a clear precedent exists in the Assembly records, may be answered by the Secretary without further Assembly action. In such cases the Secretary is to cite the source in conveying the Assembly's view on the matter.

**PALESTINE BRANCH OF AMERICAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

It would interest you to know that the American National Spiritual Assembly, Palestine Branch, has been incorporated according to the law in Palestine, not as a foreign corporation or a charitable trust, but as a "religious society" enjoying all the privileges attaching to recognized religious institutions in the Holy Land. Shoghi Effendi hopes to transfer to the name of your Assembly additional plots of land in the vicinity of the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh at Akka and of the Báb at Mount Carmel as soon as he obtains the necessary authorization from the authorities, inasmuch as the right of holding real estate by religious institutions is strictly limited according to Palestinian law. This step which he has taken, which has necessitated many months of careful and delicate negotiations with both the local and central authorities, our Guardian feels will constitute the prelude to the eventual formation and recognition, by the Palestine Government, of a properly constituted International Bahá'í Assembly, functioning as an independent religious body in the Holy Land.  
—SHOGHI EFFENDI.

**ON APPEALS FROM LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES**

In order to clarify the important subject of the right of individual members of local Bahá'í communities to make appeal to the National Spiritual Assembly for reconsideration of actions taken by a Local Spiritual Assembly, and to set forth for the information of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada a definite procedure controlling the making of appeals to the National Bahá'í body, the members of the National Spiritual Assembly have adopted the following statement and incorporated it in the minutes of the Meeting held on December 27 and 28, 1932.

1. The By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly contain the following references to the subject of appeals.

*Article I.* "It shall, in such cases as it considers suitable and necessary, entertain appeals from the decisions of Local Spiritual Assemblies and shall have the right of final decision in all cases where the qualifications of an individual or group for continued voting rights and membership in the Bahá'í body are in question."

*Article VII. Section 6.* "The Local Assembly shall pass upon and approve the qualifications of each member of the Bahá'í community before such members shall be admitted to voting membership; but where an individual is dissatisfied with the ruling of the Local Spiritual Assembly upon his Bahá'í qualifications, such individual may appeal from the ruling to the National Assembly, which shall thereupon take jurisdiction of and finally decide the case."

*Article VII. Section 9.* "All questions arising between two or more Local Spiritual Assemblies or between members of different Bahá'í communities, shall be submitted in the first instance to the National Assembly, which shall have original and final jurisdiction in all such matters."

*Note:* Article VII. Section 9, properly speaking, does not refer to the subject of appeals, since an appeal is from a lower to a higher jurisdiction, and the National Spiritual Assembly is the only Bahá'í body having jurisdiction in cases of an Inter-Assembly character. It is quoted here, however, as an instruction to be noted by believers in their study of the principles of administration.

2. It will be seen from the above quotations that the right of individuals to appeal is subject to the decision of the National Spiritual Assembly whether the appeal is important enough to be considered or of a trivial nature and therefore not to be entertained. This brings out the vital principle that the National Spiritual Assembly is not a passive body compelled to deal with all matters brought to its attention, but has paramount executive and legislative powers in addition to its function as a judicial body.

3. Since with the lapse of time it becomes difficult to bring together all evidence bearing upon a situation or matter, the National Assembly has voted that all appeals must be received within sixty days of the date when the action or decision of the Local Spiritual Assembly has been made known to the believer appealing from that action or decision. The period of sixty days is ample in which individual believers can take steps to safeguard their legitimate rights.

4. The National Spiritual Assembly will entertain only such appeals as are made from decisions of a Local Assembly after the individual believer who makes the appeal has presented his views to the Local Assembly and endeavored sincerely to solve the problem by local consultation. The members of the National Assembly believe that practically every Bahá'í problem can be removed by full and frank consultation on the part of the believers directly concerned. But this

does not mean that a dissatisfied believer is to agitate any matter among the members of the local Bahá'í community apart from the Local Spiritual Assembly. The responsibility for decisions is clearly placed upon the Local Spiritual Assemblies and not upon the believers of the community.

5. The National Spiritual Assembly can rightfully entertain only those appeals which express dissatisfaction with actions or decisions of a Local Assembly—it cannot be expected to deal with appeals which are an effort to deny the authority and power of the Local Assembly in general. The authority and power duly vested in Local Spiritual Assemblies will always be upheld and defended by the National Assembly. But where a duly elected Local Assembly acts unjustly toward a believer, or acts in such a way as to work some harm upon the Cause, an appeal to the National Assembly is entirely justified after consultation with the Local Assembly has proved fruitless.

6. The National Spiritual Assembly, in entertaining an appeal, will deal only with the believer or believers by whom the appeal has been made. The National Assembly will not recognize any believer's right to be represented by another believer nor by a non-Bahá'í attorney, advocate or representative. In becoming a voting member of the Bahá'í community, every believer accepts the recognized qualifications for membership, which include full acceptance of the power and authority duly vested in Local and National Assemblies, including the power to remove any name from the voting list if the recognized qualifications for membership are no longer observed. The right of every believer to be a member of the Bahá'í community is conditional upon continued faithfulness to the Cause, and that right is acquired by asserting one's acceptance of the qualifications for membership, and is not in any way a vested right nor a right that may be permanently claimed without permanence of loyalty and faithfulness to the Cause.

7. Appeals must be made in writing, and on receiving an appeal the National Assembly will request the Local Assembly to furnish an attested copy of its Minutes or other records bearing upon the matter in question, including a record of the consultation requested by the appellant. The nature of the appeal will be made known to the Local Assembly, and the Local Assembly be given opportunity to furnish a written explanation of the matter, before the National Assembly decides whether to entertain the appeal. By "attested copy" is meant a copy signed by the Secretary or other Officer of the Local As-

sembly duly chosen by the Local Assembly to furnish the record.

8. The National Assembly will announce both to the appellant and to the Local Assembly its decision, which decision is binding upon the appellant, the Local Assembly and the local Bahá'í community. In entertaining an appeal, the National Spiritual Assembly will endeavor to raise the problem from the realm of personality to the plane of the Teachings and Principles of Administration, and seek not merely to announce a final decision but also to point out wherever possible the grounds for true understanding and reconciliation on the part of the believers immediately affected by the problem appealed.

9. Unless the National Spiritual Assembly is entertaining an appeal of a strictly personal and private nature, the Local Spiritual Assembly should present the decision of the National Assembly to the entire local Bahá'í community, for the information and guidance of the community.

10. Local Assemblies are requested to give individual believers every opportunity for full and frank discussion of matters which seem to cause dissatisfaction, in order to prevent local problems coming to the point of formal appeal to the National Assembly. Local Assemblies should freely receive appeals for reconsideration of its decisions from members of the local Bahá'í community, and endeavor to turn these into occasions for increasing the spirit of true unity between itself and all members of the community. Believers having a grievance against their Local Spiritual Assembly, or against another believer in the community, have a right to present that grievance privately to the Local Assembly. If the Local Assembly considers a grievance between two or more members of the community, and cannot remove that grievance, it should refer the matter to the National Assembly for advice and assistance, after securing the approval of all parties to the grievance that the matter be referred to the National body. Any believer unwilling to have the grievance referred to the National Assembly must accept the decision of the Local Assembly in regard to the grievance. But when the grievance has been referred to the National Assembly with the approval of all the individual believers directly affected, all such believers are bound to accept the decision of the National body. Local Assemblies, like the National Assembly, should deal with believers directly and not through any representative.

11. Individual believers may justifiably appeal to the National Assembly not merely

in matters affecting themselves personally but also in larger matters affecting the Cause in their community. For example, if there be real evidence that a Local Assembly has not been properly elected, any Bahá'í in that community may and in fact should join with other local Bahá'ís in making the matter known to the National Assembly. In the same way, if a duly elected Assembly for any reason is unable or unwilling to hold regular meetings and function as a Local Assembly, it is incumbent upon the Bahá'ís of that community to report the matter to the National Assembly. In such case the National Assembly may order a new election.

12. A Local Assembly which finds itself in dispute with another Local Assembly may refer the matter to the National Assembly if the matter can not be settled by the two Local Assemblies in accordance with the Teachings and Principles of the Cause.

In conclusion, the members of the National Spiritual Assembly would emphasize the vital fact that in the Bahá'í Faith, all rights are balanced by the obligation to maintain true unity among the followers of Bahá'u'lláh. But "Justice is loved above all," and this statement on appeals has been prepared in order to make it possible for every believer to obtain the fullest measure of justice in relation to his Local Assembly and to his fellow Bahá'ís.—N. S. A.

## **PROCEDURE FOR CONDUCT OF JURIDICAL SESSIONS**

WHEREAS, the National Spiritual Assembly, by virtue of its stated powers and responsibilities, is from time to time required to exercise the jurisdiction of a court in determining matters of fact and of Bahá'í principle arising from actions, misunderstandings and disputes among the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, and WHEREAS, the National Spiritual Assembly is a Bahá'í institution in process of development toward the status of a House of Justice, which status is charged with jurisdiction of all manner of personal and community matters under the standard of divine Justice established in the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, therefore be it RESOLVED, that the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, seeking to fulfill its duties and responsibilities in the promotion of that Justice among believers, shall henceforth observe the following procedure when exercising jurisdiction over disputes:

1. Each case requiring judicial action by the Assembly shall be divided into three successive and distinct stages, viz. ;
  - A. The determination of all relevant facts.
  - B. The determination of what principle or principles in the Bahá'í teachings apply to said facts.
  - C. The determination of a final decision of the case based upon (1) a written record of facts duly accepted by the Assembly and (2) a written analysis of the fundamental principles involved, likewise duly accepted by the Assembly.
2. Any and all report or comment on the

- case, both before and after determination of a final decision, shall be confined to such reports and comments as are duly agreed upon by the Assembly and fully recorded in its Minutes.
  3. In arriving at its final decision, the Assembly shall endeavor faithfully to rise above all personal considerations, either of undue love and affection for or undue prejudice against any of the persons likely to be affected by that final decision; shall consider dispassionately the facts and principles at issue and not the persons, and shall strive in its decision of all disputes to manifest the reality of Bahá'u'lláh's teaching that "Justice is loved above all."—N. S. A.
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