

# The Spiritual Character Of Bahá'í Elections

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### I.

#### From letters written by Shoghi Effendi

1. Beware, beware lest the foul odour of the parties and peoples of foreign lands in the West, and their pernicious methods, such as intrigues, party politics and propaganda—practices which are abhorrent even in name—should ever reach the Bahá'í community, exert any influence whatsoever upon the friends, and thus bring all spirituality to naught. The friends should, through their devotion, love, loyalty and altruism, abolish these evil practices, not imitate them. It is only after the friends completely ignore and sanctify themselves from these evils, that the spirit of God can penetrate and operate in the body of humanity, and in the Bahá'í community.

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 30 January 1923 to the Central Spiritual Assembly of Iran—translated from the Persian)*

2. On the election day, the friends must wholeheartedly participate in the elections, in unity and amity, turning their hearts to God, detached from all things but Him, seeking His guidance and supplicating His aid and bounty.

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 27 February 1923 to the Bahá'í in the East—translated from the Persian)*

3. ...I earnestly appeal to every one of you ... to make ... yet another effort, this time more spontaneous and selfless than before, and endeavour to approach your task ... with that purity of spirit that can alone obtain our Beloved's most cherished desire. 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...

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 23 February 1924 to the Bahá'ís in North America, published in "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), p. 65)*

4. If we but turn our gaze to the high qualifications of the members of Bahá'í Assemblies, ... we are filled with feelings of unworthiness and dismay, and would feel truly disheartened but for the comforting thought that if we rise to play nobly our part every deficiency in our lives will be more than compensated by the all-conquering spirit of His grace and power. Hence it is incumbent upon the chosen delegates to consider without the least trace of passion and prejudice, and irrespective of any material consideration, the names of only those who can best combine the necessary qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience...

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 3 June 1925 to the Bahá'í Convention, published in "Bahá'í Administration" p. 88)*

5. I feel that reference to personalities before the election would give rise to misunderstanding and differences. What the friends should do is to get thoroughly acquainted with one another, to

exchange views, to mix freely and discuss among themselves the requirements and qualifications for such a membership without reference or application, however indirect, to particular individuals. We should refrain from influencing the opinion of others, of canvassing for any particular individual, but should stress the necessity of getting fully acquainted with the qualifications of membership referred to in our Beloved's Tablets and of learning more about one another through direct, personal experience rather than through the reports and opinions of our friends.

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 14 May 1927 to a Local Spiritual Assembly, published in "Bahá'í News Letter", June 1927, p. 9)*

6. ...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 inasmuch as it gives the right [to the majority of a body that, in itself under the present circumstances, often constitutes a minority of all the elected delegates (this phrase from the original source was not included in the publication *The Compilation of Compilations*.)], to deny that God-given right of every elector to vote only in favour of those whom he is conscientiously convinced are the most worthy candidates....

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 27 May 1927 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in "Bahá'í Administration", p. 136)*

7. Bahá'í elections of the Community are ... sanctified from all traces of canvassing and plotting that characterize the activities of the perfidious.

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 13 December 1932 to the Bahá'ís in Iran—translated from the Persian)*

8. I greatly value your suggestions, but I do not feel it to be in keeping with the spirit of the Cause to impose any limitation upon the freedom of the believers to choose those of any race, nationality or temperament who best combine the essential qualifications for membership of administrative institutions. They should disregard personalities and concentrate their attention on the qualities and requirements of office, without prejudice, passion or partiality. The Assembly should be representative of the choicest and most varied and capable elements in every Bahá'í community....

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 11 August 1933 to an individual believer)*

## II.

### **From letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi**

9. One's vote should be kept confidential. It is not permissible to make any reference whatsoever to individual names. The friends must avoid the evil methods and detestable practices of the politicians. They must turn completely to God, and with a purity of motive, a freedom of spirit and a sanctity of heart, participate in the elections; otherwise the outcome will be chaos and confusion, serious difficulties will ensue, mischief will abound and the confirmation of God will be cut off.

*(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 16 January 1923 to the Central Spiritual Assembly of Iran—translated from the Persian)*

10. Let them exercise the utmost vigilance so that the elections are carried out freely, universally and by secret ballot. Any form of intrigue, deception, collusion and compulsion must be stopped and is forbidden.

*(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 8 March 1932 to a Local Spiritual Assembly—translated from the Persian)*

11. The strength and progress of the Bahá'í community depend upon the election of pure, faithful and active souls.... Canvassing is deprecated....

*(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 9 April 1932 to a Local Spiritual Assembly—translated from the Persian)*

12. The electors ... must prayerfully and devotedly and after meditation and reflection elect faithful,

sincere, experienced, capable and competent souls who are worthy of membership....

*(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1 July 1943 to the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran—translated from the Persian)*

13. In regard to your question about qualifications of delegates and Assembly members: the qualifications which he outlined are really applicable to anyone we elect to a Bahá'í office, whatever its nature. But these are only an indication, they do not mean people who don't fulfil them cannot be elected to office. We must aim as high as we can....

*(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 24 October 1947 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, published in "Unfolding Destiny: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'í Community of the British Isles" (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), p. 207)*