

# **A Spiritual Assembly's Growing Pains**

Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum (Mary Maxwell)

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# A Spiritual Assembly's Growing Pains

## The Cast

### The Narrator

**The Narrator's Interlocutors**, Mr A and Mrs B.

**Mrs Harriet Wisely** (*middle-aged*), housewife; capable and kind.

**Mr Jack Smith**     {*An average couple,*     owner of a radio  
**Mrs Jane Smith**   *in their thirties}*     repair shop.

**Miss Martha Jones** (*about thirty, colored*), quiet, capable; has small dress-making shop.

**Miss Elizabeth Brisk** (*young*), efficient; an office secretary.

**Mr Clarence Friend** (*middle-aged*), reserved, fair-minded; salesman in drapery section of a department store.

**Mr Oscar J. Boom** (*middle-aged*), aggressive; sales representative for home appliances.

**Mrs Adelaide Cosmos** (*elderly*), learned but diffuse; the pioneer teacher to Fair-view.

**Mr George Penhold** (*elderly*), quiet by nature; a book-keeper by profession.

**Miss Mary Lou Fervor** (*twenty-one*), inexperienced, intense.

The scene of the play is laid in the city of Fairview; the action takes place in the apartment of Mrs Harriet Wisely.

Fairview is an average city of about fifty thousand inhabitants.

# A Spiritual Assembly's Growing Pains

## Scene one

The Narrator and his interlocutors appear in a small drawing room, and the Narrator addresses the audience.

**Narrator:** Friends, we are going to show you, in a brief form, some of the workings of a Bahá'í Spiritual Assembly; some of the blunders, some of the problems; how certain types of people fit better into one office, and others into another.

For, remember, we are all types! And, whether we like it or not, we all fall into different categories. This is the city of Fairview. At present there are only nine Bahá'ís here, and they are preparing to meet to elect the officers of Fairview's first Bahá'í Spiritual Assembly.

This is the apartment of Mrs Harriet Wisely, and here she comes, talking with the first arrivals, Mr Jack Smith and his wife, Jane.

Here is Miss Martha Jones, and with her are Miss Elizabeth Brisk and Mr Clarence Friend.

Following them is Mr Oscar J. Boom, who is entering with Mrs Adelaide Cosmos. Mrs Cosmos is the pioneer teacher to Fairview; and here is Mr George Penhold, an old Bahá'í from Chicago, who came out to help the work.

All the others, except Mrs Cosmos and Mr Penhold, have become believers during the last eighteen months ....

Now they are getting ready to vote for the officers of the Assembly ... (He withdraws, and the nine seated people are talking together.)

## Scene two

**Mrs Wisely:** Mrs Cosmos, won't you read a prayer?  
*(Mrs Cosmos recites a prayer.)*

Friends, I think it is only fitting that Mrs Cosmos should take charge of the meeting until the officers are elected.

*(All assent to this.)*

**Mr Cosmos:** Don't you think we should cast our ballots now for the officers?

**Mrs Wisely:** Yes, I'll get some paper.

*(Goes to the desk, and distributes paper and pencils to everyone.)*

**Mr Boom:** I suppose we vote for the Chairman first?

**Mr Friend:** That's right.

*(All are seen to vote. Mrs Wisely collects the ballots, and hands them to Mrs Cosmos.)*

**Mr Boom:** We should appoint tellers.

Cosmos: Oh, yes .... Well, Mr Boom, will you be one?—and you, Miss Brisk?

*(Mr Boom rises, takes the ballots, and he and Miss Brisk step to a corner of the room to count them.)*

**Boom:** The result of the ballot is Mrs Cosmos is elected Chairman.

**Cosmos:** Oh, my dear Friends .... I don't really think you should have elected me .... I feel so unworthy, so overwhelmed, I hardly know how to express my feel-

ings .... I just can't think where to begin. To think we are the first Bahá'í Assembly in Fairview ... the first ones to have this sacred trust ... the ones now responsible for the work of our beloved Cause here. ... I never knew when I came here how glorious the end would be ... really, it's quite overwhelming ... it's ...

**Boom:** Now I think we vote for the Vice-Chairman, don't we?

**Cosmos:** Why yes .... I suppose we do.

*(Mr Boom distributes more paper; they are vote, he collects the ballots, and with Miss Brisk, counts the ballots ...)*

**Boom:** Well, folks, I'm sorry for you all. I'm Vice-Chairman. Secretary next!

*(Distributes paper, they vote, etc.)*  
Mr Penhold is Secretary.

All right, Mr Penhold, you get busy this time and distribute the ballots for Treasurer!

*(Mr Penhold does so, they all vote, etc.)*  
Mr Smith is elected Treasurer.

**Smith:** The worst job of all! (All laugh.)

**Boom:** Well, now ... I suppose the first business of the Assembly is to decide where our public meetings are to be held?

**Cosmos:** Oh, yes ... where to meet ... why I think you are quite right Mr Boom. I'm sure I hadn't thought of it!

**Boom:** I vote we hire a room on Main Street, and advertise in the Saturday papers the Sunday meetings.

**Mr Smith:** How can we pay for a room?

**Jane Smith:** We can all meet in our house, if you like. You're welcome to use it ... and besides, that would save renting a room.

**Boom:** No, I think that places the Cause in the realm of personalities at once .... I'm not in favour of it at all.

**Brisk:** How much would a hired room cost?

**Boom:** Oh, about forty or fifty dollars a month.

**Jack Smith:** We could never get that much together—at least, speaking for myself, with all my obligations, I can't pledge more than five dollars a month.

**Brisk:** I'm sure I could give that much, too.

**Friend:** I think I could manage three dollars a month. Of course, I can't be sure every month.

**Jack Smith:** This is useless—you can see for yourselves we can't raise enough money to pay for the rent.

**Jones:** Don't you think ...

**Boom:** (*Interrupting*) I don't see how you can expect the public to have a high opinion of us if we haven't even got a place to meet!

**Penhold:** Excuse me, but am I supposed to be keeping notes of this discussion?

**Boom:** Of course you are!

**Penhold:** Oh, dear me, ... where did I put my pencil.

*(Searches lengthily through pockets, finally finds pencil ... hunts for paper.)*

I'm sorry, I don't seem to have any paper with me.

**Brisk:** Here, you can use my pad, Mr Penhold. *(Hands it to him.)*

**Penhold:** Ah, thank you very much, thank you .... Now what shall I put down? Will somebody please refresh my memory?

*(He looks around helplessly.)*

**Jane Smith:** We are discussing a meeting place—pros and cons.

**Penhold:** Yes, yes indeed ... let me see now, *(writing)* ....

Subject, a meeting place, date April 22, 1948, Fairview ... pros and cons ... *(All watch him.)*

**Jones:** As I was going to say ...

**Boom:** *(Interrupting)*

Now the whole point is, what are we going to do?

I'm still dead against a private home.

**Jack Smith:** There isn't any other way we can do it ... but suit yourself.

**Wisely:** Why don't we take it in rotation, one week one person, one week another? You can meet here as often as you like.

**Brisk:** Ah, that's a good idea. I'd love to have it once a month.

**Jones:** Couldn't we ...

**Boom:** *(Interrupting)*

No. I don't approve of that at all. It's belittling the Faith in the eyes of the public!

**Penhold:** *(Writing)*

Please, ... just a moment .... I can't keep up at this rate. Mr Boom believes such a course of action belittling the Faith in the eyes of the public.

**Smith:** It's getting late. Jane and I have to be up at six-thirty.

**Jane:** But, we haven't come to any decision yet, Dear.

**Cosmos:** Ah, yes, we must really come to a decision .... Now if Mr Boom would just propose some other arrangement?

*(She looks pleadingly at him.)*

**Narrator:** *(speaking from the side of the stage)*

By this time it is ten o'clock .... Much confused discussion continues .... As we return to the scene, it is now eleven o'clock and all are tired.

**Smith:** Sorry, folks, but I have to go ... get too tired if I miss my sleep.

**Wisely:** But we still haven't come to any decision.

**Jones:** Mrs Cosmos, ... perhaps ...

**Boom:** *(Interrupting)*

I move the meeting be adjourned for two weeks. In the meantime we can look into the matter and report back.

**Smith:** Seconded. Well, goodnight, everyone, you can always meet at our place anytime. All welcome. Goodnight, Mrs Wisely.  
*(Some of the others have risen, general discussion follows, and goodnights.)*

**Penhold:** *(Still writing)*  
Voted that the next Spiritual Assembly meeting be held in two weeks time ... where .... Friends, where do we meet next time?

**Smith:** *(Just going out the door)*  
Mrs Cosmos can let us know ... so long, all. *(Exits.)*

### Scene three

**The Narrator,** with Mr A and Mrs B, evaluate the meeting.

**Narrator:** Now what do we see in this trial assembly? Everyone is sincere, and anxious to serve the Cause, but the meeting was void of any results. Let us analyse its mistakes.

**Mr A:** First, and worst, was the lack of courtesy to Martha Jones .... Every time she tried to speak she was interrupted and ignored.

We must always be careful to remember that members of minority groups are constantly being subjected to slights and insults in their daily lives. Sometimes this is from indifference and sometimes it is from violent race prejudice.

How sad that a Bahá'í sister was not made to feel at home, and happy, with those who form her real spiritual family.

Martha Jones has gone home holding no grudge, but feeling depressed, and unconsciously, or perhaps even consciously, is a little offended and hurt .... This is the gravest mishandling of this meeting.

**Mrs B:** The second mistake was that no decision was reached, and no work accomplished, although the meeting lasted three hours. Why?

**Narrator:** The main reason is that in the function of Chairman, Mrs Cosmos completely failed.

The duties of a Chairman are to keep the meeting in order; to see that everyone gets a fair chance to express his or her views, and to hold the other eight members of the Assembly gently, but firmly, on their course of carrying out the work on the agenda, as smoothly, harmoniously and capably as possible.

A Bahá'í Chairman has no special privileges. He votes one vote, as do the other members. He is free to express his opinion, but he must not abuse his position by monopolising the discussion.

Mrs Cosmos neither held the meeting in order, nor guided the discussion. From beginning to end, she was stampeded by others. Mr Boom dominated everything. He is a strong personality and did most of the talking. But poor chairmanship let him do these things.

However devoted a believer Mrs Cosmos may be, and however capable she is as a Bahá'í teacher, she is not qualified to serve in the capacity of Chairman of the Assembly.

**Mrs B:** The third cardinal mistake was that out of nine people, two people did most of the talking—Mr Boom and Mr Smith. This was not their fault, for Mrs Cosmos did not follow the Bahá'í law of consultation and invite everyone, in rotation, to express an opinion. Nor did she call for a decision, and voting, after the subject had been discussed.

Still another obvious weakness of this new Assembly is the Secretary. Mr Penhold cannot follow the discussion and keep notes at the same time. He has neither the experience, nor the capacity, to be a good Secretary. He is, however, a professional bookkeeper. Wouldn't he have made a better Treasurer?

**Narrator:** Now let us recast the Assembly again. They have just finished their voting. (*Scene shows the same people again, visiting quietly as the votes are counted.*)

The results of this election are Mr Boom, Chairman; Mrs Wisely, Vice-Chairman; Miss Brisk, Secretary; and Mr Penhold, Treasurer.

(*Narrator fades out and scene shows same nine people.*)

### Scene four

**Boom:** I think the first matter for us to take up is a suitable meeting place. Now what I propose is this: we rent a hall on Main Street and meet every Sunday afternoon at four-thirty. We advertise in the newspaper and we get good outside Bahá'í speakers.

**Jane Smith:** Do you think we can get outside speakers for each meeting? None of us can really speak in public except Mrs Cosmos, and she can't be expected to speak every Sunday.

**Boom:** That is beside the point. The first thing to do is to decide on a place to meet; once we have that we can go on to explore the other matter.

**Penhold:** When I was in Chicago, in 1929, we found that our largest meetings were those we held with well-known non-Bahá'í speakers on the platform. Why, once, I remember, we had two hundred people present and  
....

**Boom:** You're out of order, Mr Penhold—the subject is meeting place. Now let's have a show of hands: all those in favour of the room on Main Street? (*Five hold up their hands.*)

That's it—carried by a majority vote. Got that, Miss Brisk?

**Brisk:** (*Who has been busily writing*)

O.K.

**Jones:** Don't you think, Mr Boom, ...

**Boom:** Now, now, Miss Jones, from now on, I'm Mr Chairman!

Well, Friends, I think the next matter for us to decide is which paper to advertise in. ... Now, the *Fairview Times* is read by most well-to-do people, and I suggest we use its columns.

**Smith:** *The Post* is read by more people, why don't we use that?

**Wisely:** Why can't we use both?

**Boom:** Too expensive, eh, Penhold? ... no money! Well, Friends, all those in favour of the *Fairview Times* raise their right hands!

(*Four raise their hands*) Vote defeated! All those in favour of *The Post*? (*Five raise their hands.*) Vote carried, Got that, Miss Brisk?

**Brisk:** Yes.

**Boom:** Now, here is a tentative program I've prepared for the first month.

(*Scene fades out and Narrator and Interlocutors appear.*)

## Scene five

**Narrator:** Well, what was wrong with that meeting?

**Mrs B:** You will say the work went ahead, ... and there were results, ... Yes, but at a price. And, perhaps, ultimately too high a price for the Community to pay. Here we see complete over-domination by the Chairman. He is capable; he is well-meaning. It never occurs to him that he is not right, or not acting in the highest interests of the Cause.

**Mr A:** Yes, and what is the result? Almost no consultation at all, ... a suppressed group of eight people working under him, some of whom will gradually build up strong feelings of resentment. Before long, this will lead to inharmony within the Assembly, and taking sides ... and a state of affairs will exist, which, without anyone having wished it to happen, will prevent the development of the Cause in this city. And Fairview will be labelled “a weak Assembly, needing assistance.”

**Narrator:** Mr Boom, himself, will come to resent the criticism and personal attacks his methods are going to give rise to. And, increasingly, those members he suppresses, either unconsciously, or from habit, will resent him, and oppose his plans.

All this might have been prevented, if the members of this Assembly, before they voted, had devoted sufficient thought to the requirements of a good Chairman.

In the meantime, what kind of Secretary is Miss Brisk making? A very efficient one, you will say.

**Mr A:** Yes, very business like. But, in this Bahá'í brotherhood we belong to, there should be something more than mere business-like efficiency.

For the sake of illustrating the point, let us suppose the Fairview Community has grown large enough to require a Committee of Arrangements. Here, for example, is a letter Miss Brisk wrote to the Chairman of this Committee, regarding conditions of the meeting hall.

Dear Mrs Panzer

The Spiritual Assembly has instructed me to point out to you that the Bahá'í Hall is badly kept in order, the flowers poorly arranged, or Missing entirely, and at the last Feast, there was no one present at eight o'clock to open the door to the Friends. Will you and your committee please see to it that this does not happen again in the future.

Yours sincerely,  
Elizabeth Brisk, Secretary.

**Narrator:** A letter like that is a bucket of cold water in the face of the Committee and its Chairman. It was written without any ill intention on the part of Miss Brisk, who writes many business letters in this formal tone, every day.

**Mr A:** Most probably, the Committee will be offended. Nor will they like Miss Brisk any better for having written it!

**Mrs B:** If such a tone continues to be used by the Assembly to the members of the Community it represents, a feeling is sure to develop, among some of the Friends, that the Assembly domineers over them, and is dictatorial. Coolness will spring up amongst the Bahá'ís of Fairview. Then, as usual, when there is any disharmony among the believers, it will be the Cause of God that suffers.

**Narrator:** Now, here is the kind of letter Miss Brisk could have written:

Dear Mrs Panzer

Your committee has one of the very important responsibilities and privileges of the Bahá'í community this year. The attractive appearance of our Bahá'í Hall can be a first and favourable impression we can make on non-believers who come to learn of the sacred Teachings. There-

fore the Assembly is keenly interested and wants to be of service to you throughout the year.

Please go over with the other members these items in connection with the work of the Committee of Arrangements: cleanliness to a scrupulous degree, a nice feeling of order and suitable arrangements, attractive selections of flowers, and, of course, a committee representative on hand to open the Hall at eight o'clock and greet the Friends and newcomers.

Be assured that not only the Assembly but the community and guests will always respond happily to any extra little attentions your committee can give the Bahá'í Center, where the spirit of the Master Himself is the Host.

With cordial Bahá'í greeting,  
Spiritual Assembly Secretary.

**Mrs B:** This second Assembly set-up does not seem to be much better than the first. The first one was too uncoordinated and inefficient, while this one is a little too streamlined!

It is going ahead so fast there is not time for consultation, or for any real Friendliness and consideration.

We must always remember that our Bahá'í Administration is based on higher laws than those governing the conduct of the ordinary affairs of society. It is based on loving consultation, and reliance on the help of Baha'u'llah.

**Narrator:** Now, once more, let us recast the Assembly, and see if we can form a properly functioning Bahá'í body from the same nine people.

*(Narrator's voice continues, while the members carry out action of voting, counting ballots, etc.)*

They have kept Mr Penhold as Treasurer; he is a good one. This time Mrs Wisely becomes Chairman, and Mr Friend is Vice-Chairman. And somehow, the members seem to have thought about the fact that

Miss Jones has also had some business experience; they have made her Secretary.

Mrs Wisely is a housewife; a pleasant and thoughtful woman. She has studied *Bahá'í Administration* carefully, and felt it wise to study also something about parliamentary procedure.

Let us see how this Assembly works,—better balanced in its officers because the nine members did a little intelligent thinking before they cast their votes, and pondered the requirements needed for Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer.

They were not sentimental in their voting. They did not try to confer an honour on anyone, as a mark of love and esteem, by making her Chairman, regardless of her capacities.

They were also wise enough to avoid placing in that office a too dominating and opinionated type of personality. Such a person, they realised, could fully contribute to the work of the Assembly without holding the office of Chairman, which would automatically place him in a more or less unrestrained position.

Fairview's Assembly is still faced with the problem of where to hold their meetings. Let us see what the new Chairman does with this situation.

## Scene six

*(Scene reverts to the nine members)*

**Wisely:** Friends, now that we have had our opening prayer, don't you think the first thing for us to decide is where and how to hold our meetings. Has anyone any ideas on this subject?

**Boom:** I think we should rent our own room, and hold a public meeting every Sunday afternoon, and advertise in the Saturday papers.

**Smith:** I don't think we can afford that. Personally I can't contribute more than five dollars a month to our expenses.

**Jane Smith:** We can meet in our house, if you like, you're all very welcome, I'm sure.

**Boom:** I disapprove of that. It brings personalities into our work, and belittles us in the eyes of the public. I vote we rent a room. *(Raises his hand)*

**Wisely:** I think before we consider voting, Mr Boom, we should hear everyone's opinion. Has someone else a suggestion to make?

**Brisk:** Well, I don't know which is best, but I can pledge five dollars a month towards the rent, too, if that is any help.

**Smith:** A room will cost us at least forty or fifty dollars a month, and I don't see us paying for it.

**Boom:** And I don't see us meeting in private homes, it lowers the Cause in the estimation of the public, from the very beginning. I'm absolutely against it.

**Narrator:** *(speaking from the side of the stage)*

Now Mrs Wisely is going to do the right thing. She is going around the room in rotation, and invite everyone to give an opinion.

**Wisely:** Mrs Smith, what do you think?

**Jane Smith:** Well, I see Mr Boom's point of view, but frankly I don't see how so few of us are going to be able to pay for a rented room to hold meetings in.

**Wisely:** Mr Penhold?

**Penhold:** At the moment I have no definite idea of what we should do.

**Wisely:** Mrs Cosmos?

**Cosmos:** Well, it seems to me that for the time being we had better accept Mr and Mrs Smith's offer to use their home for the meetings. It's quite central, and I am sure we are very grateful to them for this service they are willing to render the Cause.

**Wisely:** Have you any suggestion, Miss Brisk?

**Brisk:** Why don't we all just teach privately until we have enough Bahá'ís to support a proper center?

**Boom:** At that rate we might just as well not have bothered to constitute an Assembly! Why, I think ...

**Wisely:** (*Interrupting*)

Just a moment, please, Mr Boom, we'll go in rotation, if you don't mind, until everyone has expressed his views fully. This is something we must all consider together.

**Boom:** Quite right, I'm sorry.

**Wisely:** What do you think we should do, Mr Friend?

**Friend:** Well, I suggest we try and rent one of the Board rooms in the local YMCA or YWCA, for our advertised meeting. Their prices, I seem to remember, are moderate and we should be able, between us, to raise the necessary amount.

**Wisely:** Miss Jones?

**Jones:** I agree with Mr Friend's suggestion.

**Wisely:** Mr Smith, have you anything to add?

**Smith:** Well, no, ... that idea sounds worth trying to me.

**Wisely:** Now, Mr Boom, we'd be glad to hear what you have to say.

**Boom:** Although that isn't what I wanted, it sounds like a reasonable compromise to me. I move we appoint someone to look into the matter at once.

**Wisely:** Well, I would like to second that motion .... Are there any other comments? (*Silence*)

All those in favour? (*All raise their right hands.*)

Motion carried unanimously.

**Jones:** I move that Mr Friend and Mr Boom be appointed to investigate this as soon as possible, and report back to us.

**Smith:** Second that motion.

**Wisely:** Any comments? ... All in favour?

(*All vote, with hands up, as the scene ends, and Narrator speaks.*)

## Scene seven

**Narrator:** Here we have an entirely different set-up .... The Chairman is the hinge of proper Assembly function. Mrs Wisely has been efficient, firm, self-effacing and courteous. She has conducted the discussion accord-

ing to both the Bahá'í Administration and parliamentary procedure.

At last we have an Assembly which is able to handle the affairs of the Cause in Fairview, in an orderly and capable manner .... Now, let us suppose the Cause has grown, and that the Fairview Community has forty or so members. Situations of a difficult nature can, and do, arise. How will this Assembly meet and properly overcome such problems?

The following example is taken from an incident which really did occur. In this scene, the Assembly is meeting for its first session after the election, and is going to appoint its annual committees. (*Thank heaven, it now has a Bahá'í Center, and we don't have to discuss it any more.*)

This time there is a new member—Miss Mary Lou Fervor. She is the daughter of old Bahá'ís, brought up in the Cause, and is just twenty-one years old.

### Scene eight

*(Scene shows all previous members, except Miss Brisk, who is now replaced by Miss Fervor.)*

**Wisely:** I think, as the Teaching Committee is really our most important committee we should appoint it first. Has anyone any names to propose?

**Mary Lou:** But surely, committees are elected by secret ballot!

**Smith:** No, my dear, committee members are appointed by the Spiritual Assembly.

**Mary Lou:** Oh, no! That can't be right! The whole principle of the Cause is the secret ballot. Each person, uninfluenced, using his own judgment and casting a vote. We must vote for its members.

**Wisely:** No, Mary Lou, one of the functions of the Assembly is to appoint committee members. Now, has anyone any suggestions?

**Jane Smith:** I think Mrs Cosmos would make an excellent member of that committee; she has been a teacher for so many years.

**Jones:** I agree with you, and I would also like to propose Miss Brisk; she has grown to be a very good speaker, and is a capable worker in every way.

**Wisely:** Mrs Cosmos, Miss Brisk. How large do you think the committee should be.

**Boom:** I should think five was about right. I would like to propose Jack Smith be included.

**Smith:** Don't let's have too many Assembly members on it; let's give the other Friends a chance.

**Jones:** Two is not too many, and we must think impartially of the best qualified workers. I think you would be valuable on that committee.

**Wisely:** May I suggest that we add the name of Mrs Newcome for consideration. She is so full of enthusiasm, and even if she is new in the Faith, I feel she can do a lot.

*(Mary Lou Fervor has been seen to be getting more and more nervous.)*

**Mary Lou:** No! No! You can't do it this way. It says in the Bahá'í Administration that all voting must be secret, and you are just going ahead and discussing it openly!

**Wisely:** Why, Mary Lou, you mustn't get so excited, dear.

**Mary Lou:** I can't help it. You are all wrong, ... it's political, ... it's just the opposite of what the Cause should be!

**Penhold:** I assure you, Mary Lou, we are quite in order; this is the way committees are appointed, by discussion, so we can find the best qualified people.

**Mary Lou:** No! It is against the Teachings. I can't stand it!  
*(She bursts into tears and rushes from the room. They all look dismayed. Mr Friend rises.)*

**Friend:** I'll go after her. *(Exit Mr Friend.)*

### Scene nine

*(Scene shows Mary Lou weeping in the hall outside. Mr Friend pats her on the shoulder.)*

**Friend:** Now, Mary Lou, you are not acting the right way, you know.

**Mary Lou:** *(Weeping)*

I can't help it. I love the Cause, and they are breaking the Laws of God!

**Friend:** You are wrong, my dear .... Mary Lou, do you remember how I withdrew for many months from the Assembly, because I felt I could not accept a certain decision they had made?

Well, it took me weeks to see that I was the one who was wrong, and harming the Cause by my act. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that even if the Assembly makes a wrong decision, we must uphold it for the sake of the unity of the Cause. This unity is really more important than anything else. We must obey the will of the majority.

I realised my mistake, Mary Lou, now don't you make the same one, but listen to me, and come back and serve the Cause as you should.

*(Mary Lou dries her eyes—He takes her hand—)*  
There that's better.

**Mary Lou:** Thank you, Mr Friend, I guess you are right. I'll come back ... but I still think it's wrong, what they're doing!

## Scene ten

*(They re-enter the room)*

**MARY Lou:** I'm sorry, it's just because I feel it so keenly.

**Wisely:** You are quite right to feel about the Cause so keenly, but I assure you, Mary Lou, committees are not elected bodies; they are appointed bodies, and their powers are derived from the Assembly. They are not the ones who have the authority vested in them by the voters; they are appointed in consultation, so that we can find the best people for them .... Now, let's go on with our work, all together.

*(Mrs Smith takes Mary Lou's hand, and holds it, discussion continues, the scene fades out, and the Narrator appears.)*

## Scene eleven

**Narrator:** Perhaps that may seem far-fetched, but it actually did happen. For, you see, we Bahá'ís are so intensely sincere, and the Cause means so much to us, that sometimes explosive emotions come out. The proper solution, however, can always be found.

**Mrs B:** If Mr Friend had pondered on 'Abdu'l-Baha's words, as he, himself, came to realise, he would never have withdrawn from the Assembly because the other members voted for something he felt was wrong.

**Mr A:** Likewise, if Mary Lou had really studied the Bahá'í Administration, she would have known she was wrong—wrong about procedure for appointing committees, and wrong to disrupt the Assembly meeting,

because she did not agree with the other members. Even if she had been absolutely right, unless she could prove it to the other members, she would still have to abide by the majority vote.

**Mrs B:** The forces at work under the Bahá'í system are not to be under-estimated.

Nine people, usually nine strangers to each other, are yoked together to pull forwards the work of the Faith in their community. One of them may be long-winded by nature; one aggressive, one timid and retiring, yet each has qualities that are useful to the whole. Those personalities must melt into each other, forgetful of self, working for the good of the Cause, and ever mindful of the goals Baha'u'llah has set us to achieve.

A good chairman must see to it that the long-winded one does not unduly monopolise the discussion; the aggressive one does not force his opinions on the others, the sensitive soul is not hurt, and the timid one is drawn out, and helped to give of his best to the consultation.

Then, occasionally, fierce forces are released in Assembly meetings, for the human ego, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, "*... tempts every moment, and spreads a new snare at every breath.*"

**Narrator:** For instance, let us see what is going on in this meeting of the Assembly. (*Scene reverts to the same nine people.*)

## Scene twelve

**Smith:** There is a matter I want to bring up before the Assembly: last week Mrs Penhold spoke at the Congregational Church Youth Meeting, and, as far as I know, she neither asked this Assembly's advice, nor consulted with the Teaching Committee. She had no right to do that, and I consider such acts sabotage the Administration!

**Penhold:** I resent that remark extremely.

**Smith:** Well, I can't help whether you resent it or not, it's true. It's really disloyal to the Cause to do things like that, entirely ignoring the principles of the Cause.

**Penhold:** I cannot permit you to speak that way about my wife. I won't stand for it.

**Wisely:** Friends, don't let us have any inharmony over this question. Let us discuss it together dispassionately.

**Penhold:** When someone insults me, and members of my family I cannot be expected to put up with it, and I won't! I resign from the Assembly.

**Cosmos:** Oh, Mr Penhold, don't think of such a thing! I am sure that Mr Smith does not really mean it that way; he only means she really should have consulted us first.

**Smith:** I mean just what I said, such acts undermine the Cause.

**Wisely:** Really, Mr Smith, your language is much too strong! This is not the way to discuss a Bahá'í sister.

**Jane Smith:** Why doesn't she act like a Bahá'í? (*Mr Penhold rises to leave the room.*)

**Friend:** George, you must not leave this room. Please, Friends, let us have a prayer. Let us ask Bahá'u'lláh to shed His spirit on us. This is not the way Bahá'ís meet their problems,—with anger.

(*Mr Penhold hesitates.*)

**Jones:** Please sit down right here beside me, Mr Penhold, and let us all turn to God. I'm sure that we all love this Cause more than anything else.

*(She pulls him down beside her; Mr Friend recites a prayer, followed by silence.)*

**Wisely:** Mr Smith, I really do feel you owe Mr Penhold an apology. No matter how strongly you may feel on this subject, you could express yourself in a way that would not hurt his feelings.

We all love Mrs Penhold. She is very eager to serve, and I am sure she never dreamed she was doing anything wrong in accepting a speaking engagement without previously consulting us, or the Teaching Committee.

**Smith:** Well, as I said, ... I feel these things very strongly; we'll never build the New World Order, if we don't live up to our own Administration, ... but perhaps I was hasty in the way I spoke. I'm sorry, George.

**Penhold:** If the Bahá'ís can attack each other so bitterly, without even giving the other person a chance to explain, I don't see that we art much of an example to the world. It is very disillusioning.

**Cosmos:** Well, Mr Penhold, the trouble is, that, as the Guardian so often tells us, we are still so immature—all of us, every one of us. We love the Cause, and rush to its defence, but not always wisely, and not always lovingly. I think it is far more grave that we members of the Assembly should be harsh to each other than that Mrs Penhold should break an Administrative rule. We can always point out her mistake to her, but if we cease to work lovingly and patiently together on this Assembly, the work of the Cause in our city will be entirely disrupted.

I want you two to forget you ever spoke or heard

such words. Forgive, for the sake of the Guardian who is so patient and long-suffering with us all.

*(Silence—Mr Smith reaches over his hand to Mr Penhold, who takes it.)*

**Jane Smith:** Mrs Cosmos is right, George, and I want you to know we do admire your wife's devotion.

**Wisely:** Now, may I move we delegate Mr Penhold to tell his wife we were very pleased she was able to give the message to the Congregational Church Youth Meeting on Friday night, but that we feel she should have first consulted with the Teaching Committee about it.

**Jane Smith:** I second that motion.

**Wisely:** All those in favour? *(All raise their right hands, except Mr Penhold.)* And, please, Mr Penhold, don't tell your wife about how this matter was brought up. It is all over now, and let us leave it that way, and not spoil her happiness in having rendered the Cause this service, even if she did it in an unadministrative way. *(Scene fades out, Narrator appears.)*

### Scene thirteen

**Narrator:** Well, things like that do happen, unfortunately, but let us hope they may always be solved that way—the Bahá'í way. 'Abdu'l-Bahá advised us to "*be wise as the serpent, and as gentle as the dove*".

We try to be wise in administering the affairs of the Cause, but the quality of gentleness has a tendency to be absent, sometimes, from our dealings with each other.

**Mr A:** Courtesy is one of the qualities enjoined upon us by Baha'u'llah—courtesy towards everyone, and surely most of all towards each other. Mr Smith was bru-

tally impolite to Mr Penhold. It was only due to the loving and truly spiritual intervention of other members of the Assembly that a serious breach in Fairview's Assembly was averted.

**Narrator:** Mr Smith, Mrs Smith and Mr Penhold were all receptive to that intervention—fortunately for the Cause! For we must always remember that it is the Cause that is the loser through such things. It can be set back literally years, in its development, through deep-seated inharmony amongst the Assembly members.

**Mrs B:** Ever since the promulgation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament, the Bahá'ís all over the world, and most particularly here, in America, have been constantly urged by the Guardian to build up the Administrative Order. But it is doubtful if most of us as yet fully grasp its significance, or function according to its precepts.

We are inclined to have, on our Assemblies, a "nine" consciousness, instead of a "one" consciousness. Each member thinks of himself as a part of that Assembly, and all know that decisions and policies must be formed jointly. But a Bahá'í Spiritual Assembly is much more than that. It is not only an organic body, but is, in fact, a spiritual organism.

**Narrator:** Let us see this in the form of an analogy. (*If feasible, an anatomical chart may be introduced here, and the Narrator points to the organs, as named. Or the Narrator can continue with a verbal description only.*)

Just as in the human body, for example, man has a heart, a liver, a stomach, a pancreas, a pair of kidneys, and so on .... How would this body live and function, if that liver got in a huff, and refused to work, ... the pancreas became swollen, and sulked, ... and the heart tried not to beat!

Of course it's inconceivable .... And when one of the organs does act up, and refuse to carry on its pro-

per share of the body's labors, we say the man is diseased.

But it seldom occurs to the Mary Lous, the Smiths, Penholds, Friends, and so on, of our Assemblies, that when they deliberately hold out against the others, or if offended and hurt, retire into their shells, or refuse to submit their personal wills to the forces of consultation, they are responsible for producing a state of disease on the Assembly.

They seldom realise that when they do not behave like true Bahá'ís, according to the Laws and Teachings of Baha'u'llah, that they are hindering the flow of the spirit. It is this flow of the spirit, which may be likened to the circulation of the physical body, that sustains the body of the Assembly in good spiritual health.

You can't imagine a kidney, when the liver is upset, refusing to do its part, on the grounds that it does not like the reddish color of the liver! And yet the members of Assemblies often act just this way! They are antagonistic to some person, because they fail to get on well together, or dislike his or her personality.

**Mrs B:** When the human body is attacked by disease, the whole organism cooperates to rush to the defence. ... An Assembly should function the same way ... When trouble arises on an Assembly, whatever the immediate reason, however justifiable the cause may seem to be, all nine members should have but one basic thought in mind, ... to rally to the defence. ... The defence of what? ... Of their unity!

**Mr A:** This does not mean the believers won't sometimes hurt each other's feelings, or perhaps be rude and insulting. Probably we Bahá'ís will do these things until we are a great deal more perfect than we are at present.

What it does mean is that, under all circumstances, the Assembly members must be aware that they are a *spiritual organism* ... a unit, ... and not a composite.

**Narrator:** To return to our analogy: If, for example, the pancreas is weak, the body does not try to throw it out, or hate it, or even condemn it. It recognises the fact that this pancreas has been born weak, or become weak, and is therefore a channel for ailments to attack the whole body. With one accord the liver, the kidneys, the heart, and so on, make a greater effort to help, and to take good care of the pancreas.

An Assembly should do the same. If Mr Smith, for instance, is its weak pancreas, a disturbing element in some way, all the members must help him to fit in. Patiently and lovingly, they must consider him, in reality, as a weak part of themselves, not something to be quarrelled with, united against, or cast out.

There are a number of practical measures for this. The greatest of these is to turn to God in prayer, because He is waiting to be called upon for help and He *will* help.

Another is frank discussion of the matter, for this removes hidden grievances and fears, and dispels uncertainty.

Another is full rotary consultation; and the last is to abide willingly by the majority vote.

*(Narrator fades out, the Assembly is again seen, and Mrs Cosmos addresses them, and the audience.)*

**Mrs Cosmos:** Few of us are saints, capable of really loving their fellow-men for their own sakes.

Bahá'u'lláh knew this, and that is why He asked us to love each other for His sake, and for the sake of God.

All Bahá'ís love the Cause, and love and reverence deeply the Manifestation of God. This is why they can, and must, love each other, ... so that we may establish that great unity that 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke of: ... *One spirit in many bodies ...*

It is this unity the world is dying for!

The end