

THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY

A Summary of
Its Organization and Laws

Compiled by
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís
of the United States



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THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY of the BAHÁ'ÍS
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this compilation is (1) to make available to local Spiritual Assemblies and to members of the American Bahá'í community a brief manual on the nature, functions and responsibilities of the basic institutions of their administrative order, and (2) to remind the individual believers of the Bahá'í laws, which the Bahá'ís of the West are expected to practice.

The material wherever possible has been taken from the Sacred Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the works of Shoghi Effendi. The few statements by the National Spiritual Assembly have been included to guide Assemblies and individuals in the application of the administrative principles given to us in these writings, and to help them understand the vital necessity of the institutions of the Faith and the spirit in which they are to be used for the establishment of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. The profound significance of these administrative principles and institutions is emphasized in the following words of Shoghi Effendi:

“. . . the Spirit breathed by Bahá'u'lláh upon the world . . . can never permeate and exercise an abiding influence upon mankind unless and until it incarnates itself in a visible Order, which would bear His name, wholly identify itself with His principles, and function in conformity with His laws . . .

“For Bahá'u'lláh, we should readily recognize, has not only imbued mankind with a new and regenerating Spirit. He has not merely enunciated certain universal principles, or propounded a particular philosophy, however potent, sound and universal these may be. In addition to these He, as well as 'Abdu'l-Bahá after Him, has, unlike the Dispensations of the past, clearly and specifically laid down a set of Laws, established definite institutions, and provided for the essentials of a Divine Economy. These are destined to be a pattern for future society,

a supreme instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace, and the one agency for the unification of the world, and the proclamation of the reign of righteousness and justice upon the earth." W.O.B., p. 19.

". . . To dissociate the administrative principles of the Cause from the purely spiritual and humanitarian teachings would be tantamount to a mutilation of the body of the Cause, a separation that can only result in the disintegration of its component parts, and the extinction of the Faith itself." W.O.B., p. 5.

". . . It (the Administrative Order) will, as its component parts, its organic institutions, begin to function with efficiency and vigor, 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 fullness of time the whole of mankind . . ." W.O.B., p. 144.

". . . It is this building process, slow and unobtrusive, to which the life of the world-wide Bahá'í community is wholly consecrated, that constitutes the one hope of a stricken society." W.O.B., p. 195.

That the administrative machinery is not an end in itself but merely the means to spread everywhere the light of faith and brotherhood, is frequently expressed by the Guardian in such words as these:

"Not by the force of numbers, not by the mere exposition of a set of new and noble principles, not by an organized campaign of teaching—no matter how world-wide and elaborate in its character—not even by the staunchness of our faith or the exaltation of our enthusiasm, can we ultimately hope to vindicate in the eyes of a critical and skeptical age the supreme claim of the Abhá Revelation. One thing and only one thing will unflinchingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, namely, the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh." B.A., p. 66.

THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY

THE BAHÁ'Í GROUP

Definition and Purpose

“Next to an isolated believer any number of confirmed Bahá'ís less than nine persons should be considered as automatically constituting a Bahá'í group.” Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í News*, March 1941.

Every Bahá'í group, whether having only two or as many as eight believers, constitutes a vital resource in the national and international Bahá'í community.

First, it is a reservoir from which future local Assemblies are to be formed. Second, it challenges each individual believer to live a Bahá'í life and demonstrate the potency of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Third, it obliges the individual Bahá'í to attain unity with his fellow believers. Fourth, in its relationship to the area teaching committee and area activities, such as conferences, vision is expanded and capacity developed. Fifth, it introduces the basic element of consultation to determine all activities undertaken by the group as a whole. Sixth, during the existence of the group, consultation and joint decision by majority vote prepares the believers for their later experience as members of a local Spiritual Assembly or members of a local community.

A group attains Assembly status when there are nine members, but the actual formation of the Assembly, either by joint declaration or election, takes place on the first day of Ridván.

The believers in a Bahá'í group must not only carry out successful teaching activities but must also master the supreme art of unified consultation requiring full cooperation with, but not personal subjection to their fellow group members. It is during this stage of our Bahá'í experience that we must acquire emotional stability, courage, self-respect, and mental clarity as

well as knowledge of the basic teachings, the nature of the administrative order, and the progress of the Divine Plan.

Organization

In order to carry on its business the Bahá'í group needs a correspondent, who should be elected according to Bahá'í procedure. If it wishes, the group may also elect a chairman to conduct meetings, and a treasurer to handle its funds. No individual member of a group possesses personal or official authority, but merely carries out the group decision.

Assistance from the Area Teaching Committee

The experience and resources of the area teaching committees can be of great assistance and encouragement to Bahá'í groups. The group should consult with the area teaching committee regarding teaching problems and plans, teaching assistance, information about area conferences, and in every way utilize to the fullest possible extent this Bahá'í service. The enrollment of new members of a group, like isolated believers, is processed through the area teaching committees.

LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

The Institution and Its Significance

The institution of the Spiritual Assembly was created by Bahá'u'lláh and is an integral part of His Revelation, together with the teachings, principles, supplications, truth, and laws written in the Books and Tablets. It is the foundation stone of the new World Order, the establishment of which is the essential aim of the Bahá'í Faith. Through the loyalty of the believers who assist in the unfoldment of its latent attributes and powers, divine guidance and reinforcement is promised, and the forces of unity, justice, affection and fellowship are made to prevail over the negative elements which prey upon and destroy the civilization of an unbelieving age.

“. . . To it (local Assembly) 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." B.A., p. 37.

"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 decisions, 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." B.A., p. 41.

Formation of a Local Spiritual Assembly

When the requisite conditions exist, the local group of Bahá'ís is obligated to establish an Assembly. It is not an optional matter.

The requisite conditions are simple. They include the following:

1. There must be nine or more adult Bahá'ís resident in the community able and willing to serve.

2. These Bahá'ís are to be declared and recognized believers, all meeting qualifications of faith laid down by the Guardian. If one or more members of the group are such newly-confirmed Bahá'ís that they are not yet recorded as believers by the National Spiritual Assembly, these new believers are to take a full part in the formation of the Assembly, subject to later determination of their Bahá'í status.

3. Each local Assembly has a definite area of jurisdiction. In most cases the area is that of the civil boundaries of an incorporated village, town or city. An Assembly may also be formed by nine or more Bahá'ís who reside in the same township or county or unincorporated village.

Where the area of jurisdiction is a township, there must be nine or more adult Bahá'ís resident therein outside the limits of any incorporated town or city in the township, as each Bahá'í civil area must be separate and distinct from other areas where an Assembly might later be formed.

Where the area of jurisdiction is a county, the county itself must be small enough to permit all the believers to meet regularly. The county unit constitutes a Bahá'í area of jurisdiction only when in it there are nine or more Bahá'ís who have access to no smaller civil area such as township or permanent electoral district. Postal areas and school districts do not represent areas of jurisdiction for Bahá'í Assemblies.

4. At the present time there is only one date when local Assemblies can be formed—April 21 of any year. As the Bahá'í calendar consists of days which begin and end at sunset rather than midnight, the time to form an Assembly is after sunset on April 20 and before sunset on April 21.

5. Where there are more than nine adult Bahá'ís, they form an Assembly by electing the nine members of the Spiritual Assembly. Where there are exactly nine adult Bahá'ís, they establish an Assembly by joint declaration, and all nine members must participate. The National Spiritual Assembly provides different types of report forms for these two methods, and the group should apply for the proper form in advance.

(For further information refer to the following section on “The Annual Election and Organization.”)

The Annual Election and Organization

“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.” B.A., p. 39.

“Pending its (the Universal House of Justice) 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.” B.A., p. 41.

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 by secret ballot
- Presentation of annual reports
- Tellers' report of the election
- Approval of the tellers' report

Assembly members are elected by plurality vote. The believers receiving the nine highest votes on the first ballot are elected, unless two or more are tied for ninth place. In case of a tie, a second ballot is cast by those present, and on this ballot the voter is to write the name of one of those who are tied in the first ballot.

Contrary to the ways of the world, Bahá'í elections are approached in a spirit of prayer without preliminary electioneering or nominating of candidates. Before the ballots are cast, prayers should be read and all participating ask for guidance in selecting those best fitted to serve. In this regard the Guardian wrote:

“. . . Let us recall His explicit and often-repeated assurances that every Assembly elected in that rarefied 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.” B.A., p. 65.

“. . . the elector . . . 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 . . . Should this simple system (based on plurality) 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” B.A., p. 136.

“The newly elected Assembly is called together by the believer who received the highest number of votes, or in case two or more

members have received the same said highest number of votes, then by the member selected by lot from among those members; and this member shall preside until the permanent chairman is chosen." By-Laws of a L.S.A., Art. VIII.

It is preferable to have the election of the officers of the Assembly immediately following the annual election or formation by joint declaration; however, all nine members of the Assembly must be given opportunity to vote for the officers. In rare instances a meeting for the election of officers cannot be called because of inability on the part of one or more members to attend. In such cases, the best procedure is to elect or appoint immediately a temporary chairman and secretary to serve until such time as all members of the Assembly can be present to vote in person.

Permanent officers are elected by secret ballot and by majority rather than by plurality vote. (Plurality is the largest number; majority is the number greater than half, which, in this case, is at least five out of the nine.)

When an Assembly is organized, it is to report its formation and election of officers to the National Spiritual Assembly, together with whatever relevant facts may be necessary for recognition of the Assembly.

Dissolution of a Local Spiritual Assembly

Once elected or formed by joint declaration, an Assembly continues to exist until the next annual election or until the National Spiritual Assembly acts to declare the Assembly dissolved. This decision is not to be made by the members of the local Assembly itself nor by any regional or national committee.

If the number of adult Bahá'ís in the community becomes less than nine, or other conditions arise which make it impossible for the local Assembly to function, the facts should be reported to the National Assembly for final determination of the status of the Assembly.

Authority and Functions

The local Spiritual Assemblies are "invested with an authority rendering them unanswerable for their acts and decisions to those who elect them; solemnly pledged to follow, under all con-

ditions, the dictates of the 'Most Great Justice' that can alone usher in the reign of the 'Most Great Peace' which Bahá'u'lláh has proclaimed and must ultimately establish; charged with the responsibility of promoting at all times the best interests of the communities within their jurisdiction, of familiarizing them with their plans and activities and of inviting them to offer any recommendations they might wish to make; cognizant of their no less vital task of demonstrating, through association with all liberal and humanitarian movements, the universality and comprehensiveness of their Faith; dissociated entirely from all sectarian organizations, whether religious or secular; assisted by committees annually appointed by, and directly responsible to, them, to each of which a particular branch of Bahá'í activity is assigned for study and action; supported by local funds to which all believers voluntarily contribute. . . ." G.P.B., p. 331.

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 more definitely defined in the By-Laws of a local Spiritual Assembly approved by the National Spiritual Assembly as recommended by the Guardian. Each local Spiritual Assembly of the United States, whether or not legally incorporated, is to function according to those By-Laws, and all members of the local Bahá'í community shall be guided and controlled by their provisions.

An essential function of local Spiritual Assemblies is to act as intermediaries between the local communities and the National Spiritual Assembly. The local Assembly is, therefore, the proper medium through which local Bahá'í communities can communicate with the body of their national representatives. (See page 20 of this booklet.)

Appointment of Committees

In the appointment of committees, *only* those committees *needed* to carry out the activities of the community are necessary. Such committees are appointed by the Assembly from among the entire membership of the community, have specific functions to perform, and are responsible to the Assembly who will exercise constant and general supervision upon their work. Before making appointments, it is usually beneficial to discuss the special abilities, aptitudes and personal wishes of the members under consid-

eration in relation to the tasks which are to be performed by the committees.

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 meeting 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, in his absence or incapacity, of the vice-chairman, or of any three members of the Assembly, should send due notice to all the members.

The procedure for the calling of the Annual Meeting is outlined in Article XI of the By-Laws of a local Spiritual Assembly.

Prime Requisites

“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 Fragrances, 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.” B.A., p. 21.

“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 devo-

tion, 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 . . . Should they endeavor to fulfill 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.” B.A., pp. 22-23.

Recommended Agenda and Procedure

Since order is an important characteristic of the Bahá'í World Faith, Bahá'ís should conduct their business in an orderly manner.

The following agenda is suggested for meetings of the local Spiritual Assembly:

Prayer

Reading and approval of minutes of previous meeting

Report of Secretary (or Corresponding Secretary) including correspondence of interest and concern to the body of the believers, and any and all recommendations 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

A Spiritual Assembly, in maintaining its three-fold function of a body given (within the limits of its jurisdiction) an executive, a legislative and a judicial capacity, is charged with responsibilities for initiating 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 chairman on the subject under discussion and not introduce matters irrelevant to the subject.

Bahá'í principles of consultation and majority rule are requisite characteristics in Bahá'í Administration, and represent radical departures from the generally accepted rules of parliamentary procedure (based on *Roberts Rules of Order*) used in this country. In Bahá'í Assembly action, the chairman takes part in the discussion, and a majority decision becomes unanimous and binding upon all. There is no minority opinion in Bahá'í Administration; the decision of the majority is the decision of all.

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 principle which is involved;

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. Only one motion should be considered at a time. The procedure for handling motions is:

1. Statement of motion
2. Second
3. Discussion of the motion
4. Voting
5. Announcement of the result of the voting

Amendments are to be voted on before the main motion. Motions can be amended only once, by one of the following actions: adding, striking out, inserting, striking out and inserting, substituting, dividing.

An action may be agreed upon by the Assembly without going through the formality of making a motion and voting upon it; however, if the agreement is not unanimous the question must be put to a vote.

The chairman, or other presiding officer, has the same right and responsibility as other members of the Assembly for discussing and voting upon all matters being considered by the Assembly.

Discussion of any subject 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 unnecessarily prolonging the discussion beyond the point at which full opportunity has been given all members to express their views.

A motion to adjourn is always in order and has priority over all other motions except the motion to fix the time of the next meeting. The motion to adjourn is not debatable and cannot be amended. It requires a majority vote. Before voting, however, the presiding officer should point out items of unfinished business on the agenda, so that the members will know whether to vote for or against adjournment at that moment.

A motion may be withdrawn by the mover, provided no one objects, and before a vote has been taken.

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.

Vacancies on Assembly

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 fulfill 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." Letter from Shoghi Effendi, Feb. 16, 1935.

When a vacancy on an Assembly involves also one of its officers, the Assembly vacancy is filled in the usual manner by election at a special meeting of the local Bahá'í community, after which the entire Assembly elects the new officer.

Minutes and Files

The Spiritual Assembly, as a permanent body, is responsible for maintaining all minutes of its meetings, important records and 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 and files pertaining to the business of the Assembly. A permanent record of minutes is of special importance and necessity when an Assembly is incorporated, because situations could arise which would make it necessary to produce the minutes for inspection by state authorities.

Other items which would be of historical interest in the future should be kept in the local archives.

It is vitally important that each local Spiritual Assembly maintain a complete file of *Bahá'í News* and the *U.S. Supplement* for reference on various directives regarding laws and procedures, teaching suggestions, and other pertinent information. It should also maintain and keep up to date a file of all special instructions and statements from the National Spiritual Assembly dealing with matters of permanent value.

Minutes are the permanent official record of the meeting taken by a secretary. If the community is large and the Assembly handles a great amount of business, a recording secretary may be elected to record the minutes. The minutes should include all essential details, such as the election of the Assembly and its officers at the beginning of each year, by-elections for filling vacancies on the Assembly occurring during the year, attendance of all members at its meetings, new enrollments and transfers, marriages, and deaths.

All carried motions are recorded in the minutes. The minutes should be written in such a way as to provide sufficient background to understand the reason for the motions and decision, but the entire discussion does not need to be recorded. It is not necessary to record names of individuals making and seconding motions or making comments during the discussion. Names are of importance, however, when the minutes record reports given on special assignments or situations, or when assignments are given to particular individuals.

If a decision is adopted by common consent without the formality of a motion, even this decision should be clearly stated by the chairman and recorded in the minutes so that there is no question as to what action was agreed upon by the group.

Correspondence should be listed in the minutes. Copies of important outgoing correspondence, in addition to the incoming letters, should be kept for the files.

Record should be made in the minutes of consultation with individuals meeting with the Assembly, whether requested by the individual or the Assembly.

Minutes should be written or typed legibly. They should be corrected and approved by the Assembly before they become a matter of permanent record.

Records of Nineteen-Day Feasts need include only the recommendations made by the community to be presented to the local

Spiritual Assembly, with the background necessary for understanding them.

Minutes of Assembly meetings are not read at the Nineteen-Day Feasts; only the actions taken by the Assembly which concern the community affairs are reported at Feasts. The judgment of what should be shared at the Feasts belongs to the local Spiritual Assembly. (See page 18 of this booklet.)

Legal Incorporation

Local Assemblies having fifteen or more active adult believers in the community are authorized to effect legal incorporation.

To do so the matter should be presented at a Nineteen-Day Feast and a recommendation adopted which expresses the desire of the community that the Spiritual Assembly be legally incorporated.

The Bahá'í World volumes reproduce many local Certificates of Incorporation which supply models for consideration by the Assembly's attorney. What is incorporated is the Spiritual Assembly, not the entire community. The community is associated with the instrument through the annual election of the local Assembly and the Spiritual Assembly's authority to enroll new believers and determine the membership list.

The Articles of Incorporation are to make proper reference to the Central Figures of the Faith and to the National Spiritual Assembly. If necessary, the National Assembly on request will provide an example of how this is to be done.

Before the Incorporation papers are recorded, a copy is to be sent to the National Spiritual Assembly for final approval. After recording, three photostatic copies of the recorded Articles are to be sent to the National Spiritual Assembly, together with a photograph of the nine Assembly members.

Incorporation must be preserved in accordance with the manner prescribed by state law.

THE NINETEEN-DAY FEAST

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 disclosed. 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." B.W., Vol. XII, p. 298.

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 the reading of Bahá'í Prayers and selections from the 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.

In selecting the readings for the devotional part of the Feast the friends may be guided by the latest instructions printed in *Bahá'í News* quoting the following excerpt from a letter to a believer from the Guardian through his assistant secretary dated April 27, 1956: "The Writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh can certainly be read any time at any place; likewise the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá are read freely during the spiritual part of the Feast. The Guardian has instructed that during the spiritual part of the Feast, his own writings should not be read. In other words, during the spiritual part of the Feast, readings should be confined to the Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and to a lesser extent, of the Master; but during that part of the Feast the Guardian's writings should not be read. During the period of administrative discussion of the Feast, then the Guardian's writings may be read. Of course, during the administrative part of the Feast there can be no objection to the reading of the Writ-

ings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh or 'Abdu'l-Bahá." *Bahá'í News*, Jan. 1959.

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.

Attendance

Only members of the Bahá'í community and visiting Bahá'ís from other localities may attend these meetings. Young people between fifteen and twenty-one years of age, who have declared their acceptance of the qualifications of membership in the Faith are considered as members although they are referred to as Bahá'í youth. Children up to age fifteen, of Bahá'í parents, may also attend the Nineteen-Day Feasts.

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 expected 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 World Center and the National Spiritual Assembly, as well as other correspondence of concern to all believers of the community. This does not necessarily mean that all communications must be read *in full* at the Feast.

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.

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.

Provision is to be made for reports from committees, with discussion of each report.

The meeting is to be open for suggestions and recommendations from individual believers to the local Spiritual Assembly on any matter affecting the Cause. Such recommendations must be adopted by majority vote of the community members present before constituting a resolution to be considered by the local Spiritual Assembly.

Through this means individual Bahá'ís 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 recommendations to the National Spiritual Assembly accompanied by its own considered view.

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.

Bahá'í visitors attending a Feast do not take part in the consultation of the community unless invited to do so.

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.

It should be borne in mind that the consultation period of the Nineteen-Day Feast is not the time for the local Spiritual Assembly to consult and make decisions:

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."

CONSULTATION

“In this Cause, consultation is of vital importance; but spiritual conference and not the mere voicing of personal views is intended. . . . Antagonism and contradiction are unfortunate and always destructive of truth. . . . The purpose is to emphasize the statement that consultation must have for its object the investigation of truth. He who expresses an opinion should not voice it as correct and right but set it forth as a contribution to the consensus of opinion; for the light of reality becomes apparent when two opinions coincide. . . .” P.U.P., pp. 68–69.

“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, *Bahá’í News*, Nov. 1933.

“Shoghi Effendi firmly believes that consultation must be maintained between the NSA 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 suggestions to the local Assembly which in its turn will pass it to the NSA. The local Assembly is, therefore, the proper medium through which local Bahá’í communities can communicate with the body of the national representatives.” Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Nov. 18, 1933.

“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." B.A., pp. 63-64.

DECISIONS AND APPEALS

At this crucial stage in the history of our Faith it seems advisable to emphasize to each local Assembly an important principle of administration which has been too frequently overlooked. This principle establishes the National Assembly as the court of appeal from decisions of local Assemblies when protested by one or more members of the community as unjust or as not conforming to the actual facts.

A court of appeal is not responsible for determining the facts but only for reviewing the local decision based upon the facts assembled by the local Assembly itself. On receiving an appeal the National Spiritual Assembly will send a copy of it to the local Assembly and request its opinion. When this is received the case will be studied in the light of the facts presented to the National Assembly and a final decision made. The National Assembly can decide only upon the facts presented to it; therefore, when a matter is submitted to it, all obtainable facts, together with supporting documentary evidence should be included. The National Assembly's decision, whether approving or disapproving the original decision of the local Assembly, will be communicated to both the local Assembly and to the person or persons who made the appeal.

This procedure is in accordance with both the national and local By-Laws.

Any complaint received by the National Assembly from a member or members of a local community who have not first submitted their complaint to the local Assembly will be returned to those making the protest, with copy of the letter being sent to the local Assembly for its information. In such a case the local Assembly is to call the person or persons in for consultation and act upon the complaint.

An essential function of the local Spiritual Assembly is the maintenance of unity and devotion among the believers. As "Trustees of the Merciful" the Spiritual Assembly must be selfless and impartial, considerate of the rights of the individual, but firm and steadfast in upholding the vital truths of the Revelation and obedience to its institutions. Therefore, they must discriminate between situations which are transient and trivial and those which threaten to disrupt the community. A distinction is to be made between personalities who cause disturbances because they lack grounding in the basic Teachings and attitudes of the Bahá'í life, and those who deliberately cause trouble because in their hearts they do not accept the principle of authority as vested in the Manifestation, or in the institutions of the Bahá'í World Community.

The local Assembly is responsible for dealing with all local problems, but can call upon the National Spiritual Assembly for advice if necessary.

The National Assembly, in any case involving two or more local communities, however, acts directly and deals with the problems as the court of original jurisdiction, since no local Assembly has authority outside its own civil area.

"The authority of the NSA is undivided and unchallengeable in all matters pertaining to the administration of the Faith throughout the United States, . . . therefore, the obedience of individual Bahá'ís, delegates, groups, and assemblies to that authority is imperative and should be whole-hearted 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 among the believers, and is indispensable to the effective working of the administrative machinery of the Faith in every country." Letter from Shoghi Effendi through his secretary, *Bahá'í News*, July 1934.

CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

Individual members of the community having suggestions for the National Spiritual Assembly are to submit them at a Nine-

teen-Day Feast. If approved by the community and the local Spiritual Assembly, they are to be submitted to the National Assembly by the local Assembly.

Individual believers in a Bahá'í community are not to make complaints directly to the National Assembly, but submit them to the local Assembly in accordance with the section on "Decisions and Appeals" in this booklet.

The local Assembly is requested not to apply to the National Spiritual Assembly for information which is generally available in the Sacred Writings, or in the works of Shoghi Effendi or in *Bahá'í News*; nor to bring up matters which can and should be decided by local consultation.

COOPERATION WITH NATIONAL AND AREA COMMITTEES

The national and area committees appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly offer services which can strongly reinforce the local community in its efforts to promote the Faith. None of these committees exercises authority within the area of jurisdiction of the local Assembly, but they are to be recognized as arms of the National Spiritual Assembly, authorized to maintain specific activities necessary to the growth and development of the American Bahá'í community and the maintenance of the American commitments in other lands.

The local Assembly alert to the advantages offered by national and area committees will study their functions as defined in the annual Bahá'í Directory and make every possible use of their materials and services.

Particular emphasis at this time must be laid upon the obligation of every local Assembly to adopt and carry out, in consultation with the area teaching committee, a plan for active and continuous extension teaching in nearby towns and villages. This service to the Faith on the home front is not only a challenge to each Assembly but also to each individual member of the community.

INACTIVE BELIEVERS

It is a privilege as well as a sacred obligation of the local Assembly to maintain helpful and friendly communication with all members of the community. Its representatives are to visit the sick and elderly friends, comfort the bereaved and seek out those who continue to remain absent from Nineteen-Day Feasts, firesides and other community gatherings.

Perhaps the absent one is traveling, prevented by illness or other valid reasons from participating in Bahá'í activities, or he may actually have withdrawn from the Faith.

The Assembly is to do its utmost to remove the causes for inactivity, but if a believer refuses to respond, the Assembly should appoint a committee to call upon the person to ascertain whether he or she is no longer interested in the Faith. If not, the name of the believer and all pertinent facts are to be reported to the National Spiritual Assembly who will determine whether the believer's decision to withdraw is fixed and final, or whether there is some misunderstanding, personal feeling or other difficulty which can be overcome.

In all cases the local Assembly should show sympathy and understanding toward the inactive believer and avoid any dictatorial attitude.

When an individual withdraws from the Faith, this does not mean that all association with him or her should be cut off. On the contrary the friends should maintain warm and loving contact with him or her to whatever extent is possible in the hope that he or she will ultimately desire reinstatement in the Faith.

REMOVAL FROM MEMBERSHIP

From time to time the National Assembly regretfully finds it necessary to deprive a believer of his membership and voting rights. This is generally due to flagrant violation of Bahá'í laws or standards of Bahá'í conduct which reflects upon the fair name of the Faith, or disobedience to the administrative institutions of the Faith. This disciplinary measure deprives the individual of attendance at Nineteen-Day Feasts, voting in any Bahá'í elec-

tions, and participating in any activities restricted to enrolled members. He is simply no longer a member of the Bahá'í community and therefore loses all privileges of Bahá'í membership, but friendly association may be maintained with him unless the National Spiritual Assembly announces that this is forbidden.

TEACHING AND CONFIRMING NEW BELIEVERS

Every Spiritual Assembly is urged to realize that the goal of all teaching is to confirm new souls and not merely to add more names to the membership list. A vital realization of the Station of the Manifestation and capacity to sacrifice in devotion to His Faith is and must ever be the aim of all teaching efforts. Full understanding of the various laws and principles of the Faith and of its world-wide Administrative Order can and must be offered after enrollment through teaching and deepening classes. The new believer is to be cherished and carried through the different stages of development until he becomes a firmly grounded worker for the Cause.

In his instructions concerning teaching and confirming new believers, Shoghi Effendi in A.D.J., pp. 43-44, states that the teacher should "shower such kindness upon the seeker, and exemplify to such a degree the spirit of the teachings he hopes to instill into him, that the recipient will be spontaneously impelled to identify himself with the Cause embodying such teachings. Let him," he continues, "refrain, at the outset, from insisting on such laws and observances as might impose too severe a strain on the seeker's newly-awakened faith, and endeavor to nurse him, patiently, tactfully, and yet determinedly, into full maturity, and aid him to proclaim his unqualified acceptance of whatever has been ordained by Bahá'u'lláh. Let him, as soon as that stage has been attained, introduce him to the body of his fellow-believers, and seek, through constant fellowship and active participation in the local activities of his community, to enable him to contribute his share to the enrichment of its life, the furtherance of its tasks, the consolidation of its interests, and the co-ordination of its activities with those of its sister communities. Let him not be content until he has infused into his spiritual child so deep a longing as to impel him to arise independently,

in his turn, and devote his energies to the quickening of other souls, and the upholding of the laws and principles laid down by his newly-adopted Faith."

ENROLLMENT OF BELIEVERS

Shoghi Effendi has set forth the qualifications of membership in the following passage:

"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 thier 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."— B.A., p. 90.

A local Spiritual Assembly is responsible for the enrollment of members residing within the area of its jurisdiction, and area

teaching committees have been given the responsibility of enrolling believers living outside of Assembly jurisdiction, with the exception of American Indians living on Indian Reservations who are enrolled through the American Indian Service Committee.

The National Spiritual Assembly provides on request of local Spiritual Assemblies and area teaching committees the necessary forms for reporting the enrollment of new members and the transfer of membership from one locality to another.

Assemblies have one form of enrollment card and the area teaching committees are supplied with another form.

Concerning the enrollment of foreigners in this country, in general, any individuals visiting briefly in this country who become interested in the Faith may be taught but should not be enrolled except by their own National Spiritual Assemblies upon their return home. However, if they intend to remain in the United States for a lengthy period, they may be enrolled and can be transferred to the National Spiritual Assembly of their native land on their return. An exception to this is the enrollment of Persians and individuals from other Islamic countries. Such persons cannot be enrolled in this country, but must apply for enrollment on their return home, unless they have taken steps to become citizens of the United States. In any case, where the enrollment of *anyone* from another country is involved, all facts must be presented to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States before proceeding with enrollment.

BAHÁ'Í CREDENTIALS

All Bahá'ís, adult and enrolled youth, should carry current identification cards. These serve as credentials when moving to a new community or visiting communities where they are not already known, to identify them as members in good standing entitled to attend Nineteen-Day Feasts, Bahá'í conferences, national and state conventions, and other meetings for Bahá'ís only. Local Spiritual Assemblies are supplied with the necessary cards for the members of their community. The National Spiritual Assembly provides the cards on request for members in isolated centers and groups, for believers traveling abroad, and for Bahá'ís coming to the United States from other countries. These

identification cards are issued for one year only and it is the responsibility of the individual to see that his card is renewed when the current one expires.

Any person from another country claiming to be a Bahá'í must present his credentials to the proper administrative body. If he carries credentials as a visitor only he may retain them, but if he plans to remain in the United States for any length of time, for any purpose whatever, he must send these credentials immediately to the National Assembly who will retain them and provide him with American credentials. This regulation is to be strictly applied to Orientals from Islamic countries whose credentials must be submitted to the National Spiritual Assembly before the individual can be accepted by or welcomed to the local community.

ASSOCIATION WITH ORIENTALS

No Persian or any Oriental from the Near East having an Islamic background is to be accepted as a Bahá'í unless he has proper credentials from the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States. If he presents credentials from his own country, he must be informed that he cannot be admitted to Bahá'í meetings until he has submitted them to the NSA and has received a proper identification card. Any Oriental lacking credentials, or who claims to have a Bahá'í background or close association with Bahá'ís elsewhere, and persists in association with the local believers, is to be reported to the National Spiritual Assembly.

The Guardian on several occasions sent to the American Bahá'ís stern warnings concerning the reception and enrollment of Persians and other Orientals, reminding them that to disregard the Master's repeated commands concerning this matter "would be detrimental to the vital interests of the Faith," and will "precipitate a crisis endangering the unity and security of the Faith." "They must constantly bear in mind the fact that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's warnings in this connection are just as serious today as the day He uttered them," wrote Shoghi Effendi on March 25, 1946, "because the people He warned the friends against have not changed in character or in their attitude toward

the Cause. Neglect of these warnings can lead to a serious retardment of the Faith's development in America."

Shoghi Effendi further urged the American Bahá'ís not to seek out and concentrate upon teaching Orientals when there are still millions of Americans who have not heard of the Faith. However, Orientals having permanent residence in America, if found to be sincere seekers, can be taught and enrolled. (See section "Enrollment of New Believers.")

CHANGES IN ADDRESS AND MEMBERSHIP

Membership Report forms are provided all local Spiritual Assemblies and area teaching committees for the purpose of notifying the National Assembly of any changes in address and membership.

Change of Address

Whenever a Bahá'í changes his address it must be reported promptly to the National Bahá'í Administrative Headquarters by the local Spiritual Assembly or area teaching committee concerned.

Transfer of Membership

1. From one Bahá'í Community to another Bahá'í Community
 - a. The individual member reports to secretary of his local Spiritual Assembly.
 - b. The secretary makes certain a current identification card has been issued.
 - c. The secretary reports transfer to secretary of the community to which the believer is moving, giving new street address if possible.
 - d. Duplicate copy of the report of transfer is sent to the National Bahá'í Administrative Headquarters.
 - e. The individual reports to the secretary of his new local Spiritual Assembly.

- f. The secretary of his new local Assembly reports this addition to the community membership list to the National Bahá'í Administrative Headquarters.
2. From a Bahá'í Community to Isolated or Group
 - a. The individual member reports to secretary of his local Spiritual Assembly.
 - b. The secretary makes certain a current identification card has been issued.
 - c. The secretary reports the transfer to National Bahá'í Administrative Headquarters, giving new street address if possible.
 - d. National Spiritual Assembly reports the transfer to the area teaching committee and requests them to determine whether the new address is an isolated locality or one having a Bahá'í group.
 3. From Isolated or Group to a Bahá'í Community
 - a. The individual member notifies National Bahá'í Administrative Headquarters.
 - b. The individual member requests a current identification card if he does not have one.
 - c. The individual member notifies the secretary of his new local Spiritual Assembly.
 - d. The secretary of his new local Assembly reports this addition to the community membership list to the National Bahá'í Administrative Headquarters.
 4. Changes within Isolated or Group List
 - a. The individual member notifies the National Bahá'í Administrative Headquarters.
 - b. The individual requests a current identification card if he does not have one.
 - c. The individual notifies the area teaching committee.
 - d. The area teaching committee reports the change to the National Bahá'í Administrative Headquarters.
 5. Transfers from outside the United States
 - a. A Bahá'í coming to the United States from another country is expected to bring proper credentials with him from the National Spiritual Assembly of that country, and to present them on arrival to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States.
 - b. As soon as these are received by the National Spiritual

Assembly, the believer will be provided with a Bahá'í identification card to serve as his credentials while in this country.

BAHÁ'Í YOUTH

The status of Bahá'í youth and their service on committees was defined by the National Spiritual Assembly in *Bahá'í News, U.S. Supplement*, April 1961. These principles, in which there has been no change since that time, are as follows:

The term "Bahá'í" is not limited to declared believers twenty-one years of age or older. Members between the ages of fifteen and twenty-one are Bahá'ís even though they may be referred to as Bahá'í youth. The members of a community are all the declared believers in that community, regardless of age.

Each individual, fifteen years of age and older, becomes a registered believer upon acceptance of the qualifications of faith set forth by the Guardian and by declaration to a Spiritual Assembly or to an area teaching committee. All individuals, regardless of age, should be lovingly and carefully prepared for acceptance into the community.

It is not necessary for a regularly enrolled Bahá'í youth to re-declare his faith at the age of twenty-one. When a Bahá'í youth declares his faith, it is a spiritual step binding upon him for the rest of his life and not a mere statement of some future intention. However, on reaching the age of twenty-one, the individual is to notify the local Assembly secretary or the area teaching committee so that he may be registered as a voting member.

Bahá'ís between the ages of fifteen and twenty-one have all the rights and privileges of a community member except voting in Bahá'í elections and serving as members of assemblies. Bahá'í youth may participate without question in all the consultations of the community; they may serve on any committee of the local Assembly, as well as on national and area committees.

Bahá'ís under twenty-one may not serve as convention delegates or as members of a local or National Assembly. In these matters, as in voting for these positions, the age limit of twenty-one must be maintained in order to assure the legal position of the local and national institutions.

Assemblies should give all possible encouragement, experience and training to the young members of the community.

The children of believers may attend the Nineteen-Day Feasts and other intimate gatherings of the community, but when they reach the age of fifteen, the local Assembly should lovingly inquire if they wish to declare their faith and enroll as members of the community. If they do not declare their faith after reaching fifteen, they do not have the rights and privileges of community membership. The local Assembly is cautioned not to exert undue pressure on such young people, but to treat them in a very kindly spirit and, when they wish to declare their faith, to assist them in understanding the significance of such a step.

THE BAHÁ'Í FUND

“As the progress and execution 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 to 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. . . .” B.A., pp. 41-42.

“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.” Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í News*, Sept. 1926.

“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.” M.A., p. 5.

“In connection with the institution of the National Fund . . . 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. . . .” B.A., p. 101.

“Moreover, we should, I feel, regard it as an axiom and guiding principle of Bahá’í administration that in the conduct of every specific Bahá’í activity, as different from undertakings of a humanitarian, philanthropic, or charitable character, which may in future be conducted under Bahá’í auspices, only those who have already identified themselves with the Faith and are regarded as its avowed and unreserved supporters should be invited to join and collaborate.” B.A., p. 182.

A statement from the National Treasurer is included in an issue of the *Bahá’í News* each year, setting out the various funds — international, national, and local — with instructions for making contributions to each of them.

THE BAHÁ’Í CALENDAR

Anniversaries

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.
 Birth of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, May 23, 1844.
 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.

Holy Days on which Work Should Be Suspended

The first day of Ridván.
 The ninth day of Ridván.
 The twelfth day of Ridván.
 The anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb.
 The anniversary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh.
 The anniversary of the Birth of the Báb.
 The anniversary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh.
 The anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Báb.
 The Feast of Naw-Rúz.

Nineteen-Day Feasts

MONTH	ARABIC NAME	TRANSLATION	FIRST DAYS
1st	Bahá	Splendor	March 21
2nd	Jalál	Glory	April 9
3rd	Jamál	Beauty	April 28
4th	'Azamat	Grandeur	May 17
5th	Núr	Light	June 5
6th	Rahmat	Mercy	June 24
7th	Kalimát	Words	July 13
8th	Kamál	Perfection	August 1
9th	Asmá'	Names	August 20
10th	'Izzat	Might	September 8
11th	Mashiyyat	Will	September 27
12th	'Ilm	Knowledge	October 16
13th	Qudrat	Power	November 4
14th	Qawl	Speech	November 23
15th	Masá'il	Questions	December 12
16th	Sharaf	Honor	December 31

MONTH	ARABIC NAME	TRANSLATION	FIRST DAYS
17th	Sultán	Sovereignty	January 19
18th	Mulk	Dominion	February 7
19th	'Alá'	Loftiness	March 2

“The Bahá’í day starts and ends at sunset, and consequently the date of the celebration of Bahá’í feasts should be adjusted to conform to the Bahá’í calendar time. For further particulars on this subject you should refer to the section entitled ‘Bahá’í Calendar’ in *The Bahá’í World*.

“The Guardian would advise that, if feasible, the friends should commemorate certain of the feasts and anniversaries at the following time:

“The anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb on May 22, at about two hours after sunset.

“The first day of Ridván, at about 3:00 P.M. on the 21st of April.

“The anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Báb on July 9 at about noon.

“The anniversary of the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh on May 29 at 3:00 A.M.

“The Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on November 28 at 1:00 A.M.

“The other anniversaries the believers are free to gather at any time during the day which they find convenient.” Letter from Shoghi Effendi, November 27, 1938.

ADMINISTRATIVE TITLES AND THE NAME OF THE FAITH

Distinction should be made between the title of an administrative body, like a local Assembly or national committee, and a designation employed to refer to the Faith in general and as a whole.

An administrative body or institution has a title which defines its functions and its area of jurisdiction; for example, an Assembly letterhead like “Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Jonesville” or a committee letterhead like “Area Teaching Committee for the Atlantic States.” Such titles identify the body which is acting.

On the other hand, we say "Bahá'í World Faith," "Bahá'í Faith," "The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh," or "Bahá'í Revelation" when we mean our religion in general, its teachings, its aims, its international community and the sum total of its institutions. It is not a body which acts in a particular local, regional or national area, but the Faith for which all our individual or collective actions are performed.

Thus, if a local public meeting is held, the program designates the local sponsoring body, but the program can also identify the religion for which the meeting is held — Bahá'í World Faith, for example. In such cases, the typographical arrangement should make it clear to the non-Bahá'í that "Bahá'í World Faith" is not holding the meeting, but the meeting is held by such and such a body in, of, or for Bahá'í World Faith. Similarly, letterheads should not convey the idea that the letter is written by "Bahá'í World Faith," but rather by a particular Assembly or committee.

These same instructions apply to listings in telephone and other directories.

INTER-COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Co-operative action involving more than one local community often appears desirable in such activities as conferences, public meetings, social events, etc. This process of working together in groups larger than a single community is not to be discouraged, provided it can be accomplished within the framework of proper administrative procedure.

Administratively, each local Spiritual Assembly has complete and sole jurisdiction over all Bahá'í matters and functions taking place within the civil boundaries of its town, city, township, county, judicial district, etc., subject only to the higher authority of the National Spiritual Assembly. Individuals and groups living outside the jurisdiction of a local Assembly are directly under the complete and sole jurisdiction of the National Assembly.

However, within the limits of wise discretion, local communities may invite Bahá'ís from other localities to attend and participate in functions sponsored by the local Assembly or group, and these Bahá'ís are free to accept these invitations provided that by doing so they do not detract from the teaching effort in their

own locality. The principal danger lies in the possibility of one group or Assembly becoming dominant in a metropolitan area, while the others become dependent, losing their self-reliance and initiative.

In matters affecting two or more local Assemblies, isolated believers, or groups, the line of authority is through the National Spiritual Assembly. In planning events in which the co-operative activity appears desirable, the permission, guidance, and assistance of the National Assembly is to be sought.

BAHÁ'Í LITERATURE AND ITS DISTRIBUTION

The Guardian (and 'Abdu'l-Bahá before him) made the National Spiritual Assembly the central responsible authority for the publication and distribution of Bahá'í literature, and the National Assembly is obligated to maintain authenticity, accuracy and a high degree of quality in all Bahá'í publications. In B.A., p. 40, Shoghi Effendi stated: "Vital issues affecting the interests of the Cause . . . such as the matter of translation and publication . . . must be under the full jurisdiction of the National Assembly."

The National Spiritual Assembly appoints annually a Reviewing Committee whose function is to review the quality and accuracy of works scheduled for publication, and the production and distribution of these items is centralized in the Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

The matter of circularization and distribution of literature and all other items affecting the interests and prestige of the Faith lies entirely within the province of Bahá'í administrative channels; that is, the National Spiritual Assembly, its appointed committees, the local Spiritual Assemblies and groups.

No local Spiritual Assembly or group may produce for sale or distribution outside its own area of jurisdiction any item not properly reviewed and approved by the National Assembly.

The local Assembly, in fulfilling its responsibility to its community, should appoint a librarian, or literature representative, whose duty is to keep the believers informed of new literature, and to centralize the ordering and distribution of literature within the local community, both to Bahá'ís as well as to in-

quirers and students of the Faith. This same procedure applies also to the Bahá'í groups.

When a change of librarian or literature representative is made, the former representative should turn over to his or her successor full records, including catalogs and all of the instructive material which is supplied from time to time by the Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

LAWS, ORDINANCES AND OBLIGATIONS

“A two-fold obligation resteth upon him who hath recognized the Day Spring of the Unity of God, and acknowledged the truth of Him Who is the Manifestation of His oneness. The first is steadfastness in His love, such steadfastness that neither the clamor of the enemy nor the claims of the idle pretender can deter him from cleaving unto Him Who is the Eternal Truth. . . . The second is strict observance of the laws He hath prescribed. . . .”
Gl., pp. 289–290.

In G.P.B., pp. 214–215, Shoghi Effendi gives a summary of the laws of the *Aqdas*, and refers to the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, “revealed from first to last by the Author of the Dispensation Himself,” as the repository of “the basic laws and ordinances on which the fabric of His future World Order must rest” and states that “recognizing the ‘Dayspring of God’s Revelation’ and of observing all the ordinances revealed by Him” constitute “inseparable duties,” “neither of which is acceptable without the other.”

“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 society 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. . . ." Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í News*, October 1935.

In a letter dated May 7, 1957, the Guardian wrote: "The Bahá'ís must, in view of the conditions of the world today, stand forth firmly and courageously as followers of Bahá'u'lláh, obeying His Laws and seeking to build His World Order. Through compromise we will never be able to establish our Faith or win others' hearts to it. This involves often great personal sacrifice, but we know that, when we do the right thing, God gives us strength to carry it out, and we attract His blessing. We learn at such times that our calamity is indeed a blessing."

The following pages cover further information, under sub-headings, regarding some of the specific laws, ordinances and obligations.

Daily Obligatory Prayer

"O thou spiritual friend! Know thou that prayer is indispensable and obligatory, and man under no pretext whatever is excused therefrom unless he be mentally unsound or an insurmountable obstacle prevent him." TAB, Vol. III, p. 683.

". . . in every Dispensation the law concerning prayer hath been emphasized and universally enforced." *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, p. 39.

"The daily obligatory prayers are three in number. . . . 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." Shoghi Effendi, B.P., p. 117.

"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, B.P., p. 129.

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'u'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-Rúz 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.’ . . .

“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, through his secretary, *Bahá'i News*, March 1936.

“Travelers are exempt from fasting, but if they want to fast while they are traveling, they are free to do so. You are exempt

the whole period of your travel, not just the hours you are in a train or car, etc. If one eats unconsciously during the fasting hours, this is not breaking the Fast as it is an accident. The age limit is seventy years, but if one desires to fast after the age limit is passed, and is strong enough to, one is free to do so. If during the Fast period a person falls ill and is unable to fast, but recovers before the Fast period is over, he can start to fast again and continue until the end. Of course the Fast, as you know, can only be kept during the month set aside for that purpose." Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í News*, January 1944.

Marriage

"The Bahá'í betrothal is the perfect agreement and entire consent of both parties. They must show forth the utmost attention and become informed of one another's character. The firm covenant between them must become an eternal binding, and their intentions must be everlasting affinity, friendship, unity and life.

"The marriage of Bahá'ís means that the man and woman must become spiritually and physically united, so that they may have eternal unity throughout all the divine worlds, and improve the spiritual life of each other. This is Bahá'í matrimony." TAB, Vol. II, p. 325, as cited in B.N.E., pp. 215-216.

From time to time the Guardian answered questions and gave clear explanations regarding Bahá'í marriage which have been published in *Bahá'í News*. The following instructions are brought together here to enable both the local Spiritual Assembly and the betrothed parties to understand the nature and character of Bahá'í marriage and how it is to be conducted.

Consent of Parents

"Bahá'u'lláh has clearly stated the consent of all living parents is required for a Bahá'í marriage. This applies whether the parents are Bahá'ís or non-Bahá'ís, divorced for years, or not. This great law He has laid down to strengthen the social fabric, to knit closer the ties of the home, to place a certain gratitude and respect in the heart of children for those who have given them life and sent their souls out on the eternal journey towards their Creator. We Bahá'ís must realize that in present-day society the

exact opposite process is taking place: young people care less and less for their parents' wishes, divorce is considered a natural right, and obtained on the flimsiest and most unwarrantable and shabby pretexts. People separated from each other, especially if one of them has had full custody of the children, are only too willing to belittle the importance of the partner in marriage also responsible as a parent for bringing those children into this world. The Bahá'í must through rigid adherence to the Bahá'í laws and teachings, combat those corrosive forces which are so rapidly destroying home life and the beauty of family relationships, and tearing down the moral structure of society."

"Regarding the question whether it is necessary to obtain the consent of the parents of a non-Bahá'í participant in a marriage with a Bahá'í, as Bahá'u'lláh has stated that the consent of the parents of both parties is required in order to promote unity and avoid friction, and as the *Aqdas* does not specify any exceptions to this rule, the Guardian feels that under all circumstances the consent of the parents of both parties is required."

Thus any Bahá'í marrying a non-Bahá'í, and any local Spiritual Assembly performing a Bahá'í marriage, whether for Bahá'ís or non-Bahá'ís, is under obligation to see that the prior consent of all living parents is received and to make clear to both the couple and the parents that in the case of non-Bahá'ís such consent does not constitute acceptance of the Bahá'í Faith.

"Regarding your question of applying the sanction of suspension of voting rights to people who marry without the consent of parents, this should be done from now on. The laws of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* are explicit and not open to any ambiguity at all. As long as the parents are alive, the consent must be obtained; it is not conditioned on their relationship to their children. If the whereabouts of the parents is not known legally, in other words, if they are legally dead, then it is not necessary for the children to obtain their consent, obviously. It is not a question of the child not knowing the present whereabouts of its parents; it is a question of a legal thing — if the parents are alive, they must be asked." Shoghi Effendi, through his secretary, June 26, 1956.

Regarding the question as to whether a believer who has been deprived of his membership and voting rights because of violating the Bahá'í laws regarding marriage, the Hands of the Faith in the Holy Land wrote on April 27, 1959 that "the general principle applied by the beloved Guardian in such cases was that

the mistakes must be rectified even to the extent of divorce and remarriage according to Bahá'í laws."

Marriage between a Bahá'í and a Non-Bahá'í

"If a Bahá'í marries a non-Bahá'í who wishes to have the religious ceremony of his own sect carried out, it must be quite clear that, first, the Bahá'í partner is understood to be a Bahá'í by religion, and not to accept the religion of the other partner to the marriage through having his or her religious ceremony; and, second, the ceremony must be of a nature which does not commit the Bahá'í to any declaration of faith in a religion other than his own. . . . Under the circumstances, the Bahá'í can partake of the religious ceremony of his non-Bahá'í partner. The Bahá'í should insist on having the Bahá'í ceremony carried out before or after the non-Bahá'í one, on the same day." Shoghi Effendi, through his secretary, June 20, 1954.

The Bahá'í Marriage Ceremony

Article III of the By-Laws of a local Spiritual Assembly states: "It (i.e., the Assembly) shall have exclusive authority to conduct Bahá'í marriage ceremonies and issue Bahá'í marriage certificates within the area of its jurisdiction."

State marriage codes confer legal authority upon certain designated civil and church officials. In most instances the codes also recognize the conduct of a legal marriage service by religious communities which have no professional clergy.

Forms are provided by the Bureau or County Clerk which the Assembly officers are to fill out and file as directed. The National Spiritual Assembly, on application, provides a Bahá'í marriage certificate which the local Assembly certifies and presents to the bride and groom. In the case of Assemblies having legal authority to conduct marriages, the Bahá'í marriage certificate constitutes a legal marriage certificate.

"In the performance of a Bahá'í marriage, the chairman and secretary of the local Assembly should act as its representatives. The ceremony itself must be very simple."

". . . there is no ritual, according to the *Aqdas*, and the Guardian is very anxious that none should be introduced at present and no general form accepted. He believes the ceremony

should be as simple as possible, the parties using the words ordained by Bahá'u'lláh¹ and excerpts from the writings and prayers being read, if desired. There should be no commingling of the old forms with the new and simple one by Bahá'u'lláh, and Bahá'ís should not be married in the church or any other acknowledged place of worship of the followers of other faiths."

Divorce

In a Tablet to the Bahá'ís of America 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote: "The friends (Bahá'ís) must strictly refrain from divorce unless something arises which compels them to separate because of their aversion to each other; in that case, with the knowledge of the Spiritual Assembly, they may decide to separate. They must be patient and wait one complete year. If during this year harmony is not re-established between them, then their divorce may be realized. . . . The foundation of the Kingdom of God is union, not upon differences, especially between husband and wife. If one of these two become the cause of divorce, that one will unquestionably fall into great difficulties, will become the victim of formidable calamities and experience deep remorse."

In the matter of divorce the Bahá'ís are bound not only by the Bahá'í teachings but also by the laws of the state in which they live.

When separation takes place, the believer is to report to the local Assembly the intention and date of the beginning of the year of patience as well as the outcome of the efforts at reconciliation at the end of the year.

Bahá'í Burial

A law of the *Aqdas* makes it obligatory for Bahá'ís to bury their dead within one hour's journey from the place of death. In cases where the nearest relatives, or executors of the believer's estate are not Bahá'ís, the Bahá'ís are to take whatever steps are necessary in their wills, or leave written instructions that will make this act binding in the event of death.

Regarding the Bahá'í funeral service, the utmost simplicity and flexibility should be observed. The reading of Bahá'í prayers

¹ See *Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 186.

and other passages from the Bahá'í Sacred Writings is all that is necessary at the present time. Any Bahá'í may conduct a Bahá'í funeral service and such a service can be conducted for non-Bahá'ís, if requested.

The laws of the *Aqdas* prohibit cremation of the body, and in this connection Shoghi Effendi wrote through his secretary, July 7, 1947, the following: "He feels that, in view of what 'Abdu'l-Bahá has said against cremation, the believers should be strongly urged, as an act of faith, to make provisions against their remains being cremated . . ." *Bahá'í News*, August 1947.

Personal Wills

According to Bahá'í law every believer is to prepare a will and testament. Believers planning to provide a bequest to the National Spiritual Assembly can apply for a bulletin of information. Bahá'í papers and correspondence owned by a believer having non-Bahá'í relatives should be carefully disposed of in the will, either as a bequest to the local Assembly, to a trusted Bahá'í friend, or through the provision that such papers and correspondence are to be destroyed.

Provision is also to be made for a Bahá'í funeral service.

Neither the local nor the National Assembly can be named as executors of a will.

Avoidance of Alcoholic Drinks and Habit Forming Drugs

Among the things forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Aqdas* is the use of alcoholic beverages which are "the cause of chronic diseases, weakeneth the nerves, and consumeth the mind." A.D.J., p. 27.

As to the use of opium, also forbidden in the text of the *Aqdas*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states "all means must be employed, so that the human species may be delivered from this great calamity" which "leads to madness," and "maketh a living man dead." B.W.F. p. 335.

Loyalty to Government

Loyalty to government is an essential spiritual and social principle. Not only do the Bahá'í teachings obligate members to

be loyal to their government, but they also forbid them from taking part in subversive political and social movements. "Let integrity and uprightness distinguish thine acts," writes Bahá'u'lláh. "We must obey and be the well-wishers of the governments of the land . . ." B.W.F., p. 440. "In every country or government where any of this community reside, they must behave toward that government with faithfulness, trustfulness and truthfulness." B.W.F., p. 192.

Bahá'ís and Military Service

Members of the Bahá'í Faith make no reservations in claiming that they are fully obedient to all provisions of the laws of their country, including the constitutional right of the Federal government to raise armies and conscript citizens for military service.

However, when called upon for military service, Bahá'ís are required to apply for noncombatant service whenever the opportunity to do so is legally provided by their government on the basis of religious training and belief. Although it is necessary for Bahá'ís to be classified as "conscientious objectors" to combatant military service in order to obtain a noncombatant status under the Selective Service regulations, they are not "conscientious objectors" in the sense of a refusal to obey the laws of their country or to perform noncombatant military duties as members of the armed forces.

While religious convictions of Bahá'ís require them to seek whatever exemption from combatant duty may be granted by their government on the grounds of religious beliefs, they definitely are not pacifists in the sense of refusal to cooperate with and obey the laws of an established government. Thus Bahá'ís do not, on the grounds of religious convictions, seek to abandon their obligation as citizens in time of war or national emergency. Neither do they attempt to avoid the dangers and hardships which are inevitable in time of war, and to which all citizens of military age are liable. Their status is rather that of "conscientious cooperators" with the military authorities of their country; since they serve as members of the armed forces in the Medical Corps, or in any capacity in which they may legally maintain a

noncombatant status, regardless of the effect which this may have upon their personal safety, their convenience, the type of activity they must discharge, or the rank to which they may be assigned.

Thus Bahá'ís who are citizens of the United States are able to reconcile their fundamental spiritual convictions and their civil obligations as citizens by applying for noncombatant service under the existing Selective Service laws and regulations.

Local Spiritual Assemblies are expected to keep on file and to make available to all youth who may be subject to military service the special bulletin provided by the National Spiritual Assembly on request entitled "Bahá'ís and the Selective Draft."

Non-Political Character of the Faith

In a letter dated January 26, 1933, written on behalf of the Guardian, printed in April 1933 *Bahá'í News*, the following is stated:

"The Guardian . . . feels under the responsibility of stating that the attitude taken by the Master (that is, that American citizens are in duty bound to vote in public elections) implies certain reservations. He, therefore, lays it upon the individual conscience to see that in following the Master's instructions no Bahá'í vote for an officer nor Bahá'í participation in the affairs of the Republic shall involve acceptance by that individual of a program or policy that contravenes any vital principle, spiritual or social, of the Faith."

The Guardian added to this letter the following postscript: "I feel it incumbent upon me to clarify the above statement, written on my behalf, by stating that no vote cast, nor office undertaken, by a Bahá'í should necessarily constitute acceptance, by the voter or office holder, of the entire program of any political party. No Bahá'í can be regarded as either a Republican or Democrat, as such. He is above all else, the supporter of the principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, with which, I am firmly convinced, the program of no political party is completely harmonious."

More complete references to this subject may be found in *The Bahá'í World*, Volume XII, pages 306-312.

Membership in Other Religious Organizations

“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 such an act would necessarily imply only a partial acceptance of the teachings and laws of the Faith and an incomplete recognition of its independent status, and would thus be tantamount to an act of disloyalty to the verities it enshrines. . . . To be a Bahá’í and at the same time accept membership in another religious body is simply an act of contradiction that no sincere and logically minded person can possibly accept. To follow Bahá’u’lláh does not mean accepting some of His teachings and rejecting the rest. Allegiance to His Cause must be uncompromising and whole-hearted.

“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 has made such an assertion of the independence of the Cause not only highly desirable but absolutely essential.” Shoghi Effendi through his secretary, *Bahá’í News*, July 1935.

“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.” Shoghi Effendi through his secretary, *Bahá’í News*, March 1936.

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. . . . 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. . . . 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, *Bahá’í News*, August 1933.

Membership in Secret Organizations

On page 132 of *God Passes By* the following reference is made to dissociation from all secret associations and factions even before Bahá’u’lláh declared His Mission: “The dissociation of the Bábí Faith from every form of political activity and from all secret associations and factions . . .—all these constitute the salient features of a code of ethical conduct to which the books, treatises and epistles, revealed during those years, by the indefatigable pen of Bahá’u’lláh, unmistakably bear witness.”

The September 1955 issue of *Bahá’í News* carries a statement by the National Spiritual Assembly regarding membership in Freemasonry in which the texts of two cablegrams from the Guardian are quoted as follows: “Disapprove membership (in) Freemasonry” (November 11, 1954); “Any Bahá’í determined retain membership (in) Freemasonry loses voting rights” (December 22, 1954); and in a letter written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States July 9, 1955, the Guardian stated: “The directive regarding membership in Freemasonry should be carried out by your Assembly in all areas under your Assembly’s jurisdiction.”

This directive about Freemasonry is an application of the general principle which the Guardian laid down some years earlier to the effect that Bahá’ís are not to affiliate with organizations,

any of whose purposes and methods contradict fundamental principles of the Bahá'í teachings. This directive closes our ranks for the period of public responsibility when enemies of the Cause will do their best to find ways to discredit our principles of complete neutrality with respect to various social organizations in East and West.

Gossip and Backbiting

Gossip and backbiting stand as the most sinister and destructive evils of any society, and they are strictly forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh. The new World Order is and must be held sacred and free from this grave defect in human relationships. Whispers and backbiting is equivalent to separation among the friends of God, and they destroy the solidarity of the Bahá'í community.

Rumor and gossip depend upon a ready listener. Bahá'ís hearing negative statements about other believers should refuse to listen, and advise the gossipier to confine his suspicions to an administrative body. This practice will soon eliminate the circulation of negative statements.

When any individual believer feels convinced that another believer is acting in a manner that is harmful to the Faith, to the welfare of the community, or to an individual member thereof, he is to inform the local Spiritual Assembly and furnish proofs and evidence. This done, he has no further responsibility and can concentrate upon his own Bahá'í duties and obligations. To report confidentially through administrative channels any condition which is harmful and destructive is not gossip or backbiting. In no case should the friends speak to their fellow-believers 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.

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

The Assembly is to invite the believer in question to attend a meeting for consultation, and he is given full opportunity to prove himself innocent of the charges. If the Assembly accepts his proof, the matter is dropped and not discussed again unless further relevant evidence is presented.

If the charges cannot be denied or if the local Assembly is

unable to stop or prevent the continued discussion or circulation of criticism and unfounded rumors after it has taken jurisdiction of the matter, it is to report such cases to the National Spiritual Assembly for advice or further action, after which the National Assembly assumes full responsibility, for establishing either innocence or guilt; and, if guilt is established, for determining what action must be taken to protect the Cause.

The Bahá'í community must be kept free of gossip and backbiting. The remedy is twofold — prayer for spiritual health and observance of the true principle given us for the protection of the community.

Observance of Holy Days

“Abdu'l-Bahá, in one of His Tablets addressed to a believer of Nayríz, Persia, has written the following: ‘Nine days in the year have been appointed on which work is forbidden. Some of these days have been specifically mentioned in the Book. The rest follows as corollaries to the Text . . . Work on the Day of the Covenant (Fete Day of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá), however, is not prohibited. Celebration of that day is left to the discretion of the friends. Its observation is not obligatory. The days pertaining to the Abhá Beauty (Bahá'u'lláh) and the Primal Point (the Báb), that is to say these nine days, are the only ones on which work connected with trade, commerce, industry and agriculture is not allowed. In like manner, work connected with any form of employment, whether governmental or otherwise, should be suspended.’

“As a corollary of this Tablet it follows that the anniversaries of the birth and ascension of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá are not to be regarded as days on which work is prohibited. The celebration of these two days, however, is obligatory.

“Bahá'ís in East and West, holding administrative positions, whether public or private, should exert the utmost effort to obtain special leave from their superiors to enable them to observe these nine holy days.” B.W., Vol. XII, p. 552.

Use of the Greatest Name

“The Greatest Name is the name of Bahá'u'lláh. Ya-Bahá'u'l-Abhá is an invocation meaning ‘O Thou Glory of Glories.’ Alláh-u-Abhá is a greeting which means ‘God the All-Glorious.’ Both refer to Bahá'u'lláh. By ‘Greatest Name’ is meant that Bahá'u'lláh has appeared in God’s greatest name, in other words, that He is the supreme Manifestation of God.” Shoghi Effendi, through his secretary, December 26, 1941.

Use of the Symbol of the Greatest Name is legally protected for proper Bahá'í use under the trade mark registration made by the National Spiritual Assembly through the U. S. Patent Office, and it is to be confined to books and pamphlets containing the words of Bahá'u'lláh (*Bahá'í News*, September 1934). It is also used as a wall hanging, picture or plaque.

“In regard to . . . the use of the Greatest Name on tombstones of Bahá'ís, the Guardian considers this too sacred to be placed in such a position in general use, and the friends should not use it on their tombstones. They can use quotations from the Teachings, if they wish to, but not the Greatest Name.” *Bahá'í News*, September 1954.

“The use of ‘Alláh-u-Abhá’ in the East is, generally speaking, confined to a greeting. It is not said at the end of prayers and the Guardian feels that the less it is used freely in public by the Bahá'ís in the West (before strangers) the better, as it gives a very peculiar impression of us, and makes us seem like some strange Oriental sect.” *Bahá'í News*, July 1947.

“The Bahá'ís are free to greet each other with Alláh-u-Abhá when they meet, if they want to, but they should avoid anything which to outsiders, in a western country, might seem like some strange Oriental password. We must be very firm on principles and laws, but very normal and natural in our ways, 'so as to attract strangers.” Shoghi Effendi through his secretary, *Bahá'í News*, February 1955.

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

Regarding the National Spiritual Assembly, “its immediate purpose is to stimulate, unify and coordinate by frequent per-

sonal 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." B.A., p. 39.

"This National Spiritual Assembly . . . 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-Adhkár*, 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 the 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 consideration 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." B.A., pp. 40-41.

"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 interest 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 prerogatives. It is the trusted guardian and the main-spring 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." Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í News*, July 1934.

STATE CONVENTIONS

The State Convention is a Bahá'í institution of fundamental importance to every believer. Not only is it an electoral body called upon to elect a determined number of delegates to the National Convention, but it is also a consultative body dealing with important considerations of teaching and other Bahá'í services.

In a letter from the Guardian through his secretary November 16, 1943, he refers to the State Convention thus: "(He) wishes to stress the importance of reminding the believers that they should make every possible effort to attend the meeting for the election of the State or Province delegates, in order to stimulate a larger group consciousness which will greatly facilitate the process of the believers becoming acquainted with each other, and provide an intermediary stage — which will become increasingly valuable and necessary between the local organization, represented by the group or Assembly, and national collective action, represented by the activities of the Convention and the institution of the National Assembly."

The State Convention is an administrative gathering of the Bahá'ís not under the direction of any local Assembly or National Committee.

Every adult member, in good standing, of the American Bahá'í community is eligible to vote in the state elections.

NATIONAL CONVENTION

"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." Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í News*, November 1933.

“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 . . ., 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. . . .

“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. . . .” Shoghi Effendi through his secretary, *Bahá’í News*, November 1933.

“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. . . . 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." Shoghi Effendi through his secretary, *Bahá'í News*, February 1934.

"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 through his secretary, *Bahá'í News*, February 1934.

REFERENCES

B.A. — *Bahá'í Administration*

G.P.B. — *God Passes By*

B.W. — *The Bahá'í World*

P.U.P. — *Promulgation of Universal Peace*

A.D.J. — *The Advent of Divine Justice*

M.A. — *Messages to America*

Gl. — *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*

TAB — *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*

B.N.E. — *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*

B.P. — *Bahá'í Prayers*