

*Charter
of a
Divine Civilization*

A Compilation

National Spiritual Assembly
of the
Baha'is of the United States
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INTRODUCTION

In *The Power of the Covenant* the National Spiritual Assembly compiled for the Bahá'ís those teachings which offer "the most vitalizing forces of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh released by God Himself for the regeneration of souls and the ordering of the world of humanity."

The present compilation on *The Charter of A Divine Civilization* assembles the particular passages which interpret the meaning of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as source of the New Bahá'í Order. These passages illumine the purpose of Bahá'í Institutions, revealing them as the prototypes of the House of Justice which in the Golden Age of the Faith will maintain justice and peace throughout the world.

For the old as well as the new believer it is essential to realize what vital import lies in our inconspicuous and oft-times humble local Spiritual Assemblies, our Nineteen Day Feasts, our National Spiritual Assemblies and our Annual Conventions.

These are the instruments through which the providential grace of God manifests the outworking of "those most vitalizing forces" in terms of human destiny. Without its Institutions the Faith of God would wither away. The Mission of Bahá'u'lláh, acting through 'Abdu'l-Bahá, not only created the Charter of Divine Civilization but perpetuated the power to establish Divine Civilization upon earth.

Until we realize in our minds and hearts the *Goal* of our administrative work, we cannot serve in the spirit of consecration which alone advances the Faith upon the path to justice and to peace. Vision of that Goal will redeem our time and effort spent in consultation as members of a Spiritual Assembly, as members of a Committee, or as attendants at a Nineteen Day Feast. Conditions which would appear trivial, useless or even depressing to a non-Bahá'í, to the true Bahá'í are spiritual opportunities to be reverently employed for the glory of God.

The aim of the present compilation is to offer the basic passages from the Will and Testament and from the Guardian's writings which establish and explain the Bahá'í Institutions as instruments for a Divine purpose. All considerations arising from

procedure are omitted as irrelevant to the theme. *The Bahá'í Community* can be consulted for explanation of procedure.

The National Spiritual Assembly emphasizes the need for study and consultation on *The Power of the Covenant* and *The Charter of A Divine Civilization* as inter-related and inseparable materials for the deepening of the Bahá'í life and the exaltation of the Bahá'í community.

—NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

CHARTER OF A DIVINE CIVILIZATION

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who incarnates an institution for which we find no parallel whatsoever in any of the world's recognized religious systems, may be said to have closed the Age to which He Himself belonged, and opened the one in which we are now laboring. His Will and Testament should thus be regarded as the perpetual, the indissoluble link which the mind of Him Who is the Mystery of God (i.e., 'Abdu'l-Bahá) has conceived in order to insure the continuity of the three ages (i.e., Heroic, Formative, Golden) that constitute the component parts of the Bahá'í Dispensation

The creative energies released by the Law of Bahá'u'lláh, permeating and evolving within the mind of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, have, by their very impact and close interaction, given birth to an Instrument (i.e., the Will and Testament) which may be viewed as the Charter of the New World Order which is at once the glory and the promise of the most great Dispensation. The Will may thus be acclaimed as the inevitable offspring resulting from that mystic intercourse between him Who communicated the generative influence of His divine Purpose and the One Who was its vehicle and chosen recipient. Being the Child of the Covenant—the Heir of both the Originator and the Interpreter of the Law of God—the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá can no more be divorced from Him than from the One Who ultimately conceived it. Bahá'u'lláh's inscrutable purpose, we must ever bear in mind, has been so thoroughly infused into the conduct of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and their motives have been so closely welded together, that the mere attempt to dissociate the teachings of the former from any system which the ideal Exemplar (i.e., 'Abdu'l-Bahá) of those same teachings has established would amount to a repudiation of one of the most sacred and basic truths of the Faith.

—Shoghi Effendi, WOB, pp. 143-144.

For Bahá'u'lláh . . . has not only imbued mankind with a new and universal 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.

—Shoghi Effendi, WOB, p. 19

PROVISIONS OF THE WILL AND TESTAMENT

O my loving friends! After the passing away of this wronged one, it is incumbent upon the Aghsán (Branches), the Afnán (Twigs) of the Sacred Lote-Tree, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God and the loved ones of the Abhá Beauty to turn unto Shoghi Effendi—the youthful branch branched from the two hallowed and Sacred Lote-Trees and the fruit grown from the union of the two offshoots of the Tree of Holiness,—as he is the sign of God, the chosen branch, the guardian of the Cause of God, he unto whom all the Aghsán, the Afnán, the Hands of the Cause of God and His loved ones must turn. He is the expounder of the words of God and after him will succeed the first-born of his lineal descendants.

The sacred and youthful branch, the guardian of the Cause of God as well as the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God; whoso disputeth with him has disputed with God; whoso denieth him hath denied God; whoso disbelieveth in him hath disbelieved in God; whoso deviateth, separateth himself and turneth aside from him hath in truth deviated, separated himself and turned aside from God. May the wrath, the fierce indignation, the vengeance of God rest upon him! The mighty stronghold shall remain impregnable and safe through obedience to him who is the guardian of the Cause of God. It is incumbent upon the members of the House of Justice, upon all the Aghsán, the Afnán, the Hands of the Cause of God to show their obedience, submissiveness and subordination unto the guardian of the Cause of God, to turn unto him and be lowly before him. He that opposeth him hath opposed the True One, will make a breach in the Cause of God, will subvert His word and will become a manifestation of the Center of Sedition

O ye beloved of the Lord! It is incumbent upon the guardian of the Cause of God to appoint in his own life-time him that shall become his successor, that differences may not arise after his passing

O friends! The Hands of the Cause of God must be nominated and appointed by the guardian of the Cause of God. . . .

The obligations of the Hands of the Cause of God are to diffuse the Divine Fragrances, to edify the souls of men, to promote learning, to improve the character of all men and to be, at all times and under all conditions, sanctified and detached from all earthly things. They must manifest the fear of God by their conduct, their manners, their deeds and their words.

This body of the Hands of the Cause of God is under the direction of the guardian of the Cause of God. . . .

And now, concerning the House of Justice which God hath ordained as the source of all good and freed from all error, it must be elected by universal suffrage, that is, by the believers. Its members must be manifestations of the fear of God and day-springs of knowledge and understanding, must be steadfast in God's faith and the well-wishers of all mankind. By this House is meant the Universal House of Justice, that is, in all countries a secondary House of Justice must be instituted, and these secondary Houses of Justice must elect the members of the Universal one. Unto this body all things must be referred. It enacteth all ordinances and regulations that are not to be found in the explicit Holy Text. By this body all the difficult problems are to be resolved and the guardian of the Cause of God is its sacred head and the distinguished member for life of that body. . . .

According to the direct and sacred command of God we are forbidden to utter slander, are commanded to show forth peace and amity, are exhorted to rectitude of conduct, straightforwardness and harmony with all the kindreds and peoples of the world. We must obey and be the well-wishers of the governments of the land, regard disloyalty unto a just king as disloyalty to God Himself and wishing evil to the government a transgression of the Cause of God. . . .

O ye beloved of the Lord! It is incumbent upon you to be submissive to all monarchs that are just and to show your fidelity to every righteous king. Serve ye the sovereigns of the world with utmost truthfulness and loyalty. Show obedience unto them and be their well-wishers. Without their leave and permission do not meddle with political affairs for disloyalty to the just sovereign is disloyalty to God himself.

This is my counsel and the commandment of God unto you. Well is it with them that act accordingly. . . .

Wherefore, O my loving friends! Consort with all the peoples, kindreds and religions of the world with the utmost truthfulness, uprightness, faithfulness, kindness, good-will and friendliness, that all the world of being may be filled with the holy ecstasy of the grace of Bahá, that ignorance, enmity, hate and rancor may vanish from the world and the darkness of estrangement amidst the peoples and kindreds of the world may give way to the Light of Unity. Should other peoples and nations be unfaithful to you show your fidelity unto them, should they be unjust toward you show justice towards them, should they keep aloof from you attract them to yourself, should they show their enmity be friendly towards them, should they poison your lives, sweeten their souls, should they inflict a wound upon you, be a salve to their sores. Such are the attributes of the sincere! Such are the attributes of the truthful

In these days, the most important of all things is the guidance of the nations and peoples of the world. Teaching the Cause is of utmost importance for it is the head corner-stone of the foundation itself. . . .

O ye faithful loved ones of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! It is incumbent upon you to take the greatest care of Shoghi Effendi, the twig that hath branched from and the fruit given forth by the two hallowed and Divine Lote-Trees, that no dust of despondency and sorrow may stain his radiant nature, that day by day he may wax greater in happiness, in joy and spirituality, and may grow to become even as a fruitful tree.

For he is, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the guardian of the Cause of God, the Afnán, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause and the beloved of the Lord must obey him and turn unto him. He that obeyeth him not, hath not obeyed God; he that turneth away from him, hath turned away from God and he that denieth him, hath denied the True one.

O God, my God! Shield Thy trusted servants from the evils of self and passion, protect them with the watchful eye of Thy loving kindness from all rancor, hate and envy, shelter them in the impregnable stronghold of Thy Cause and, safe from the darts of doubtfulness, make them the manifestations of Thy glorious Signs, illumine their faces with the effulgent rays shed from the Dayspring of Thy Divine Unity, gladden their hearts with the verses revealed from Thy Holy Kingdom, strengthen their loins by Thy all-swaying power that cometh from Thy Realm of Glory. Thou art the All-Bountiful, the Protector, the Almighty, the Gracious!

INSTITUTIONS OF THE NEW WORLD ORDER

It should be remembered by every follower of the Cause that the system of Bahá'í administration is not an innovation imposed arbitrarily upon the Bahá'ís of the world since the Master's passing, but derives its authority from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is specifically prescribed in unnumbered Tablets, and rests in some of its essential features upon the explicit provisions of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. It thus unifies and correlates the principles separately laid down by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and is indissolubly bound with the essential verities of the Faith. 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

That the Spiritual Assemblies of today will be replaced in time by the Houses of Justice, and are to all intents and purposes identical and not separate bodies, is abundantly confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself

I need not dwell upon what I have already reiterated and emphasized that the administration of the Cause is to be conceived as an instrument and not a substitute for the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, that it should be regarded as a channel through which His promised blessings may flow, that it should guard against such rigidity as would clog and fetter the liberating forces released by His Revelation.

It would, however, be helpful and instructive to bear in mind certain basic principles with reference to the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which together with the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, constitutes the chief depository wherein lie enshrined those priceless elements of that Divine Civilization, the establishment of which is the primary mission of the Bahá'í Faith.

—Shoghi Effendi, WOB, pp 5, 6, 9, 3.

I. National Spiritual Assembly

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

guard vigilantly the Cause of God, and control and supervise the affairs of the Movement in general.

(B. Admin. p. 40.)

Vital issues, affecting the interests of the Cause in that country . . . that stand distinct from strictly local affairs, must be under the full jurisdiction of the National Assembly.

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

With it, too, rests the decision whether a certain point at issue is strictly local in its nature, and should be reserved for the 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. Admin., pp. 40, 41.)

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

(B. Proc., p. 85)

As the activities of the American Bahá'í community expand, and its world-wide 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 those nascent institutions which you are laboring to erect. Its importance cannot, surely, be overestimated I am eagerly and prayerfully awaiting the news of an unprecedented expansion in so vital an organ of the administrative Order of the Faith.

—Shoghi Effendi, Messages to America, p. 5

2. National Convention

Hitherto the National Convention has been primarily called together for the consideration of the various circumstances attending the election of the National Spiritual Assembly. I feel, however, that in view of the expansion and the growing importance of the administrative sphere of the Cause, the general sentiments and tendencies prevailing among the friends, and the signs of increasing interdependence among the National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world, the assembled accredited representatives of the . . . believers should exercise not only the vital and responsible right of electing the National Assembly, but should also fulfill the functions of an enlightened, consultative and cooperative body that will enrich the experience, enhance the prestige, support the authority, and assist the deliberations of the National Spiritual Assembly. It is my firm conviction that it is the bounden duty, in the interest of the Cause we all love and serve, of the members of the incoming National Assembly, once elected by the delegates at Convention time, to seek and have the utmost regard, individually as well as collectively, for the advice, the considered opinion and the true sentiments of the assembled delegates. Banishing every vestige of secrecy, of undue reticence, of dictatorial aloofness, from their midst, they should radiantly and abundantly unfold to the eyes of the delegates, by whom they are elected, their plans, their hopes, and their cares.

They should familiarize the delegates with the various matters that will have to be considered in the current year, and calmly and conscientiously study and weigh the opinions and judgements of the delegates. The newly elected National Assembly, during the few days when the Convention is in session and after the dispersal of the delegates, should seek ways and means to cultivate understanding, facilitate and maintain the exchange of views, deepen confidence, and vindicate by every tangible evidence their one desire to serve and advance the common weal

The National Spiritual Assembly, however, in the view of the unavoidable limitations imposed upon the convening of frequent and long-standing sessions of the Convention, will have to retain in its hands the final decision on all matters that affect the interests of the Cause

(B. Admin., pp. 78-80)

3. Local Spiritual Assemblies

And, now that this all-important work may suffer no neglect, but rather function vigorously and continuously in every part of the Bahá'í world; that the unity of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh may remain secure and inviolate, it is of the utmost importance that in accordance with the explicit text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book, in every locality, be it city or hamlet, where the number of adult (21 years and above) declared believers exceeds nine, a local "Spiritual Assembly" be forthwith established. To it all local matters pertaining to the Cause must be directly and immediately referred for full consultation and decision

(B. Admin., p. 37)

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. Admin., p. 39)

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

(B. Admin., p. 41)

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. The members thereof must take counsel together in such wise

that no occasion for ill-feeling or discord may arise. This can be attained when every member expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument. Should anyone oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed. The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions. If after discussion, a decision be carried unanimously well and good; but if, the Lord forbid, differences of opinion should arise, a majority of voices must prevail.

—'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in B. Admin., pp. 21- 22.

4. The True Believer

Regarding the very delicate and complex question of ascertaining the qualifications of a true believer . . . 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 Báb), the Author (Bahá'u'lláh) and the True Exemplar ('Abu'l-Bahá) of the Bahá'í Cause, as set forth in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Testament; unreserved acceptance of, and submission to, whatsoever has been revealed by their Pen; loyal and steadfast adherence to every clause of our Beloved's sacred Will; and close association with the spirit as well as the form of the present day Bahá'í administration throughout the world.

(B. Admin., p. 90.)

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

(B. Proc., p. 12)

Neither the local or the national representatives of the Community, no matter how elaborate their plans, or persistent their appeals, or sagacious their counsels, nor even the Guardian himself, however much he may yearn for this consummation, can

decide where the duty of the individual lies, or supplant him in the discharge of that task. The individual alone must assess its character, consult his conscience, prayerfully consider all its aspects, manfully struggle against the natural inertia that weighs him down in his effort to arise, shed, heroically and irrevocably, the trival and superfluous attachments which hold him back, empty himself of every thought that may tend to obstruct his path, mix, in obedience to the counsels of the Author of his Faith, and in imitation of the One Who is its true Exemplar, with men and women, in all walks of life, seek to touch their hearts, through the distinction which characterizes his thoughts, his words and his acts, and win them over tactfully, lovingly, prayerfully and persistently, to the Faith he himself has espoused.

The gross materialism that engulfs the entire nation at the present hour; the attachment to wordly things that enshrouds the souls of men; the fears and anxieties that distract their minds; the pleasure and dissipations that fill their time, the prejudice and animosities that darken their outlook, the apathy and lethargy that paralyze their spiritual faculties—these are among the formidable obstacles that stand in the path of every would-be warrior in the service of Bahá'u'lláh, obstacles which he must battle against and surmount in his crusade for the redemption of his own countrymen.

To the degree that the home front Crusader is himself cleansed of these impurities, liberated from these petty preoccupations and gnawing anxieties, delivered from these prejudices and antagonisms, emptied of self, and filled by the healing and the sustaining power of God, will he be able to combat the forces arrayed against him, magnetize the souls of those whom he seeks to convert, and win their unreserved, their enthusiastic and enduring allegiance to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

Delicate and strenuous though the task may be, however arduous and prolonged the effort required, whatsoever the nature of the perils and pitfalls that beset the path of whoever arises to revive the fortunes of a Faith struggling against the rising forces of materialism, nationalism, secularism, racialism, ecclesiasticism, the all-conquering potency of the grace of God, vouchsafed through the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, will, undoubtedly, mysteriously and surprisingly, enable whosoever arises to champion His Cause to win complete and total victory.

—SHOGHI EFFENDI, July 19, 1956