

Principles of Bahai Administration

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Principles of Baha'i Administration

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[Preface omitted]

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching and Administration.

The Administrative Order is fundamentally different from anything that any Prophet has previously established, inasmuch as Baha'u'llah has Himself revealed its principles, established its institutions, appointed the person to interpret His Word, and conferred the necessary authority on the body designed to supplement and apply His legislative ordinances. Therein lies the secret of its strength, its fundamental distinction, and the guarantee against disintegration and schism.

The Baha'i Administrative Order, as it expands and consolidates itself, will come to be regarded not only as the nucleus but as the very pattern of the New World Order, destined to embrace, in the fullness of time, the whole of mankind. It is the sole framework of the Baha'i commonwealth of the future which will be at once the instrument and the guardian of the Most Great Peace announced by its Author.

Should we build up the Administrative World Order to a point of absolute perfection but at the same time allow it to be hampered or disconnected from the channels within, through which channels the Holy Spirit of the Cause pours forth, we would have nothing more than a perfected body out of touch with and cut off from the finer promptings of the soul or spirit. If, on the other hand,

the influxes and goings forth of the spirit are scattered, diffused, and subjected wholly to the more or less imperfect guidance and interpretation of individual believers, lacking both the wisdom secured through consultation and also the lights of real unity which shine through consultative action and obedience thereto - a disordered and disorganized activity would be witnessed, which would but dimly reflect the divine purpose for this age, which is no less than the establishment of the reign of divine love, justice, and wisdom in the world, under and in conformity to the Divine Law. <p2>

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

Real Use of Administrative Machinery.

Now that they (the believers) have erected the administrative machinery of the Cause they must put it to its real use - serving only as an instrument to facilitate the flow of the spirit of the Faith out into the world. Just as the muscles enable the body to carry out the will of the individual, all Assemblies and Committees must enable the believers to carry forth the Message of God to the waiting public, the love of Baha'u'llah and the healing laws and principles of the Faith to all men. (Shoghi Effendi)

Purpose of Baha'i Administration.

As the administrative work of the Cause steadily expands, as its various branches grow in importance and number, it is absolutely necessary that we bear in mind this fundamental fact that all these administrative activities, however harmoniously and efficiently conducted, are but means to an end, and should be regarded as direct instruments for the propagation of the Baha'i Faith. Let us take heed lest in our great concern for the perfection of the administrative machinery of the Cause, we lose sight of the Divine Purpose for which it has been created. Let us be on our guard lest the growing demand for specialization in the administrative functions of the Cause detain us from joining the ranks of those who in the forefront of battle are gloriously engaged <p3> in summoning the multitude to this New Day of God. This indeed should be our primary concern; this is our sacred obligation, our vital and urgent need. Let this cardinal principle be ever borne in mind, for it is the mainspring of all future activities, the remover of every embarrassing obstacle, the fulfilment of our Master's dearest wish. (Shoghi Effendi)

Teachers and Administrators.

Although it is essential for the believers to maintain always a clear distinction between teaching and administrative duties and functions, yet they should be careful not to be led to think that these two types of Baha'i activity are mutually exclusive in their nature, and as such cannot be exercised by one and the same person. As a matter of fact, the friends should be encouraged to serve in both the teaching and the administrative fields of Baha'i service. But as there are always some who are more specially gifted along one of these two lines of activity it would seem more desirable that they should concentrate their efforts in acquiring the full training for that type of work for which they are best suited by nature. Such a specialization has the advantage of saving time, and of leading to greater efficiency, particularly at this early stage of our development. The great danger, however, lies in that by so doing the friends may tend to develop a sort of class consciousness which is fundamentally contrary to both the spirit and actual teachings of the Faith. It is precisely in order to overcome such a danger that the Guardian thinks it advisable that the friends should be encouraged to serve from time to time in both the teaching and the administrative spheres of Baha'i work, but only whenever they feel fit to do so. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary) <p5>

PART I

The Individual

Qualifications of a True Believer

REGARDING the very delicate and complex question of ascertaining the qualifications of a true believer, I cannot in this connection emphasize too strongly the supreme necessity for the exercise of the utmost discretion, caution, and tact, whether it be in deciding for ourselves as to who may be regarded a true believer or in disclosing to the outside world such considerations as may serve as a basis for such a decision. I would only venture to state very briefly and as adequately as present circumstances permit, the principal factors that must be taken into consideration before deciding whether a person may be regarded a true believer or not. Full recognition of the station of the Forerunner, the Author, and the True Exemplar of the Baha'i Cause, as set forth in 'Abdu'l-Baha'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 Baha'i 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 <p6> problem with the spirit of humble prayer, and earnest consultation, and to refrain from drawing rigidly the line of demarcation

except on such occasions when the interests of the Cause absolutely demand it.
(Shoghi Effendi)

(A) Spiritual and Personal Obligations

The Book of God.

"Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men. In this most perfect Balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard, did ye but know it". (Baha'u'llah)

Regarding the vital character and importance of the Divine ordinances and laws, and the necessity of complete obedience to them by the believers, we thus read in the Gleanings, p. 175:

"Know verily that the essence of justice and the source thereof are both embodied in the ordinances prescribed by Him Who is the Manifestation of the Self of God amongst men, if ye be of them that recognize this truth. He doth verily incarnate the highest, the infallible standard of justice unto all creation. Were His law to be such as to strike terror into the hearts of all that are in heaven and on earth, that law is naught but manifest justice. The fears and agitation which the revelation of this law provoke in men's hearts should indeed be likened to the cries of the sucking babe weaned from his mother's milk, if ye be of them that perceive..." (Baha'u'llah)

Laws of the Aqdas.

He feels it his duty to explain that the Laws revealed by Baha'u'llah in the Aqdas are, whenever practicable and not in direct conflict with the Civil Laws of the land, absolutely binding on every believer or Baha'i institution whether in the East or in the West. Certain laws, such as fasting, obligatory prayers, the consent of the parents before <p7> 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 Baha'u'llah, 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 Baha'u'llah. Nor has the Guardian any right whatsoever to lessen the binding effect, much less to abrogate the provisions of so fundamental and sacred a Book. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

Daily Obligatory Prayer.

The daily obligatory prayers are three in number. The shortest one consists of a single verse which has to be recited once in every twenty-four hours at midday. The medium [prayer] has to be recited three times a day, in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. The long prayer which is the most elaborate of the three has to be recited once in every twenty-four hours, and at any time one feels inclined to do so.

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

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

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The hour of noon should, of course, be observed in accordance with the position of the sun, not in accordance with local time-standards. The short obligatory prayer may be said at any time between noon and sunset. (From a letter from the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the British Isles)

Congregational Prayer.

Regarding the practice of congregational prayer, the Guardian wishes you to know that this form of prayer has been enjoined by Baha'u'llah only for the dead. In all other circumstances there is no obligation whatever imposed upon the believers. When the Aqdas is published the form of congregational prayer prescribed by Baha'u'llah will be made clear to all the believers. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

Prayers to be Read as Revealed.

Also concerning your question about the prayers and changing the pronoun: this cannot be done, even in the long Obligatory Prayer or the Healing Prayers. Either we must square this mere detail or say a prayer that applies to our sex or number. (Shoghi Effendi)

Child's Prayers.

The Guardian feels that it would be better for either the mothers of Baha'i children - or some Committee your Assembly might delegate the task to - to choose excerpts from the Sacred Words to be used by the child rather than just something made up. Of course, prayer can be purely spontaneous but many of the sentences and thoughts combined in Baha'i writings of a devotional nature are easy to grasp, and the revealed word is endowed with a power of its own. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

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. <p9>

The ordinance of fasting is, as is the case with these three prayers, a spiritual and vital obligation enjoined by Baha'u'llah upon every believer who has attained the age of fifteen. In the Aqdas He thus writes:

"We have commanded you to pray and fast from the beginning of maturity; this is ordained by God, your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers. He has exempted from this those who are weak from illness or age, as a bounty from His Presence, and He is the Forgiving, the Generous." And in another passage He says: "We have enjoined upon you fasting during a brief period, and at its close have designated for you Naw-Ruz as a feast...The traveller, 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, Baha'u'llah 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 fulfil them."

Concerning the age of maturity, He reveals in the appendix of that same book:

"The age of maturity is in the fifteenth year [1] women and men are alike in this respect."

[1 Fifteenth birthday.]

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 purposes are, therefore, fundamentally spiritual in character. Fasting is symbolic, and a reminder of abstinence from selfish and carnal desires.

Regarding your question concerning the Fast: Travellers are exempt from fasting, but if they want to fast while they are travelling, they are free to do so. You are exempt the whole <p10> 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)

Spiritual Experiences.

There is a fundamental difference between Divine Revelation as vouchsafed by God to His prophets, and the spiritual experiences and visions which individuals may have. The latter should, under no circumstances, be construed as constituting an infallible source of guidance, even for the person experiencing them. (Shoghi Effendi)

Guidance, Meditation, and Teaching Methods.

The questions you ask in your letter about individual guidance have two aspects, one might say. It is good that people should turn to God and beseech His aid in solving their problems and guiding their acts, indeed every day of their lives, if they feel the desire to do so. But they cannot possibly impose what they feel to be their guidance on anyone else, let alone on Assemblies or Committees, as Baha'u'llah has expressly laid down the law of consultation and never indicated that anything else superseded it.

As to meditation: This also is a field in which the individual is free. There are no set forms of meditation prescribed in the teachings, no plan as such, for inner development. The Friends are urged - nay enjoined - to pray, and they also should meditate, but the manner of doing the latter is left entirely to the individual.

The same thing is true of teaching methods; no system for teachers to practise exists. But obviously the more people know about the teachings and the Cause, the better they will be able to present the subject. If some people find that prayer and placing all their trust in God releases in them a flood of inspiration, they should be left free to pursue this method if it is productive of results.

The inspiration received through meditation is of a nature that one cannot measure or determine. God can inspire into our minds things that we had no previous knowledge of, if He desires to do so.

We cannot clearly distinguish between personal desire and guidance, but if the way opens, when we have sought guidance, then we may presume God is helping us. (Shoghi Effendi)

Deepening in the Cause.

To deepen in the Cause means to read the writings of Baha'u'llah and the Master so thoroughly as to be able to give it to others in its pure form. There are many who have some superficial idea of what the Cause stands for. They, therefore, present it together with all sorts of ideas that are their own. As the Cause is still in its early days we must be most careful lest we fall into this error and injure the Movement we so much adore. There is no limit to the study of the Cause. The more we read the Writings, the more truths we can find

in Them, the more we will see that our previous notions were erroneous. (Shoghi Effendi)

The Regenerating Power.

But let us all remember, in this connection, that prior to every conceivable measure destined to raise the efficiency of our administrative activities, more vital than any scheme which the most resourceful among us can devise, far above the most elaborate structure which the concerted efforts of organized Assemblies can hope to raise, is the realization down in the innermost heart of every true believer of the regenerating power, the supreme necessity, the unfailing efficacy of the Message he bears. I assure you, dear friends, that nothing short of such an immovable conviction could have, in days past, enabled our beloved Cause to weather <p12> the blackest storms in its history. Naught else can today vitalize the manifold activities in which unnumbered disciples of the Faith are engaged; naught else can provide that driving force and sustaining power that are both so essential to the success of vast and enduring achievements. It is this spirit that above all else we should sedulously guard, and strive with all our might to fortify and exemplify in all our undertakings. (Shoghi Effendi)

MATTERS OF PERSONAL STATUS

Age of Maturity.

Regarding the age of fifteen fixed by Baha'u'llah: this relates only to purely spiritual functions and obligations and is not related to the degree of administrative capacity and fitness which is a totally different thing, and is, for the present, fixed at twenty-one. (Shoghi Effendi)

Obligation to Work.

With reference to Baha'u'llah's command concerning the engagement of the believers in some sort of profession: the Teachings are most emphatic on this matter, particularly the statement in the Aqdas to this effect which makes it quite clear that idle people who lack the desire to work can have no place in the new World Order. As a corollary of this principle, Baha'u'llah further states that mendicity should not only be discouraged but entirely wiped out from the face of society. It is the duty of those who are in charge of the organization of society to give every individual the opportunity of acquiring the necessary talent in some kind of profession, and also the means of utilizing such a talent, both for its own sake and for the sake of earning the means of his livelihood. Every individual, no matter how handicapped and limited he may be, is under the obligation of engaging in some work or profession, for work, specially when performed in the spirit of service, is according to Baha'u'llah a form of worship. It has not only a utilitarian purpose, but has a value in itself, because it draws us nearer to God, and enables us to better <p13> grasp His purpose for us in this world. It is obvious, therefore, that the inheritance of wealth cannot make anyone immune from daily work.

As to the question of retirement from work for individuals who have reached a certain age, this is a matter on which the International House of Justice will have to legislate as there are no provisions in the Aqdas concerning it. (Shoghi Effendi)

Marriage.

"Enter into Wedlock, O people, That ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me." (Baha'u'llah)

Nature of Baha'i Marriage.

In regard to your question concerning the nature and character of Baha'i marriage. As you have rightly stated, such a marriage is conditioned upon the full approval of all four parents. Also your statement to the effect that the principle of the oneness of mankind prevents any true Baha'i from regarding race itself as a bar to union is in complete accord with the Teachings of the Faith on this point. For both Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha never disapproved of the idea of inter-racial marriage, nor discouraged it. The Baha'i Teachings, indeed, by their very nature transcend all limitations imposed by race, and as such can and should never be identified with any particular school of racial philosophy. (Shoghi Effendi)

Consent of Parents for Marriage.

Regarding the question whether it is necessary to obtain the consent of the parents of a non-Baha'i participant in a marriage with a Baha'i; as Baha'u'llah 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. The ceremony itself must be very simple.

With reference to the matter of the consent of the parents to a Baha'i marriage; as this is a vital binding obligation, it is <p14> the duty of the Assemblies to ascertain, before giving their sanction, that the consent obtained has been given freely by the parents themselves. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

Baha'i Marriage Ceremony.

Baha'i marriage should at present not be pressed into any kind of a uniform mould. What is absolutely essential is what Baha'u'llah stipulated in the Aqdas: the friends can add to these selected writings if they please - but the so-called "Marriage Tablet" (revealed by 'Abdu'l-Baha) is not a necessary part of every Baha'i marriage. In The Baha'i World is a prayer for marriage incorporated in either the Arabic or Persian text: he suggests Marzieh Gail translate this, and it can be made available to the friends, so that they can use it if they wish to. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

The Use of Ringstones and Burial Stones.

In regard to the use of ringstones and burial stones, the Guardian leaves this matter at present entirely to the discretion of the believers, and has no objection if your Assembly provides facilities for their purchase by the friends. When the Kitab-i-Aqdas is published the necessary instructions will be given regarding this matter. (Shoghi Effendi)

Baha'i Funeral Service.

Regarding the Baha'i funeral service: it is extremely simple, as it consists only of a congregational prayer to be read before burial! This prayer will be made available to the friends when the Aqdas is translated and published. In the meantime, your N.S.A. should take great care lest any uniform procedure or ritual in this matter be adopted or imposed upon the friends. The danger in this, as in some other cases regarding Baha'i worship, is that a definite system of rigid rituals and practices be developed among the believers. The utmost simplicity and flexibility should be observed, and a selection from the Baha'i Sacred Writings would serve the purpose at the present time, provided this selection is not rigidly and uniformly adopted on all such occasions. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary) <p15>

Cremation.

He feels that, in view of what 'Abdu'l-Baha has said against cremation, the believers should be strongly urged, as an act of faith, to make provisions against their remains being cremated. Baha'u'llah has laid down as a law, in the Aqdas, the manner of Baha'i burial, and it is so beautiful, befitting, and dignified, that no believer should deprive himself of it. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

Suicide.

Regarding the "In Memoriam" section of Baha'i News: although suicide is so strongly condemned in the teachings, it does not mean that a person has ceased to be a Baha'i because he killed himself; he should, therefore, be mentioned, the same as other believers, in this section. (Shoghi Effendi)

(B) Relations with Other Baha'is

Our Most Vital Obligation.

In their relations amongst themselves as fellow-believers, let them not be content with the mere exchange of cold and empty formalities often connected with the organizing of banquets, receptions, consultative assemblies, and lecture-halls. Let them rather, as equal co-sharers in the spiritual benefits conferred upon them by Baha'u'llah, arise and, with the aid and counsel of their local and national representatives, supplement these official functions with those opportunities which only a close and intimate social intercourse can adequately provide. In their homes, in their hours of relaxation and leisure, in the daily contact of business transactions, in the association of their children, whether in their study-classes, their playgrounds, and club-rooms, in short, under all possible circumstances, however insignificant they appear, the

community of the followers of Baha'u'llah should satisfy themselves that in the eyes of the world at large and in the sight of their vigilant Master they are the living witnesses of those truths which He fondly cherished and tirelessly championed to the very end of His days. If we <p16> relax in our purpose, if we falter in our faith, if we neglect the varied opportunities given us from time to time by an all-wise and gracious Master, we are not merely failing in what is our most vital and conspicuous obligation, but are thereby insensibly retarding the flow of those quickening energies which can alone insure the vigorous and speedy development of God's struggling Faith. (Shoghi Effendi)

Spiritual Ties are Far Deeper.

Deep as are family ties, we must always remember that the spiritual ties are far deeper; they are everlasting and survive death, whereas physical ties, unless supported by spiritual bond, are confined to this life. You should do all in your power, through prayer and example, to open the eyes of your family to the Baha'i Faith, but do not grieve too much over their actions. Turn to your Baha'i brothers and sisters who are living with you in the light of the Kingdom. (Shoghi Effendi)

Indeed, the believers have not yet fully learned to draw on each other's strength and consolation in time of need. The Cause of God is endowed with tremendous powers, and the reason the believers do not gain more from it is because they have not learned to draw fully on these mighty forces of love and strength and harmony generated by the Faith. (Shoghi Effendi)

Use of Allah-u-Abha.

The use of "Allah-u-Abha" 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 Baha'is 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. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

Baha'i Dates.

It is advisable to use both the Baha'i dates, according to the Baha'i Calendar, and the usual Gregorian <p17> dates as well. The Friends at present are free to do as they please. (Shoghi Effendi)

The Nineteen Day Feast.

"This Feast was established by His Holiness the Bab, to occur once in nineteen days. Likewise, the Blessed Perfection hath commanded, encouraged, and reiterated it. Therefore, it hath the utmost importance. Undoubtedly you must give the greatest attention to its establishment and raise it to the highest point of importance, so that it may become continual and constant. The believers of God must assemble and associate with each other in the utmost love, joy, and fragrance. They must conduct themselves (in these Feasts) with the greatest dignity and consideration, chant divine verses, peruse instructive articles,

read the Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Baha, encourage and inspire each other with love for the whole human race, invoke God with perfect joy and fragrance, sing the verses, glorifications, and praises of the Self-Subsistent Lord, and deliver eloquent speeches. The owner of the house must

personally serve the beloved ones. He must seek after the comfort of all, and with the utmost humility he must show forth kindness to every one. If the Feast is arranged in this manner and in the way mentioned, that supper is the "Lord's Supper", for the result is the same result and the effect is the same effect". ('Abdu'l-Baha)

Consultation Between National Assembly and Believers.

Shoghi Effendi firmly believes that consultation must be maintained between the N.S.A. and the entire body of the believers, and that such consultation, while the Convention is not in session, can best be maintained through the agency of the local Assemblies, one of whose essential functions is to act as intermediaries between the local communities and their national representatives. The main purpose of the Nineteen Day Feasts is to enable individual believers to offer any suggestion to the local Assembly which in its turn will pass it to the N.S.A. The local Assembly is, therefore, the proper medium through which local Baha'i communities can communicate with the body of the national representatives. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary) <p18>

Baha'i Youth on Committees.

The question of young Baha'is being able to serve on committees other than the Youth Committee has been raised in a number of letters recently, and in considering the matter he felt that Baha'i young people under twenty-one should not be denied the privilege of committee work. Though they cannot be voting members of Baha'i communities (or exercise the electoral vote until they reach that age) and though they cannot, likewise, be elected to Assemblies, there is no reason why they should not serve the Cause on various committees as all committees, national or local, are subordinate to Assemblies and their members not elected but appointed, and appointed by Assemblies. We have many devoted and talented young believers who can be of great assistance to the Cause even though not yet legally of age. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

The Voting Right.

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

Obligation to Serve.

I desire to remind believers of the necessity for unconditional acceptance of whatever position and duties may be assigned them by delegates and National Assembly. I deprecate all refusals of candidature. (Shoghi Effendi) <p19>

Assemblies, Not Individuals, Constitute the Bedrock.

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

No Believer Above Assembly Jurisdiction.

As to the specific question you have raised in connection with the view prevalent among some of the believers to the effect that certain believers have been given "spiritual stations" which make them immune to any action by a Baha'i administrative body; the Guardian wishes me to definitely state that to no one of the believers such a station has been conferred, which can place him outside and above the jurisdiction of any Assembly. Such an attitude, as you rightly state, runs counter to the very spirit and purpose of the Administrative Order. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

General Interests Take Precedence.

As to material sacrifices towards the welfare of the Cause, he wishes you to understand that the general interests of the Cause take precedence over the <p20> interests of the particular individuals. For instance, contributions to the welfare of individuals are secondary to contributions to the National and Local Funds. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

Test of Faith.

Each and every believer, undaunted by the uncertainties, the perils, and the financial stringency afflicting the nation, must arise and insure, to the full measure of his or her capacity, that continuous and abundant flow of funds into the National Treasury, on which the successful prosecution of the Plan must chiefly depend.

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)

Consultation on Personal Difficulties.

In all such matters as you mention in your letter, Shoghi Effendi wishes the Friends to take the Assemblies into their confidence and discuss it with them. Being on the spot they can judge better and take into consideration all the different aspects of the problem. We should always trust the Assemblies and go to them for advice. Our debts, however, should be considered as sacred and take precedence over any other thing [i.e., payment of debts comes before contributions to the Cause] for upon this principle does the foundation of our economic life rest. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

Association with Orientals.

The attitude of the Friends towards Orientals should be one of great caution, according to the Master's own often-repeated and explicit instructions and <p21> warnings. Any believer in good standing would not leave his home community without a letter of credentials, and certainly no Persians, claiming to be Baha'is, but lacking credentials, should be accepted until the Persian N.S.A. has clarified their status. They can, naturally, attend Public Meetings, but should not be permitted to come to the Nineteen Day Feast; the Friends may associate with them, but should be very cautious, bearing in mind that many Orientals, who scorned, or were even actively against the Cause while living in the East, now find it convenient to pass as believers or Friends of the Faith in a Western country where they are strangers.

I desire to reiterate the warning that no Persian, student or otherwise, must be admitted into the community under any circumstances unless provided with full credentials. Exception and compromise would be detrimental to the vital interests of the Faith at the present juncture. The utmost caution and vigilance are imperative. (Shoghi Effendi)

Warning About Orientals.

As to your question as to what races should be regarded as coming under the heading of "Orientals" in connection with 'Abdu'l-Baha's warnings; there is no doubt. He was primarily thinking of the Near Eastern races of Islamic extraction, who have every reason to look upon the Faith either with contempt as a mere heresy within, or sect of Islam, or with hatred as a potential threat to the supremacy of their religion. Likewise, it is these Near Eastern Races, particularly the Persian, who have been most persistently exposed to the propaganda and bad example of the Covenant-breakers, old and new, and from whose ranks these very Covenant-breakers have sprung. These circumstances, combined with the fact that, like his Prophetic Forebears, Baha'u'llah appeared amongst the people most in need of enlightenment - and hence at their lowest ebb morally - are the reasons for not only 'Abdu'l-Baha's and his own [i.e.,

the Guardian's] repeated warnings concerning Orientals, but also <p22> for the conduct, so often demonstrated, unfortunately, by these same Orientals and which amply justifies our attitude of great precaution and wariness concerning receiving them in our midst and believing their declarations to be sincere. Shoghi Effendi also feels that the Moslems of India should likewise be included in this category, owing to their respective religious and racial background. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

Shun Entirely All Covenant-breakers.

Baha'u'llah and the Master in many places and very emphatically have told us to shun entirely all Covenant-breakers as they are afflicted with what we might try and define as a contagious spiritual disease; they have also told us, however, to pray for them. These souls are not lost forever. In the Aqdas, Baha'u'llah says that God will forgive Mirza Yahya if he repents. It follows, therefore, that God will forgive any soul if he repents. Most of them don't want to repent, unfortunately. If the leaders can be forgiven it goes without saying that their followers can also be forgiven...

Also, it has nothing to do with unity in the Cause; if a man cuts a cancer out of his body to preserve his health and very life no one would suggest that for the sake of "unity" it should be reintroduced into the otherwise healthy organism! On the contrary, what was once a part of him has so radically changed as to have become a poison. (Shoghi Effendi)

(C) Relations with Non-Baha'is and the World at Large

Demonstration by Deed and Word.

As material affairs go from bad to worse in the world, the confidence, optimism, love, and hope of the believers will, by force of contrast, shine <p23> out as an ever brighter beacon, leading the people to the Path of Truth, the way laid down by God, which alone can guide them to the promise of the future.

These, indeed, are the days when heroism is needed on the part of the believers. Self-sacrifice, courage, indomitable hope, and confidence are the characteristics they should show forth, because these very attributes cannot but fix the attention of the public and lead them to inquire what, in a world so hopelessly chaotic and bewildered, leads these people to be so assured, so confident, so full of devotion. Increasingly, as time goes by, the characteristics of the Baha'is will be that which captures the attention of their fellow-citizens. They must show their aloofness from the hatreds and recriminations which are tearing at the hearts of humanity, and demonstrate by deed and word their profound belief in the future peaceful unification of the entire human race. (Shoghi Effendi)

Our One Aim and Sole Object.

Whether it be by an open and bold assertion of the fundamental verities of the Cause, or the adoption of a less direct and more cautious method of teaching;

whether by the dissemination of our literature or the example of our conduct, our one aim and sole object should be to help in the eventual recognition by all mankind of the indispensability, the uniqueness, and the supreme station of the Baha'i Revelation. Whatever method he adopts, and however indirect the course he chooses to pursue, every true believer should regard such a recognition as the supreme goal of his endeavour. Whilst consciously labouring towards the attainment of this end, he should, by supporting every branch of the administrative activities of his national and local Assembly, seek and obtain the fullest information on the character and extent of the world-wide progress of the Cause, and strive to contribute his share towards the strengthening of the spirit of solidarity among the component parts of the Baha'i world. (Shoghi Effendi) <p24>

Baha'i Work and Service to Humanity.

He feels that, although your desire to partake actively of the dangers and miseries afflicting so many millions of people today, is natural, and a noble impulse, there can be no comparison between the value of Baha'i work and any other form of service to humanity.

If the Baha'is could evaluate their work properly they would see that, whereas other forms of relief work are superficial in character, alleviating the sufferings and ills of men for a short time at best, the work they are doing is to lay the foundation of a new spiritual Order in the world founded on the Word of God, operating according to the Laws He has laid down for this age. No one else can do this work except those who have fully realized the meaning of the Message of Baha'u'llah, whereas almost any courageous, sincere person can engage in relief work, etc.

The believers are building a refuge for mankind. This is their supreme, sacred task, and they should devote every moment they can to this task. (Shoghi Effendi)

Concerning Individual Teaching.

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

Freedom of the Individual to Express His Own Views.

As regards the statement of our own views and explanations of the teachings: Shoghi Effendi believes that we should not restrict <p25> the liberty of the individual to express his own views so long as he makes it clear that these views are his own. In fact, such explanations are often helpful and are

conducive to a better understanding of the teachings. God has given man a rational power to be used and not killed.

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

Care in Presenting the Message.

In their presentation of the Message of Baha'u'llah they must neither hesitate nor falter. They must be neither contemptuous of the poor nor timid before the great. In their exposition of its verities they must neither overstress nor whittle down the truth which they champion, whether their hearer belong to royalty or be a prince of the church, or a politician, or a tradesman, or a man of the street. To all alike, high or low, rich or poor, they must proffer, with open hands, with a radiant heart, with an eloquent tongue, with infinite patience, with uncompromising loyalty, with great wisdom, with unshakable courage, the Cup of Salvation at so critical an hour, to the confused, the hungry, the distraught and fear-stricken multitudes, in the north, in the west, in the south, and in the heart of the sorely tried continent. (Shoghi Effendi)

Channels for the Spirit of God.

Perhaps the reason why you have not accomplished so much in the field of teaching is the extent you have looked upon your own weaknesses and inabilities to spread the Message. Baha'u'llah and the Master have both urged us repeatedly to disregard our own handicaps and lay our whole reliance upon God. He will come to our aid if we only arise and become an active channel for God's Grace.

Do you think it is the teachers who make converts and change human hearts? No, surely not. They are only pure souls who take the first steps and then let the spirit of Baha'u'llah move and make use of them. If any one of them should even for a second think or consider his achievements as due to his own capacities, his work is ended and his fall starts. This is the fact why so many competent souls have, after wonderful services, suddenly found themselves utterly impotent and perhaps thrown aside by the spirit of the Cause as useless souls. The criterion is the extent to which we are ready to have the will of God work through us. (Shoghi Effendi)

Contacts with Social Movements - Association and Affiliation.

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

Fully aware of the repeated statements of 'Abdu'l-Baha that universality is of God, Baha'is in every land are ready, nay anxious, to associate themselves by word and deed with any association of men which, after careful scrutiny, they feel satisfied is free from every tinge of partisanship and politics and is wholly devoted to the interests of all mankind. In their collaboration with such associations they would extend any moral and material assistance they can afford, after having fulfilled their share of support to those institutions that affect directly the interests of the Cause. They should always bear in mind, however, the dominating purpose of such a collaboration, which is to secure in time the recognition by those with whom they are associated of the paramount necessity and the true significance of the Baha'i Revelation in this day. <p27>

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 programmes or politics that are not in strict conformity with the tenets of the Faith. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

International Language.

Regarding the whole question of an international language and its relation to the Faith: We, as Baha'is, are very anxious to see a universal auxiliary tongue adopted as soon as possible; we are not the protagonists of any one language to fill this post. If the governments of the world agree on an existing language, or a constructed, new tongue, to be used internationally, we would heartily support it because we desire to see this step in the unification of the human race take place as soon as possible.

Esperanto has been in wide use, more so than any similar language, all over the world, and the Baha'is have been encouraged by both the Master and the Guardian to learn it and to translate Baha'i literature into it. We cannot be sure it will be the chosen language of the future; but as it is the one which has spread most, both East and West, we should certainly continue to co-operate with its members, learn to speak it, and translate Baha'i literature into it. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

Not an Economic System.

There are practically no technical teachings on economics in the Cause, such as banking, the price system, and others. The Cause is not an economic system, nor can its founders be considered as having been technical economists. The contribution of the Faith to this subject is essentially indirect, as it consists of the application of spiritual principles to our present-day economic system. Baha'u'llah has given us a few basic principles which should guide future Baha'i economists in establishing such institutions as will adjust the economic relationships of the world. (Shoghi Effendi) <p28>

Application of Economic Teachings.

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

On Commercial Arrangements.

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

Settlement of Civil Disputes.

The Guardian wishes to emphasize the importance of avoiding references to civil courts of cases of dispute between believers, even in non-Baha'i issues. It is the Assembly's function to endeavour to settle amicably such disputes, both in order to safeguard the fair name and prestige of the Cause, and to acquire the necessary experience for the extension of its functions in the future. (Shoghi Effendi) <p29>

Membership in other Religious Organizations.

Formal affiliation with and acceptance of membership in organizations whose programmes 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 Baha'i speaker of the entire programme. (Shoghi Effendi)

Non-Political Character of the Faith.

The Guardian...feels under the responsibility of stating that the attitude taken by the Master (i.e., 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 Baha'i vote for an officer nor Baha'i participation in the affairs of the Republic shall involve acceptance by that individual of a programme or policy that contravenes any vital principle, spiritual or social, of the Faith...I

feel it incumbent upon me to clarify the above statement, written on my behalf, by stating that no vote cast, or office undertaken, by a Baha'i should necessarily constitute acceptance, by the voter or office holder, of the entire programme of any political party. No Baha'i can be regarded as either a Republican or Democrat, as such. He is above all else, the supporter of the principles enunciated by Baha'u'llah, with which, I am firmly convinced, the programme of no political party is completely harmonious...

The Master surely never desired the Friends to use their influence towards the realization and promotion of policies contrary to any of the principles of the Faith. The Friends may vote, if they can do it, without identifying themselves with one party or another. To enter the arena of party politics is surely detrimental to the best interests of the Faith and will harm the Cause. It remains for the individuals to so use their right to vote as to keep aloof from party politics, and always bear in mind that they are voting on the merits of the individual, rather than because he belongs to one party or another. The matter must be made perfectly clear to the individuals, who will be left free to exercise their discretion and judgment. But if a certain person does enter into party politics and labours for the ascendancy of one party over another, and continues to do it against expressed appeals and warnings of the Assembly, then the Assembly has the right to refuse him the right to vote in Baha'i elections. (Shoghi Effendi)

He can quite well understand that after so many years of isolation from the rest of the Baha'i world it came as a surprise to some of you to hear that we, as Baha'is, must not have any affiliations with churches or political parties. But he feels certain that when you meditate on this matter you yourselves will see the wisdom of it. We as Baha'is can never be known as hypocrites or as people insincere in their protestations and because of this we cannot subscribe to both the Faith of Baha'u'llah and ordinary church dogma. The churches are waiting for the coming of Jesus Christ; we believe He has come again in the glory of the Father. The churches teach doctrines - various ones in various creeds - which we as Baha'is do not accept, such as the bodily resurrection, confession, or in some creeds, the denial of the immaculate conception. In other words, there is no Christian church today whose dogmas we Baha'is can truthfully say we accept in their entirety. Therefore to remain a member of the church is not proper for us, for we do so under false pretence. We should therefore withdraw from our churches but continue to associate, if we wish to, with the church members and Ministers. Our belief in Christ, as Baha'is, is so firm, so unshakable, and so exalted in nature that very few Christians are to be found nowadays who love Him and reverence Him and have the faith in Him that we have. It is only from the dogmas and creeds of the churches that we dissociate ourselves; not from the Spirit of Christianity. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary) <p31>

Very much the same reasons motivate us in withdrawing from all political movements, however close some of their ideals may be to ours. We Baha'is are one the world over; we are seeking to build up a new World Order, divine in

origin. How can we do this if every Baha'i is a member of a different political party - some of them diametrically opposite to each other? Where is our unity then? We would be divided, because of politics, against ourselves, and this is the opposite of our purpose. Obviously if one Baha'i in Austria is given freedom to choose a political party and join it, however good its aims may be, another Baha'i in Japan or America, or India has the right to do the same thing and he might belong to a party the very opposite in principle to that which the Austrian Baha'i belongs to. Where would be the unity of the Faith then? These two spiritual brothers would be working against each other because of their political affiliations (as the Christians of Europe have been doing in so many fratricidal wars). The best way for a Baha'i to serve his country and the world is to work for the establishment of Baha'u'llah's World Order, which will gradually unite all men and do away with divisive political systems and religious creeds. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

Relationship of Baha'is to Politics.

It is often through our misguided feeling that we can somehow aid our fellows better by some activity outside the Faith, that Baha'is are led to indulge in politics. This is a dangerous delusion. As Shoghi Effendi's secretary wrote on his behalf: "What we Baha'is must face is the fact that society is disintegrating so rapidly that moral issues which were clear a half century ago are now hopelessly confused and, what is more, thoroughly mixed up with battling political interests. That is why Baha'is must turn all their forces into the channel of building up the Baha'i Cause and its administration. They can neither change nor help the world in any other way at present. If they become involved in the issues the governments of the world are <p32> struggling over, they will be lost. But if they build up the Baha'i pattern they can offer it as a remedy when all else has failed."..."...We must build up our Baha'i system, and leave the faulty systems of the world to go their way. We cannot change them through becoming involved in them; on the contrary, they will destroy us."

Reference to Political Figures.

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

Articles on Controversial Issues.

Touching the publication of articles and pamphlets bearing on the controversial and political issues of the day, I desire to remind my dearly-beloved fellow-workers that at the present stage when the Cause is still in its infancy, any minute and detailed analysis by the Friends of subjects that are in the forefront of general discussion would often be misconstrued in certain quarters and give rise to suspicions and misunderstandings that would react

unfavourably on the Cause. They would tend to create a misconception of the real object, the true mission, and the fundamental character of the Baha'i Faith. We should, while endeavouring to uphold loyalty and expound conscientiously our social and moral principles in all their essence and purity, in all their bearings upon the divers phases of human society, insure that no direct reference or particular criticism in our exposition of the fundamentals of the Faith would tend to antagonize any existing institution, or help to identify a purely spiritual movement with the base clamourings and contentions of warring sects, factions, and nations. We should strive in all our utterances to combine the discretion and noble reticence of the wise with the frankness and passionate loyalty of the ardent advocate of <p33> an inspiring Faith. While refusing to utter the word that would needlessly alienate or estrange any individual, government, or people, we should fearlessly and unhesitatingly uphold and assert in their entirety such truths the knowledge of which we believe is vitally and urgently needed for the good and betterment of mankind. (Shoghi Effendi)

Review of Articles About the Cause.

In the February Baha'i News, page 3, it mentions that magazine articles about the Cause "written by individual believers as their personal understanding of the teachings..." need not be reviewed officially. He feels this is unwise in view of the Master's own instructions that articles about the Cause should not be published by individuals without proper approval of some responsible body.

The Guardian says the local Assemblies can pass upon such articles; it is not necessary to refer them to a national committee.

So often persons can be carried away by their enthusiasm and express something detrimental to the Faith. Therefore they must either refer their articles to their local Spiritual Assembly or the National Reviewing Committee. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

Baha'i Periodicals.

Regarding the publication of Baha'i periodicals, there is no doubt whatsoever that every individual Baha'i is free to inaugurate and conduct any magazine of his own provided that nothing is published therein which in the estimation of the National Assembly tends in the least to become detrimental or injurious to the highest interests of the Cause. Within these limits, and these limits only, private initiative should in no wise be discouraged and is indeed highly praiseworthy. It is for the National Assembly, however, to exercise its judgment as to what extent the resources at their disposal enable them to aid financially the individual undertakings of the Friends. Should the response of the Friends and <p34> Assemblies to the appeals made on behalf of the National Fund be prompt, sustained, and generous, the National Assembly will, I am certain, justify its sympathy, goodwill, and genuine co-operation with every individual Baha'i enterprise. (Shoghi Effendi)

Distinction Between Tablets and Talks.

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

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

'Abdu'l-Baha in London.

Regarding 'Abdu'l-Baha in London. Nothing can be considered Scripture, for which we do not have an original text. A verbatim record, in Persian, of His talks would, of course, be more reliable than one in English, because He was not always accurately interpreted. However, such a book is of value, and certainly has its place in our literature. (Shoghi Effendi)

Stories About 'Abdu'l-Baha.

He would also urge you to attach no importance to the stories told about 'Abdu'l-Baha or to those attributed to Him by the Friends. These should be regarded in the same light as the notes and impressions of visiting pilgrims. They need not be suppressed, but they also should not be given prominence or official recognition. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

Preservation of Relics.

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

Baha'u'llah and the New Era.

His [1] book, Baha'u'llah and the New Era, however - an abiding monument to his pure intention - will, alone, inspire generations yet unborn to tread the path of truth and service as steadfastly and as unostentatiously as it was trodden by its beloved author. The Cause he loved so well, he served even unto his last day with exemplary faith and unstinted devotion. His tenacity of faith, his high integrity, his self-effacement, his industry and painstaking labours were traits of a character the noble qualities of which will live and live forever after him. To me, personally, he was the warmest of friends, a trusted counsellor, an indefatigable collaborator, a lovable companion. (Shoghi Effendi)

[1 Dr. Esslemont.]

Baha'i Music.

Music, as one of the arts, is a natural cultural development, and the Guardian does not feel that there should be any cultivation of "Baha'i Music" any more than we are trying to develop a Baha'i school of painting or writing. The believers are free to paint, write, and compose as their talents guide them. If music is written, incorporating the sacred writings, the Friends are free to make use of it, but it should never be considered a requirement at Baha'i meetings to have such music. The further away the Friends keep from any set forms, the better, for they must realize that the Cause is absolutely universal, and what might seem a beautiful addition to their mode of celebrating a Feast, etc., would perhaps fall on the ears of the people of another country as unpleasant sounds - and vice versa. As long as they have music for its own sake it is all right, but they should not consider it Baha'i music. (Shoghi Effendi)

(D) The Group

A Baha'i Group.

Next to an isolated believer any number of confirmed Baha'is less than nine persons should be considered as automatically constituting a Baha'i group. No regulation, however, need be introduced regarding this matter. (Shoghi Effendi)

PART II

The Local Spiritual Assembly

—

The Protection of the Community

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

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

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

As forgiveness is one of the attributes of the Merciful One, so also justice is one of the attributes of the Lord. The tent of existence is upheld upon the pillar of justice, and not upon forgiveness. The continuance of mankind depends upon justice and not upon forgiveness. So if, at present, the law of pardon were practised in all

countries, in short time the world would be disordered and the foundations of human life would crumble...

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

(A) The Nature and Establishment of the Local Spiritual Assembly

THE FOUNDATION OF THE L.S.A. AND THE CONDITIONS OF ITS EXISTENCE

Divine Institution.

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

Necessity for Establishment.

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

Attachment to 'Abdu'l-Baha.

O ye who are firm in the Covenant: 'Abdu'l-Baha is constantly engaged in ideal communication with any Spiritual Assembly which is instituted through the divine bounty, and the members of which are in the

utmost devotion turning to the Divine Kingdom and are firm in the Covenant. To them He is heartily attached and with them He is united by everlasting ties. Thus correspondence with them is sincere, constant, and uninterrupted. ('Abdu'l-Baha)

OBLIGATIONS AND DUTIES OF THE L.S.A.

Most Outstanding Obligations. (The Nine Points.)

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

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

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

They must do their utmost to extend at all times the helping hand to the poor, the sick, the disabled, the orphan, the widow, irrespective of colour, caste, and creed. <p40>

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

They must make an effort to maintain official, regular, and frequent correspondence with the various Baha'i centres throughout the world, report to them their activities, and share the glad tidings they receive with all their fellow-workers in the Cause.

They must encourage and stimulate by every means at their command, through subscription, reports and articles, the development of the various Baha'i magazines.

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

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

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

Election.

These local Spiritual Assemblies will have to be elected directly by the Friends, and every declared believer of twenty-one 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 <p41> the election, the consolidation, and the efficient working of his own local Assembly.

Pending its [The Universal House of Justice] establishment,[1] and to ensure 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 Ridvan, and the result of polling, if possible, be declared on that day.

[1 The Universal House of Justice was elected in April 1963.]

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 vigour, that its affairs may be conducted with efficiency and promptness, it is necessary that every one should conscientiously take an active part in the election of these Assemblies, abide by their decision, enforce their decree, and co-operate 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 Baha'i Community and promote the common weal. (Shoghi Effendi)

Appointed of God.

Let us recall His explicit and often-repeated assurance 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. (Shoghi Effendi)

The Bedrock of the Universal House of Justice.[1]

[1 The Universal House of Justice was elected in April 1963.]

The various Assemblies, local and national, constitute today the bedrock upon the strength of which the Universal House is in future to be firmly established and raised. Not until these function vigorously and harmoniously can the hope for the termination of this period of transition be realized. It devolves <p42> upon us whose dearest wish is to see the Cause enter upon that promised era of

universal recognition and world achievements, to do all in our power to consolidate the foundations of these Assemblies, promoting at the same time a fuller understanding of their purpose and more harmonious co-operation for their maintenance and success. (Shoghi Effendi)

The Need for Consultation.

"It is incumbent upon everyone not to take any step without consulting the Spiritual Assembly, and they must assuredly obey with heart and soul its bidding and be submissive unto it, that things may be properly ordered and well arranged. Otherwise every person will act independently and after his own judgment, will follow his own desire, and do harm to the Cause". ('Abdu'l-Baha)

The Requisites of True Consultation.

"The prime requisites for them that take counsel together are purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrance, humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering in difficulties, and servitude to His exalted Threshold. Should they be graciously aided to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen Kingdom of Baha 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 any one oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed. The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions. If, after discussion, a decision be carried unanimously, well and good; but if, the Lord forbid, differences of opinion should arise, a majority of voices must prevail.

The first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members of the Assembly. They must be wholly free from estrangement <p43> and must manifest in themselves the Unity of God, for they are the waves of one sea, the drops of one river, the stars of one heaven, the rays of one sun, the trees of one orchard, the flowers of one garden. Should harmony of thought and absolute unity be non-existent, that gathering shall be dispersed and that Assembly be brought to naught. The second condition: They must, when coming together, turn their faces to the Kingdom on High and ask aid from the Realm of Glory. They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care, and moderation to express their views. They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden. The honoured 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 honoured members object to or censure, whether in or out of the meeting, any decision arrived at previously, though that decision be not right, for such criticism would prevent any decision from being enforced. In short, whatsoever thing is arranged in harmony and with love and purity of motive, its result is light, and should the least trace of estrangement prevail the result shall be darkness upon darkness.

If this be so regarded, that Assembly shall be of God, but otherwise it shall lead to coolness and alienation that proceed from the Evil One. Discussions must all be confined to spiritual matters that pertain to the training of souls, the instruction of children, the relief of the poor, the help of the feeble throughout all classes in the world, kindness to all peoples, the diffusion of the fragrances of God, and the exaltation of His Holy Word. Should they endeavour to fulfil these conditions the Grace of the Holy Spirit shall be vouchsafed unto them, and that Assembly shall become the centre 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".

('Abdu'l-Baha) <p44>

Right of Self-expression.

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

Fellowship and Consultation.

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 Baha'i 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, candour, and courage on the other. (Shoghi Effendi)

Attitude and Responsibility of Members.

The duties of those whom the Friends have freely and conscientiously elected as

their representatives are no less vital and binding than the obligations of those who have chosen them. Their function is not to dictate, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the Friends whom they represent. They must regard themselves in no other light but that of chosen instruments for a more efficient and dignified presentation of the Cause of God. They should never be led to suppose that they are the central ornaments of the body of the Cause, intrinsically superior to others in capacity or merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles. They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavour, by their openmindedness, their high sense of justice <p45> and duty, their candour, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the Friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win, not only the confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they serve, but also their esteem and real affection. They must, at all times, avoid the spirit of exclusiveness, the atmosphere of secrecy, free themselves from a domineering attitude, and banish all forms of prejudice and passion from their deliberations. They should, within the limits of wise discretion, take the Friends into their confidence, acquaint them with their plans, share with them their problems and anxieties, and seek their advice and counsel. And, when they are called upon to arrive at a certain decision, they should, after dispassionate, anxious, and cordial consultation, turn to God in prayer, and with earnestness and conviction and courage record their vote and abide by the voice of the majority, which we are told by our Master to be the voice of truth, never to be challenged, and always to be wholeheartedly enforced. To this voice the Friends must heartily respond, and regard it as the only means that can ensure the protection and advancement of the Cause. (Shoghi Effendi)

Full Stature.

Designated as "Spiritual Assemblies" - an appellation that must in the course of time be replaced by their permanent and more descriptive title of "Houses of Justice", bestowed upon them by the Author of the Baha'i Revelation; instituted, without any exception, in every city, town, and village where nine or more adult believers are resident; annually and directly elected, on the first day of the greatest Baha'i Festival by all adult believers, man and woman alike; invested with an authority rendering them unanswerable for their acts and decisions to those who elect them; solemnly pledged to follow, under all conditions, the dictates of the "Most Great Justice" that can alone usher in the reign of the "Most Great Peace" which Baha'u'llah has proclaimed and must ultimately establish; charged with the responsibility of promoting at all <p46> 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 Baha'i activity is assigned

for study and action; supported by local funds to which all believers voluntarily contribute; these Assemblies, the representatives and custodians of the Faith of Baha'u'llah, numbering, at the present time (1944) several hundreds, and whose membership is drawn from the diversified races, creeds, and classes constituting the world-wide Baha'i community, have, in the course of the last two decades, abundantly demonstrated, by virtue of their achievements, their right to be regarded as the chief sinews of Baha'i society, as well as the ultimate foundation of its administrative structure. (Shoghi Effendi)

FORMATION OF THE LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

Obligation to Form.

Shoghi Effendi feels that in any locality where the number of adult believers reaches nine, a local Assembly should be established. He feels this to be an obligation rather than a purely voluntary act. Only in exceptional cases has the National Spiritual Assembly the right to postpone the formation of an Assembly if it feels that the situation does not warrant such a formation. This right, however, should be exercised if the situation absolutely demands it. As to the principle according to which the area of the jurisdiction of a Local Assembly is to be determined, he feels this to be the function of the National Spiritual Assembly; whatever principle they uphold should be fairly applied to all localities without any distinction whatever. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary) <p47>

Election Date.

Regarding the election of the local Assembly on 21 April: He feels that it should not take place after sunset on that day, for otherwise it would be, according to the Baha'i Calendar, falling on 22 April. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

Exactly Nine Votes.

Concerning the question you have asked as to whether in elections for Spiritual Assemblies the electors should cast exactly nine votes, or may cast less than this number. Inasmuch as Spiritual Assembly membership, according to the principles of Baha'i Administration, has been limited for the present to nine members, it follows that no electoral vote can be effective unless it is cast for exactly that number. It is, therefore, the sacred duty of every Baha'i elector to cast nine votes, neither more nor less, except under special circumstances, so as to ensure that the results of the elections for the Spiritual Assembly will be effective and on as wide a basis of representation as possible. (Shoghi Effendi)

No Reference to Personalities.

I feel that reference to personalities before the election would give rise to misunderstanding and differences. What the friends should do is to get thoroughly acquainted with one another, to exchange views, to mix freely and discuss among themselves the requirements and qualifications for such a

membership without reference or application, however indirect, to particular individuals. We should refrain from influencing the opinion of others, of canvassing for any particular individual, but should stress the necessity of getting fully acquainted with the qualifications of membership referred to in our Beloved's Tablets and of learning more about one another through direct, personal experience rather than through the reports and opinions of our friends. (Shoghi Effendi)

Voting for Oneself.

This is entirely a matter of conscience; if the individual feels for some reason justified in voting for himself, he is free to do so. (Shoghi Effendi)
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Incorporation of Local Assembly.

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

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

In small centres where the Friends are still few, the taking of such steps is rather premature and may add to the complexity of Baha'i administration. (Shoghi Effendi)

(B) Function and Procedure of the L.S.A.

UNITY, LOVE, HARMONY...

Even Though it be Wrong.

Endeavour ye as much as possible that difference may not arise in the affairs; let not every insignificant matter become the cause of disagreement. If such conditions exist the end will be complete dispersion. The believers and maid-servants of the Merciful must all consider how to produce harmony, so that the unity of the human world may be realized, not that every wholly unimportant subject becomes conducive to differences of opinion.

It is my hope that the Friends and the maid-servants become united on all subjects and not disagree at all. If they agree upon a subject, even though it be wrong, it is better than to disagree and be in the right, for this difference will produce the demolition of the

divine foundations. Though one of the parties may be in the right and they disagree, that will be the cause of a thousand wrongs, but <p49> if they agree and both parties are in the wrong, as it is in unity the truth will be revealed and the wrong made right. ('Abdu'l-Baha)

Baha'u'llah's Promise.

Baha'u'llah has given the promise that in every Assembly where unity and harmony prevail, there His glorious spirit will not only be present, but will animate, sustain, and guide all the Friends in all their deliberations.

It is to unity that the Guardian has been continually calling the Friends. For where a united will exists, nothing can effectively oppose and hamper the forces of constructive development. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

Functions of the Local Assembly.

The nature and various functions of the local Spiritual Assembly are duly set forth in Articles 14 to 28 of the Articles of Association of the National Spiritual Assembly. Each local Assembly and all members of the local Baha'i communities shall be guided and controlled by the provisions of those Articles. (N.S.A.)

MEETINGS OF THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY

Calling of Meetings.

A meeting of the Spiritual Assembly is valid only when it has been duly called, that is, when each and every member has been informed of the time and place. The general practice is for the Assembly to decide upon some regular time and place for its meetings throughout the Baha'i year. When the regular schedule cannot be followed, or the need arises for a special meeting, the secretary, on request by the chairman or any other member of the Spiritual Assembly, should send due notice to all the members. (N.S.A.)

Agenda.

It is suggested that the following be included in Local Assembly consultation if applicable and in whatever order from time to time preferred.

Devotional Opening.

Approval of Minutes of previous meeting.

Review of Agenda. <p50>

Teaching Matters.

Treasurer's Report.

Recommendations from the last Feast.

Committee Reports.

Secretary's Report - Letters received, etc.

Other business.

Devotional Close. (N.S.A.)

Records.

The Spiritual Assembly, as a permanent body, is responsible for maintaining all

its records, including Minutes of meetings, correspondence, and financial records, throughout its existence as a Baha'i institution. Each officer, therefore, on completing his or her term of office, shall turn over to the Assembly all records pertaining to the business of the Assembly. (N.S.A.)

COMMITTEES OF THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY

Assembly Members and Committee Appointments.

Those who are best fitted for the specific work assigned to the committees should be elected, irrespective of their membership on either national or local Assemblies. The greater the pressure on those who shoulder both committee and Assembly responsibilities, the greater the reward and the richer the blessings vouchsafed to those who willingly and gratefully sustain this double burden.

(Shoghi Effendi)

Dissatisfaction with Officers.

As regards the question of what procedure the Baha'i Assemblies should adopt when dissatisfied with the services of any of their officers. Should such dissatisfaction involve the loyalty of an Assembly officer to the Faith, he should, following a majority vote, be dismissed. But in case the dissatisfaction is due to the incompetence of a member, or simply to a neglect on his part to discharge his duties, this does not constitute sufficient justification to force his resignation or dismissal from the Assembly. He should be kept in office until new elections are held. (Shoghi Effendi) <p51>

Vacancy.

It is only too obvious that unless a member can attend regularly the meetings of his local Assembly, it would be impossible for him to discharge the duties incumbent upon him, and to fulfil his responsibilities as a representative of the community. Membership in a local Spiritual Assembly carries with it, indeed, the obligation and capacity to remain in close touch with local Baha'i activities, and ability to attend regularly the sessions of the Assembly.

(Shoghi Effendi)

Authority and Control of Committees.

The local Spiritual Assembly cannot delegate to any one of the local committees the authority to exercise any control or supervision over any other committee or body which it has itself appointed. All local committees are directly and solely responsible to the local Assembly which alone can exercise the power of supervision over them. (Shoghi Effendi)

Committee Officers.

He feels that committees must assume more responsibility and exercise freedom of choice and judgment in electing their officers, and function as a corporate body with a corporate spirit. More especially so as now that the Cause is growing in numbers, and its responsibilities are being multiplied, national committees are acquiring added importance, and must seek, ever-increasingly, to

follow the pattern of Baha'u'llah and assume responsibility for the election of their officers. These committees must develop, become mature, and forge ahead courageously, relying more on united effort and less on personal leadership, as is now the case with local and national Assemblies. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

(C) Relations of the Local Spiritual Assembly

CONSULTATION WITH THE COMMUNITY

Nineteen Day Feasts - Its inauguration, ratification, nature, and institution.

The institution of the Nineteen Day Feast provides the recognized and regular occasion for general <p52> 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-Baha:

"The Nineteen-Day Feast was inaugurated by the Bab and ratified by Baha'u'llah, 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, co-operation and helpfulness is the basis of human society. Without the realization of these two great principles no great movement is pressed forward."
(‘Abdu'l-Baha)

The Nineteen Day Feast has been described by the Guardian as the foundation of the World Order of Baha'u'llah. It is to be conducted according to the following programme: the first part, entirely spiritual in character, consists of the reading of prayers by the Bab, Baha'u'llah, and the Master; 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.

Baha'is 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.

Only members of the Baha'i community, and visiting Baha'is from other communities, may attend these meetings. (N.S.A.) <p53>

Regarding your question: The Devotional part of the Nineteen Day Feast means the reading of Prayers by Baha'u'llah and the Master. If, after this, there is a period of reading the teachings, his [the Guardian's] writings may be included, but this does not form part of the devotional aspect of the meeting.

Attendance at Nineteen Day Feasts is not obligatory but very important, and every believer should consider it a duty and privilege to be present on such occasions. (Shoghi Effendi)

Subjects for the Consultation Period of the Nineteen Day Feasts, as Appropriate:

Communications from the Guardian [1] and the National Spiritual Assembly.

National and International Baha'i affairs.

Local Spiritual Assembly activity and plans.

Financial report.

Forthcoming teaching effort.

Committee reports.

Suggestions and recommendations from individuals.

Reports on actions taken resulting from previous Feast resolutions.

Greetings and news from guests and from correspondence.

(N.S.A.)

[1 Now the Universal House of Justice.]

THE BAHAI CALENDAR

The Origin of the Baha'i Calendar.

The Bab, the Primal Point of a new creation, brought humanity into a new division of time in a calendar of nineteen months. All through our past heritage the months of the years and the days of the week have borne the names of pagan feasts and Roman holidays. The Bab swept these ancient landmarks away, and replaced them by the Qualities of: Splendour, Glory, Beauty, Grandeur, Light, Mercy, Words, Perfection, Names, Might, Will, Knowledge, Power, Speech, Questions, Honour, Sovereignty, Dominion, and Loftiness. <p54>

Meditating upon these sublime attributes, man is enabled to gaze beyond the curve of time, wherein the swing and change of planetary movements exists, to the eternal qualities that stabilize the soul. As the seasons return with their quaternary beauty, as the seed sacrifices to the mystery of the harvest, we see reflected in the mirror of the physical world the spiritual spring-time when the Word of God is planted in the heart of man by the coming of God's Messengers.

The cycle of the year ends with a period of nineteen days of fasting to prepare for the coming of Naw-Ruz, the New Year, when both the physical and spiritual beauty blend and we advance to another year in which to mature the soul and prepare "for the everlasting kingdom". (Traveller's Narrative - Introduction)

Anniversaries

Feast of Ridvan (Declaration of Baha'u'llah) 21 April - 2 May 1863.

Declaration of the Bab, 23 May 1844.

Ascension of Baha'u'llah, 29 May 1892.

Martyrdom of the Bab, 9 July 1850.

Birth of the Bab, 20 October 1819.

Birth of Baha'u'llah, 12 November 1817.
 Day of the Covenant, 26 November
 Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha, 28 November 1921.
 Period of the Fast, nineteen days beginning 2 March.
 Feast of Naw-Ruz (Baha'i New Year), 21 March.

Holy Days on Which Work Should be Suspended

The first day of Ridvan.
 The ninth day of Ridvan.
 The twelfth day of Ridvan.
 The anniversary of the declaration of the Bab.
 The anniversary of the birth of Baha'u'llah.
 The anniversary of the birth of the Bab.
 The anniversary of the ascension of Baha'u'llah.

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The anniversary of the martyrdom of the Bab.
 The Feast of Naw-Ruz.

He wishes also to stress the fact that, according to our Baha'i laws, work is forbidden on our Nine Holy Days. Believers who have independent businesses or shops should refrain from working on these days. Those who are in government employ should, on religious grounds, make an effort to be excused from work; all believers, whoever their employers, should do likewise. If the government, or other employers, refuse to grant them these days off, they are not required to forfeit their employment, but they should make every effort to have the independent status of their Faith recognized and their right to hold their own religious Holy Days acknowledged. (Shoghi Effendi - from a letter written on his behalf)

Nineteen Day Feasts

Month	Arabic Name	Translation	First Days
1st	Baha	Splendour	21 March
2nd	Jalal	Glory	9 April
3rd	Jamal	Beauty	28 April
4th	'Azamat	Grandeur	17 May
5th	Nur	Light	5 June
6th	Rahmat	Mercy	24 June
7th	Kalimat	Words	13 July
8th	Kamal	Perfection	1 August
9th	Asma'	Names	20 August
10th	'Izzat	Might	8 September
11th	Mashiyyat	Will	27 September
12th	'Ilm	Knowledge	16 October
13th	Qudrat	Power	4 November
14th	Qawl	Speech	23 November
15th	Masa'il	Questions	12 December

16th	Sharaf	Honour	31 December
17th	Sultan	Sovereignty	19 January
18th	Mulk	Dominion	7 February
19th	'Ala	Loftiness	2 March

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The Nineteen Day Feast should be held, preferably, on the first day of the Baha'i month, that is to say the Baha'i day, beginning at sunset. If this is not possible for some good reason, for example that it clashes with the regular day for a public meeting, then it may be held later, but it must fall within that same Baha'i month and should be on the nearest possible date. (From a letter from the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the British Isles)

The Baha'i day starts and ends at sunset, and consequently the date of the celebration of Baha'i feasts should be adjusted to conform to the Baha'i calendar time. For further particulars on this subject you should refer to the section entitled "Baha'i Calendar" in *The Baha'i 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 Bab on 22 May, at about two hours after sunset.

The first day of Ridvan, at about 3 p.m. on 21 April.

The anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Bab on 9 July, at about noon.

The anniversary of the Ascension of Baha'u'llah on 29 May, at 3 a.m.

The Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha on 28 November, at 1 a.m.

The other anniversaries the believers are free to gather at any time during the day which they find convenient. (Shoghi Effendi)

Proper Time to Celebrate.

Regarding your question of the proper time to celebrate or hold our meetings of commemoration: the time should be fixed by counting after sunset; the Master passed away one hour after midnight, which falls a certain number of hours after sunset; so His passing should be commemorated according to the sun and regardless of day-light saving time. The same applies to the Ascension of <p57> Baha'u'llah who passed away about eight hours after sunset. (Shoghi Effendi)

Date of Naw-Ruz.

Regarding Naw-Ruz: if the vernal equinox falls on 21 March before sunset, it is celebrated on that day. If at any time after sunset, Naw-Ruz will then, as stated by Baha'u'llah, fall on the 22nd. (Shoghi Effendi)

Observance of Former Holidays.

As regards the celebration of the Christian Holidays by the believers, it is

surely preferable and even highly advisable that the Friends should in their relation to each other discontinue observing such holidays as Christmas and New Year, and to have their festival gatherings of this nature instead during the intercalary days and Naw-Ruz. (Shoghi Effendi)

RELATIONS WITH INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS

Acceptance of Believers, a Great Spiritual Responsibility.

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

On the other hand, when any person is expelled, the Assembly should not act hurriedly. There is a great spiritual responsibility attached to the act. The Assemblies do not have only rights against the individuals, they have great duties also. They should act like the good shepherd whom Christ mentions in His well-known parable. We also have the example of the Master before us. The individual Baha'is were organic parts of <p58>

His spiritual being.

What befell the least one of the Friends brought deep affliction and sorrow to Him also. If by chance one of them erred He counselled him and increased His love and affection, if the Master saw that that Friend was still stubbornly refusing to reform his ways, and that his living among the other Baha'is endangered the spiritual life of the rest, then He would expel him from the group. This should be the attitude of the Assemblies towards the individuals. The best criterion whereby you can measure the spiritual attainment of an Assembly is the extent its members feel themselves responsible for the welfare of the group. (Shoghi Effendi)

Personalities to be Subordinated.

I fully approve and wholeheartedly and unreservedly uphold the principle to which you refer that personalities should not be made centres around which the community may revolve but that they should be subordinated under all conditions and however great their merits to the properly constituted Assemblies. You and your co-workers can never overestimate or overemphasize this cardinal principle of Baha'i Administration. (Shoghi Effendi)

Reference of Matters to the Local Assembly.

Regarding consultation: Any person can refer a matter to the Assembly for consultation whether the other person wishes to or not. In matters which affect the Cause the Assembly should, if it deems it necessary, intervene even if both sides do not want it to, because the whole purpose of the Assemblies is to protect the Faith, the Communities, and the individual Baha'i as well. (Shoghi

Effendi)

Status of Pioneer.

The pioneer, as soon as an administrative body has been established, ceases to have any unique status in the community. But, of course, the service he has rendered <p59> remains very great, and he should continue to do his utmost for the Cause in conjunction with the Assembly and the other believers. (Shoghi Effendi)

From time to time we receive reports that pioneers or travelling teachers who are subsidized by the International Deputization Fund or receive letters of encouragement from the Universal House of Justice are assumed to have some special status or authority.

In order that there be no misunderstanding, it should be made clear that such individuals have no special status and have no authority or standing other than that of any believer residing in the area where he is pioneering or teaching.

Furthermore, pioneers and travelling teachers are under the jurisdiction of the National Spiritual Assembly of the country or area in which they are travelling or residing, as the case may be, and they must be obedient to the instruction of these National Spiritual Assemblies.

Of course, there may be cases when the Universal House of Justice may call upon a believer to accomplish a special mission on its behalf. In such cases special letters are written to the National Spiritual Assemblies concerned. (From a letter from the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies)

Performance of Baha'i Marriage.

The ceremony itself must be very simple. With reference to the matter of the consent of the parents to a Baha'i marriage: as this is a vital binding obligation, it is the duty of the Assemblies to ascertain, before giving their sanction, that the consent obtained has been given freely by the parents themselves. (Shoghi Effendi)

Cases of Mental Illness.

Regarding persons whose condition has not been defined by the civil authorities after medical diagnosis, the Assembly on the spot must investigate every case that arises and, after consultation with experts, deliver its verdict. Such a verdict, however, should, in important cases, <p60> be preceded by consultation with the L.S.A. No doubt, the power of prayer is very great, yet consultation with experts is enjoined by Baha'u'llah. Should these experts believe that an abnormal case exists, the withholding of voting rights is justified. (Shoghi Effendi)

OTHER FUNCTIONS

Importance of Archives.

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

Publicity Agencies.

He was very pleased to see the excellent publicity the Cause received in The Chicago Sunday Tribune, and hopes that more will be forthcoming, of a similar nature, all over the country. In this connection, he sees no objection to using the advice and services of non-Baha'i experts, or agencies, as long as the purity of the Teachings and the dignity of the Faith are maintained. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary) <p61>

PART III

National Convention

—

Nature and Establishment

Indirect Election by Delegates.

It is expressly recorded in 'Abdu'l-Baha's Writings that these National Assemblies must be indirectly elected by the Friends; that is, the Friends in every country must elect a certain number of delegates, who in their turn will elect from among all the Friends in that country the members of the National Spiritual Assembly. In such countries, therefore, as America, Great Britain, and Germany, a fixed number of secondary electors must first be decided upon. The Friends then in every locality where the number of adult declared believers exceeds nine must directly elect its quota of secondary electors assigned to it in direct proportion to its numerical strength.[1] These secondary electors will then, either through correspondence, or preferably by gathering together, and first deliberating upon the affairs of the Cause throughout their country (as the delegates to the Convention), elect from among all the Friends in that country the nine who will be the members of the National Spiritual Assembly. (Shoghi Effendi)

[1 See p. 96 regarding changed basis.]

Elective and Consultative Responsibilities.

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 <p62> 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 fulfil the functions of an enlightened consultative and co-operative body that will enrich the experience, enhance the prestige, support the authority, and assist the deliberations of the National Spiritual Assembly. It is my firm conviction that it is the bounden duty, in the interest of the Cause we all love and serve, of the members of the incoming National Assembly, once elected by the delegates at Convention time, to seek and have the utmost regard, individually as well as collectively, for the advice, the considered opinion and the true sentiments of the assembled delegates. Banishing every vestige of secrecy, of undue reticence, of dictatorial aloofness, from their midst, they should radiantly unfold to the eyes of the delegates, by whom they are elected, their plans, their hopes, and their cares. They should familiarize the delegates with the various matters that will have to be considered in the current year, and calmly and conscientiously study and weigh the opinions and judgments of the delegates. The newly elected National Assembly, during the few days when the Convention is in session and after the dispersal of the delegates, should seek ways and means to cultivate understanding, facilitate and maintain the exchange of views, deepen confidence, and vindicate by every tangible evidence their one desire to serve and advance the common weal. Not infrequently, nay oftentimes, the most lowly, untutored, and inexperienced among the Friends will, by the sheer inspiring force of selfless and ardent devotion, contribute a distinct and memorable share to a highly involved discussion in any given Assembly. Great must be the regard paid by those whom the delegates call upon to serve in high position to this all-important though inconspicuous manifestation of the revealing power of sincere and earnest devotion.

The National Spiritual Assembly, however, in view of the unavoidable limitations imposed upon the convening of frequent <p63> 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, such as the right to decide whether any local Assembly is functioning in accordance with the principles laid down for the conduct and the advancement of the Cause. It is my earnest prayer that they will utilize their highly responsible position, not only for the wise and efficient conduct of the affairs of the Cause, but also for the extension and deepening of the spirit of cordiality and wholehearted and mutual support in their co-operation with the body of their co-workers throughout the land. The seating of delegates to the Convention, i.e., the right to decide upon the validity of the credentials of the delegates at a given Convention, is vested in the outgoing National Assembly, and the right to decide who has the voting privilege is also ultimately placed in the hands of the National Spiritual Assembly, either when a local Spiritual Assembly is for the first time being formed in a given locality, or when differences arise

between a new applicant and an already established local Assembly. While the Convention is in session and the accredited delegates have already elected from among the believers throughout the country the members of the National Spiritual Assembly for the current year, it is of infinite value and a supreme necessity that as far as possible all matters requiring immediate decision should be fully and publicly considered, and an endeavour be made to obtain after mature deliberation, unanimity in vital decisions. Indeed, it has ever been the cherished desire of our Master, 'Abdu'l-Baha, that the Friends in their councils, local as well as national, should by their candour, their honesty of purpose, their singleness of mind, and the thoroughness of their discussions, achieve unanimity in all things. Should this in certain cases prove impracticable the verdict of the majority should prevail, to which decision the minority must under all circumstances, gladly, spontaneously, and continually, submit.

Nothing short of the all-encompassing, all-pervading power of His guidance and love can enable this newly-enfolded order <p64> to gather strength and flourish amid the storm and stress of a turbulent age, and in the fullness of time vindicate its high claim to be universally recognized as the one haven of abiding felicity and peace.

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

Annual Occasion.

In connection with the annual holding of the Baha'i Convention and Congress, I feel that although such a representative body need not be convened necessarily every year, yet it is highly desirable, in view of the unique functions it fulfils in promoting harmony and goodwill, in removing misunderstandings and in enhancing the prestige of the Cause, that the National Spiritual Assembly should exert itself to gather together annually the elected representatives of the believers. It would in some ways be obviously convenient and <p65>

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

The Character of Baha'i Elections.

Again I earnestly appeal to every one of you, and renew my only request with all the ardour of my conviction, to make, before and during the coming Convention, yet another effort, this time more spontaneous and selfless than before, and endeavour to approach your task - the election of your delegates, as well as your national and local representatives - with that purity of spirit that can alone obtain our Beloved's most cherished desire. Let us recall His explicit and often-repeated assurances <p66> that every Assembly elected in that rarified atmosphere of selflessness and detachment is, in truth, appointed of God, that its verdict is truly inspired, that one and all should submit to its decision unreservedly and with cheerfulness. (Shoghi Effendi)

Procedure of Election.

In connection with the best and most practical methods of procedure to be adopted for the election of Baha'i Spiritual Assemblies, I feel that in view of the fact that definite and detailed regulations defining the manner and character of Baha'i elections have neither been expressly revealed by Baha'u'llah nor laid down in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha, it devolves upon the members of the Universal House of Justice to formulate and apply such system of laws as would be in conformity with the essentials and requisites expressly provided by the Author and Interpreter of the Faith for the conduct of Baha'i administration. I have consequently refrained from establishing a settled and uniform procedure for the election of the Assemblies of the East and the West, leaving them free to pursue their own methods of procedure which in most cases had been instituted and practised during the last

two decades of the life of 'Abdu'l-Baha.

The general practice prevailing throughout the East is the one based upon the principle of plurality rather than absolute majority, whereby those candidates that have obtained the highest number of votes, irrespective of the fact whether they command an absolute majority of the votes cast or not, are automatically and definitely elected. It has been felt, with no little justification, that this method, admittedly disadvantageous in its disregard of the principle that requires that each elected member must secure a majority of the votes cast, does away on the other hand with the more serious disadvantage of restricting the freedom of the elector who, unhampered and unconstrained by electoral necessities, is called upon to vote for none but those whom prayer and reflection have inspired him to uphold. Moreover, the practice of nomination, so detrimental <p67> to the atmosphere of a silent and prayerful election, is viewed with mistrust inasmuch as it gives the right to the majority of a body that, in itself under the present circumstances, often constitutes a minority of all the elected delegates, to deny that God-given right of every elector to vote only in favour of those who he is conscientiously convinced are the most worthy candidates. Should this simple system be provisionally adopted, it would safeguard the spiritual principle of the unfettered freedom of the voter, who will thus preserve intact the sanctity of the choice he first made. It would avoid the inconvenience of securing advance nominations from absent delegates and the impracticality of associating them with the assembled electors in the subsequent ballots that are often required to meet the exigencies of majority vote. (Shoghi Effendi)

Rights of Delegates and Supremacy of the National Spiritual Assembly.

The Guardian wishes the N.S.A. to remind, and make it quite clear to, the believers in that land that the supreme body 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 Spiritual 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 <p68> affect their views or restrict their freedom. The delegates must be wholly independent of any administrative agency, must approach their task with absolute detachment, and must concentrate their attention on the most important and pressing issues.

The Guardian believes that the right to elect the chairman and the secretary of

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

Non-delegates, however, according to the Guardian's considered opinion, should not be given the right to intervene directly during the sessions of the Convention. Only through an accredited delegate should they be given indirectly the chance to voice their sentiments and to participate in the deliberations of the Convention. Much confusion and complications must inevitably result in the days to come if such a restriction be not imposed on a gathering which is primarily intended for the accredited delegates of the Baha'i communities. Bearing this restriction in mind, it is the duty of the N.S.A. to devise ways and means which would enable them to obtain valuable suggestions, not only from the total number of the elected delegates, but from as large a body of their fellow-workers as is humanly possible. <p69>

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

The utmost care and vigilance should be exercised lest any fresh misunderstandings arise regarding these fundamental issues. The root principle of Baha'i Administration is unreservedly maintained. No departure from its established tenets is contemplated. The undisputed authority of the supreme Baha'i administrative body [1] has been reaffirmed, while on the other hand, the untrammelled freedom of individual believers and delegates to exercise their functions has been once again reaffirmed and strengthened. On the continuous and harmonious co-operation of the two leading Baha'i institutions, by growth and success of the administration bequeathed by 'Abdu'l-Baha must

ultimately depend. May next year's Convention witness the triumph of these basic principles. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

[1 National Spiritual Assembly.]

Prerogatives of Convention.

Concerning the status, rights, and prerogatives of the Annual Baha'i 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 <p70> consultative body all through the year; that its twofold function of electing the body of the National Spiritual Assembly and of offering any constructive suggestions in regard to the general administration of the Cause is limited to a definite period; and that consequently the opinion current among some of the believers that the delegates are to serve as a consultative body throughout the year is at variance with the fundamental, though as yet unspecified, principles underlying the Administration. Shoghi Effendi firmly believes that consultation must be maintained between the N.S.A. and the entire body of the believers, and that such consultation, while the Convention is not in session, can best be maintained through the agency of the local Assemblies, one of whose essential functions is to act as intermediaries between the local communities and their national representatives. The main purpose of the Nineteen Day Feasts is to enable individual believers to offer any suggestion to the local Assembly which in its turn will pass it to the N.S.A. The local Assembly is, therefore, the proper medium through which local Baha'i communities can communicate with the body of the national representatives. The Convention should be regarded as a temporary gathering, having certain specific functions to perform, during a limited period of time. Its status is thus limited in time to the Convention sessions, the function of consultation at all other times being vested in the entire body of the believers through the local Spiritual Assemblies. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

Function of Convention.

I wish to affirm without the least hesitation or ambiguity, that the annual convention is not to be regarded as a body entitled to exercise functions similar to those which an ordinary parliament possesses under a democratic form of government. The administrative order which lies embedded in the Teaching of Baha'u'llah, and which the believers have championed and are now establishing, should, under no circumstances, be identified with the principles underlying present-day democracies. Nor is it identical <p71> with any purely aristocratic or autocratic form of government. The objectionable features inherent in each of these political systems are entirely avoided. It blends, as no system of human policy has as yet achieved, those salutary truths and beneficial elements which constitute the valuable contributions which each of these forms of government have made to society in the past. Consultation, frank and unfettered, is the bedrock of this unique order. Authority is concentrated in the hands of the elected members of the National Assembly. Power and initiative are primarily vested in the entire body of the believers acting through their local representatives. To generate those forces which must give birth to the

body of their national administrators, and to confer, freely and fully and at fixed intervals, with both the incoming and outgoing national Assemblies, are the twofold functions, the supreme responsibility and sole prerogative of the delegates assembled in Convention. Nothing short of close and constant interaction between these various organs of Baha'i administration can enable it to fulfil its high destiny. (Shoghi Effendi)

Status of National Assembly Members.

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) <p72>

Qualifications of Delegates and Assembly Members.

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 Baha'i office, whatever its nature. But those 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. He does not feel that the Friends should attach so much importance to limitations - such as people perhaps not being able to attend Assembly or Convention meetings, because if they do, then the fundamental concept of everyone being willing to do Baha'i service on administrative bodies will be weakened, and the Friends may be tempted to vote for those who, because of independent means or circumstances in their lives, are freer to come and go but less qualified to serve. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

Delegates Consult with Local Community.

Consultation between delegates and community advisable. Presentation community views to Convention advisable. (Shoghi Effendi)

Re-election of Assembly Members.

There is no objection in principle to an Assembly being re-elected whether in toto or in part, provided the members are considered to be well qualified for that post. It is individual merit that counts. Novelty, or the mere act of renewal of elections, are purely secondary considerations. Changes in Assembly membership would be welcome so far as they do not prejudice the quality of such membership. Once Assembly elections are over the results should be conscientiously and unquestionably accepted by the entire body of the

believers, not necessarily because they represent the Voice of Truth or the Will of Baha'u'llah, but for the supreme purpose of maintaining unity and harmony in the community. Besides, the acceptance of majority vote is the only effective and practical way of settling deadlocks in elections. No other solution is indeed possible. (Shoghi Effendi) <p73>

PART IV

The National Spiritual Assembly

(A) Nature and Establishment

THE INSTITUTION OF THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

Establishment.

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

Purpose.

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

It serves also another purpose, no less essential than the first, as in the course of time it shall evolve into the National House of Justice (referred to in 'Abdu'l-Baha's Will as the "secondary House of Justice"), which according to the explicit text of the Testament will have, in conjunction with the other National Assemblies throughout the Baha'i world, to elect directly the members of the International House of Justice, that Supreme Council that will guide, organize, and unify the affairs of the Movement throughout the world. (Shoghi Effendi) <p74>

Grave Responsibilities.

This National Spiritual Assembly, which, pending the establishment of the Universal House of Justice,[1] 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.

[1 Established April 1963.]

Vital issues affecting the interests of the Cause in that country, such as the matter of translation and publication, the Ma shriqu'l-Ak-dhar, the Teaching

Work, and other similar matters that stand distinct from strictly local affairs, must be under the full jurisdiction of the National Assembly.

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

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

With these Assemblies, local as well as national, harmoniously, vigorously, an efficiently functioning throughout the Baha'i world, the only means for the establishment of the Supreme House of Justice will have been secured. And when this Supreme Body will have been properly established, it will have to consider afresh the whole situation, and lay down the principle which shall direct, so long as it deems advisable, the affairs of the Cause. <p75>

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

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

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

Unchallengeable Authority.

The Guardian wishes me to again affirm his view that the authority of the N.S.A. is undivided and unchallengeable in all matters pertaining to the administration of the Faith and that, therefore, the obedience of individual Baha'is, delegates, groups, and Assemblies to that authority is imperative, and should be wholehearted and <p76> unqualified. He is convinced that the unreserved acceptance and complete application of this vital provision of the Administration is essential to the maintenance of the highest degree of unity amongst the believers, and is indispensable to the effective working of the administrative machinery of the Faith in every country. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

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 Baha'i 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 mainspring of the manifold activities and interests of every national community in the Baha'i world. It constitutes the sole link that binds these communities to the International House of Justice, the supreme administrative body in the Dispensation of Baha'u'llah. (Shoghi Effendi)

Anything whatsoever affecting the interests of the Cause and in which the National Assembly as a body is involved should, if regarded as unsatisfactory by local Assemblies and individual believers, be immediately referred to the National Assembly itself. Neither the general body of the believers, or any local Assembly, nor even the delegates to the Annual Convention, should be regarded as having any authority to entertain appeals against the decision of the National Assembly...

...This administrative principle which the Guardian is now restating and emphasizing is so clear, so comprehensive and <p77> simple that no misunderstanding as to its application, he feels, can possibly arise. There are no exceptions whatever to this rule, and the Guardian would deprecate any attempt to elaborate or dwell any further upon this fundamental and clearly-enunciated principle. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

The Duties and Responsibilities of the National Assembly.

The objects for which the National Spiritual Assembly is established are fully set forth in the Memorandum of Association of the N.S.A. of the Baha'is of the United Kingdom. (N.S.A.)

Whatever is not laid down in "Baha'i Administration" is left to the judgment of the National Spiritual Assembly to decide. These are purely secondary details, and as the Guardian wishes to avoid introducing into the administration a labyrinth of rules and regulations he leaves the Friends in authority to decide

such matters as they arise. (Shoghi Effendi)

Full Stature of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Designated by 'Abdu'l-Baha in His Will as the "Secondary Houses of Justice", they [the National Assemblies] constitute the electoral bodies in the formation of the International House of Justice, and are empowered to direct, unify, co-ordinate, and stimulate the activities of individuals as well as local Assemblies within their jurisdiction. Resting on the broad base of organized local communities, themselves pillars sustaining the institution which must be regarded as the apex of the Baha'i Administrative Order, these Assemblies are elected by delegates representative of Baha'i local communities, assembled at Convention during the period of the Ridvan Festival; are possessed of the necessary authority to enable them to insure the harmonious and efficient development of Baha'i activity within their respective spheres, are freed from all direct <p78> responsibility for their policies and decisions to their electorates; are charged with the sacred duty of consulting the views, of inviting the recommendations, and of securing the confidence and co-operation of the delegates and of acquainting them with their plans, problems, and actions; and are supported by the resources of national funds to which all ranks of the faithful are urged to contribute. (Shoghi Effendi)

(B) Auxiliary Institutions of the National Spiritual Assembly

COMMITTEES

Responsibility and Supervision.

Large issues in such spiritual activities that affect the Cause in general in that land, far from being under the exclusive jurisdiction of any local Assembly or group of friends, must each be minutely and fully directed by a special board, elected by the National Body, constituted as a committee thereof, responsible to it and upon which the National Body shall exercise constant and general supervision. As it has been observed already, the role of these committees set up by the National Spiritual Assembly, the renewal, the membership, and functions of which should be reconsidered separately each year by the incoming National Assembly, is chiefly to make thorough and expert study of the issue entrusted to their charge, advise by their reports, and assist in the execution of the decisions which in vital matters are to be exclusively and directly rendered by the National Assembly. The utmost vigilance, the most strenuous exertion is required by them if they wish to fulfil as befits their high and responsible calling the functions which it is theirs to discharge. They should, within the limits imposed upon them by present-day circumstances, endeavour to maintain the balance in such a manner that the evils of over-centralization which clog, confuse, and in the long run depreciate the value of the Baha'i services rendered shall on one hand be entirely avoided, <p79> and on the other the perils of utter decentralization with the consequent lapse of governing authority from the hands of the national representatives of the believers definitely averted. The absorption of the petty details of Baha'i administration by the personnel of the National Spiritual Assembly is

manifestly injurious to efficiency and an expert discharge of Baha'i duties, whilst the granting of undue discretion to bodies that should be regarded in no other light than that of expert advisers and executive assistants would jeopardize the very vital and pervading powers that are the sacred prerogatives of bodies that in time will evolve into Baha'i National Houses of Justice. (Shoghi Effendi)

All Members Equally Responsible.

All members have an equal responsibility for the efficient functioning of the committee. They should study the agenda with a view to contributing their own ideas to the discussion or initiating fresh topics. It is also the responsibility of every member to consider the minutes carefully before passing them as correct. They should be prepared to relieve the secretary of work which does not inevitably have to be done by the secretary. (N.S.A.)

SUMMER SCHOOL

Purpose of Summer Schools.

The basic purpose of all Baha'i Summer Schools, whether in East or West, is to give the believers the opportunity to acquaint themselves, not only by mere study but through whole-hearted and active collaboration in various Baha'i activities, with the essentials of the Administration and in this way enable them to become efficient and able promoters of the Cause. The teaching of the Administration is, therefore, an indispensable feature of every Baha'i Summer School and its special significance can be better understood if we realize the great need of every believer today for a more adequate understanding of the social principles and laws of the Faith. It is now, when the Cause is <p80> passing through some of the most difficult stages of its development, that the Friends should equip themselves with the necessary knowledge of the Administration. (Shoghi Effendi)

Summer School Activities.

Equally important as a factor in the evolution of the Administrative Order has been the remarkable progress achieved by the institution of the Summer Schools designed to foster the spirit of fellowship in a distinctly Baha'i atmosphere, to afford the necessary training for Baha'i Teachers, and to provide facilities for the study of the history and teachings of the Faith, and for a better understanding of its relation to other religions and to human society in general.

Through the intensive study of Baha'i Scriptures and of the early history of the Faith, through the organization of courses on the teachings and history of Islam, through conferences for the promotion of inter-racial amity; through laboratory courses designed to familiarize the participants with the processes of the Baha'i Administrative Order, through special sessions devoted to youth and child training, through classes in public speaking; through lectures on comparative religion; through group discussion on the manifold aspects of the Faith; through the establishment of libraries; through teaching classes;

through courses on Baha'i ethics and on Latin America; through the introduction of winter school sessions; through forums and devotional gatherings; through plays and pageants; through picnics and other recreational activities, these schools, open to Baha'is and non-Baha'is alike, bid fair to evolve into the Baha'i universities of the future. (Shoghi Effendi)

Intense Community Life.

The Guardian would urge all the believers to persevere in their efforts for raising the standard, both intellectual and spiritual, of their Summer School, and to heighten its prestige in the eyes of the Friends, and of the general non-Baha'i public outside. The institution of the Summer School constitutes a vital and inseparable part in any teaching campaign, and as such ought to be given the full importance it deserves in the teaching plans and activities of the believers. It should be organized in such a way as to attract the attention of the non-believers to the Cause and thus become an effective medium for teaching. Also it should afford the believers themselves an opportunity to deepen their knowledge of the teachings, through lectures and discussions and by means of close and intense community life. (Shoghi Effendi)

(C) Relations of the National Spiritual Assembly

Duty to Win Confidence.

Let it be made clear to every inquiring reader that among the most outstanding and sacred duties incumbent upon those who have been called upon to initiate, direct, and co-ordinate the affairs of the Cause, are those that require them to win by every means in their power the confidence and affection of those whom it is their privilege to serve. Theirs is the duty to investigate and acquaint themselves with the considered views, the prevailing sentiments, the personal convictions of those whose welfare it is their solemn obligation to promote. Theirs is the duty to purge once for all their deliberations and the general conduct of their affairs from that air of self-contained aloofness, from the suspicion of secrecy, the stifling atmosphere of dictatorial assertiveness, in short, from every word and deed that might savour of partiality, self-centredness, and prejudice. Theirs is the duty, while retaining the sacred and exclusive right of final decision in their hands, to invite discussion, provide information, ventilate grievances, welcome advice from even the most humble and insignificant members of the Baha'i family, expose their motives, set forth their plans, justify their actions, revise if necessary their verdict, foster the sense of interdependence and co-partnership, of understanding and mutual confidence <p82> between them on one hand and all local Assemblies and individual believers on the other. (Shoghi Effendi)

The Spirit of Enterprise.

It is the duty and privilege of the National and Local Assemblies if they find that the pressing requirements of their local and national budgets have been adequately met, to encourage individuals and groups to initiate and conduct, with their knowledge and consent, any undertaking that would serve to enhance

the work which they have set themselves to achieve. Not content with appeals addressed to each and every believer to offer any constructive suggestions or plan that would remedy an existing grievance, they should, by every means in their power, stimulate the spirit of enterprise among the believers in order to further the teaching as well as the administrative work of the Cause. They should endeavour, by personal contact and written appeals, to imbue the body of the faithful with a deep sense of personal responsibility, and urge every believer, whether high or low, poor or wealthy, to conceive, formulate, and execute such measures and projects as would redound, in the eyes of their representatives, to the power and the fair name of this sacred Cause. (Shoghi Effendi)

The National Fund.

As the activities of the Baha'i 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 lifeblood of those nascent institutions which you are labouring to erect. Its importance cannot, surely, be overestimated. Untold blessings shall no doubt crown every effort directed to that end. <p83>

May the National Fund so flourish as to enable its trustees to undertake such measures as will eloquently testify to a sorely stricken humanity the healing power of God's Faith. (Shoghi Effendi)

Interests of the Cause Paramount.

In the matter of affiliation with bodies and organizations that advocate ideals and principles that are in sympathy with the Baha'i Revelation; in establishing magazines beyond those that already are designed to advance opening and indirectly the interests of the Baha'i teachings; in the financial support we may sooner or later be called upon to extend to philanthropic institutions and the like; in advancing the cause of any particular activity to which we may feel sentimentally inclined; these, as well as all similar undertakings, we should only approach after having definitely ascertained, through careful deliberation with those who are in a responsible position, that the institutions representing the paramount interests of the Cause are already assured of adequate and continuous assistance. (Shoghi Effendi)

Financial Contributions from Non-Believers.

Moreover, we should, I feel, regard it as an axiom and guiding principle of Baha'i administration that in the conduct of every specific Baha'i activity, as different from undertakings of a humanitarian, philanthropic, or charitable character, which may in future be conducted under Baha'i 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. For apart from the consideration of embarrassing complications which the association of non-believers in the financing of institutions of a strictly Baha'i character may conceivably engender in the administration of the Baha'i community of the future, it should be remembered that these specific Baha'i institutions, which should be viewed in the light of Baha'u'llah's gifts bestowed upon the world, can best function and most powerfully exert <p84> their influence in the world only if reared and maintained solely by the support of those who are fully conscious of, and are unreservedly submissive to, the claims inherent in the Revelation of Baha'u'llah. In cases, however, when a friend or sympathizer of the Faith eagerly insists on a monetary contribution for the promotion of the Faith, such gifts should be accepted and duly acknowledged by the elected representatives of the believers with the express understanding that they would be utilized by them only to reinforce that section of the Baha'i Fund exclusively devoted to philanthropic or charitable purposes. (Shoghi Effendi)

Pioneers and Travelling Teachers.

Pioneers who volunteer for work, if they are not able to support themselves, should be supported by the National Fund until they either find work or their task is completed.

Likewise, travelling teachers should be assisted financially to carry out the "projects" assigned to them. The Friends should not for a moment confuse this type of support with the creation of a paid clergy. Any Baha'i can, at the discretion of the N.S.A., receive this necessary assistance, and it is clearly understood it is temporary and only to carry out a specific plan.

Baha'u'llah Himself has not only enjoined on every one the duty of teaching His Faith, but stated if you cannot go yourself, to send someone in your stead. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

Obligation to Enforce Laws of the Faith.

This distinction between institutions that are under full or partial Baha'i control is of a fundamental importance. Institutions that are entirely managed by Baha'is are, for reasons that are only too obvious, under the obligation of enforcing all the laws and ordinances of the Faith, especially those whose observance constitutes a matter of conscience. There is no reason, no justification whatever, that they should act otherwise, and any <p85> restriction which the government may impose upon them in this connection would necessarily constitute a violation of the individual's right to freedom in matters of religious belief. The situation is different when an institution is run partly by Baha'is, or is completely owned by the government. In this case the believers, while anxious to observe all prescribed Baha'i Feasts and Anniversaries, should also take into consideration the rights and interests of their non-Baha'i partners and associates, and not to force these to stop working when they are under no moral or religious obligation to do so. (Shoghi Effendi)

National Membership Roll.

I would also strongly urge the members of every incoming National Spiritual Assembly to take all necessary steps to insure that every local Assembly without any exception whatsoever should immediately after its election send the complete list of its members, together with the full address of its secretary, to the National Secretary. It would also be extremely helpful, should actual circumstances permit, to devise with the wholehearted assistance of every local Assembly ways and means for the compilation of an authoritative, up-to-date, and exhaustive list of recognized believers supplemented by the full address of each believer's permanent residence - this list to be continually revised according to every change affecting the residence and number of such believers. (Shoghi Effendi)

REMOVAL FROM VOTING LIST

Apathy or Inability.

People who for years have ceased to either attend meetings or show the slightest interest in the Cause can be dropped from the voting list; but any who are unable to attend meetings, but still consider themselves to be Baha'is and are desirous of keeping up their contact with the Faith, should naturally be kept on the voting list. (Shoghi Effendi) <p86>

Suspension of Voting Right.

The suspension of voting and other administrative rights of an individual, always conditional and therefore temporary, can never have such far-reaching implications, since it constitutes merely an administrative sanction; whereas his expulsion or excommunication from the Faith, which can be effected by the Guardian [1] alone in his capacity as the supreme spiritual head of the Community, has far-reaching spiritual implications affecting the very soul of that believer. The former, as already stated, is an administrative sanction, whereas the latter is essentially spiritual, involving not only the particular relationship of a believer to his local or National Assembly, but his very spiritual existence in the Cause. It follows, therefore, that a believer can continue calling himself a Baha'i even though he may cease to be a voting member of the Community. But in case he is excluded from the body of the Cause by an act of the Guardian [1] he ceases to be a believer, and cannot possibly identify himself even nominally with the Faith. (Shoghi Effendi)

[1 Now by the Universal House of Justice.]

Refusal to Serve.

Concerning the question of refusal by certain believers to accept election to an administrative post: the Guardian strongly feels that criticism, opposition, or confusion do not provide sufficient grounds for either refusal or resignation. Only cases of physical or mental incapacity, which, by their very nature, are extremely rare, constitute valid reasons for such an act. The difficulties and tests involved in the acceptance of administrative posts, far from inducing the believers to dissociate themselves from the work of the

Cause, should spur them on to greater exertions and to a more active participation in the privileged task of resolving the problems that confront the Baha'i community. Only in cases where individual believers, without any valid reason, deliberately refuse the repeated exhortations, pleas, and warnings addressed to them by their Assemblies, should action be taken in removing them <p87> from the voting list. This is a measure designed to sustain the institutions of the Faith at the present time, and to ensure that the abilities and talents of its, as yet, limited number of supporters are properly consecrated to its service. The believers, for the sake of the Cause, now in the period of its infancy, should accept their duties in a spirit of self-sacrifice, and should be animated by the desire to uphold the verdict of the electorate, and to lend their share of assistance, however difficult the circumstances, to the effective administration of the affairs of the Faith.

The same sanction should apply to those who persistently refuse to dissociate themselves from political and ecclesiastical activities. This is a general principle which is being maintained throughout the Baha'i world, and the believers throughout the East are already aware of the absolute necessity of refusing any political or Moslem ecclesiastical office. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

Acts of Immorality.

Any blatant acts of immorality on the part of the Baha'is should be strongly censured; the Friends should be urged to abandon such relationships immediately, straighten out their affairs, and conduct themselves as Baha'is; if they refuse to do this, in spite of the warnings of the Assembly, they should be punished through being deprived of their voting rights. The N.S.A. is empowered to settle such cases of flagrant immorality without referring them to the Guardian.[1] (Shoghi Effendi)

[1 Now to the Universal House of Justice.]

Endeavour, Constant Endeavour.

Life is a constant struggle, not only against forces around us, but above all against our own "ego". We can never afford to rest on our oars, for if we do, we soon see ourselves carried down stream again. Many of those who drift from the Cause do so for the reason that they had ceased to go on developing. They become complacent, or indifferent, and consequently cease to draw the <p88> spiritual strength and vitality from the Cause which they should have.

Sometimes, of course, people fail because of a test they just do not meet, and often our severest tests come from each other. Certainly the believers should try to avert such things, and if they happen, remedy them through love. Generally speaking, nine-tenths of the Friends' troubles are because they don't do the Baha'i thing, in relation to each other, to the administrative bodies, or in their personal lives. (Shoghi Effendi)

Effect of Deprivation.

Regarding the matter of believers who have been deprived of their voting

rights; just as no one should ever be deprived of his voting right lightly, it should, likewise, be realized that to be deprived of it is a grave matter, and involving heavy penalties spiritually. People who have been so deprived should not be permitted to attend any meetings involving the administration of the Cause, such as an election or a Nineteen Day Feast. They can attend the Nine Holy Days however; they should not be married by Baha'i Law, no money should be accepted from them, they should not be given credentials [which imply a member of the community in good standing], nor should they be used officially as teachers or speakers. (Shoghi Effendi) <p89>

APPENDICES

(a) Selected Clarifying Statements of the Guardian

Concerning Letters from Haifa.

Whatever letters are sent in my behalf from Haifa are all read and approved by me before mailing. There is no exception whatever to this rule. (Shoghi Effendi)

Spiritual Foundation and Example.

But he feels that the friends should constantly be encouraged to bear in mind certain salient facts: Baha'u'llah has brought a new system and new laws and standards of personal as well as racial conduct into the world. Although outside agencies have been to a certain extent illumined by the radiance of His message and doctrines, and are exerting efforts to bring the world into that orbit of universal peace and harmony He has set for it, these outside forces cannot achieve what only the followers of His Faith can. The believers must not take their eyes off their own immediate tasks of patiently consolidating their administrative institutions, building up new Assemblies...and labouring to perfect the Baha'i pattern of life, for these are things that no other group of people in the world can do or will do, and they alone are able to provide the spiritual foundation and example on which the larger world schemes must ultimately rest. At the same time every effort should be made to broadcast the Teachings at this time, and correlate them to the plight of humanity and the plans for its future. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

The Importance of Baha'i Activity.

He cannot urge upon you all sufficiently, and through you the believers, the importance of Baha'is realizing that direct, concentrated, and efficiently carried out Baha'i work is not only their supreme duty but the best way they can serve the interests of humanity and <p90> hasten the day when at least the Lesser Peace will become a reality. We must always bear in mind that Baha'u'llah's Order is the sovereign remedy, and all other measures, inaugurated by the United Nations or various governments, are in the nature of palliatives, however sound and progressive they may be. We must concentrate on perfecting our characters as individual Baha'is and on maturing our still embryonic, and as yet imperfectly understood, World Order; on spreading the Message, according to the provisions of the Divine Plan; and on building a

tightly-knit, world-wide Baha'i community. We are relatively few in numbers, and have such a precious, unique, and responsible task to carry out, we must concentrate our full forces upon it. (Shoghi Effendi through his Secretary)

Dynamics of Prayer.

While in Haifa, the beloved Guardian of the Cause gave to the writer (Mrs Ruth Moffat), the most concise, complete, and effective formula she has ever seen, for the Dynamics of Prayer. After saying to stress the need of more prayers and meditation among the friends, he said to use these five steps if we had a problem of any kind for which we desired a solution or wished help.

First Step. - Pray and meditate about it. Use the prayers of the Manifestations as they have the greatest power. Then remain in the silence of contemplation for a few minutes.

Second Step. - Arrive at a decision and hold this. This decision is usually born during the contemplation. It may seem almost impossible of accomplishment but if it seems to be as answer to a prayer or a way of solving the problem, then immediately take the next step.

Third Step. - Have determination to carry the decision through. Many fail here. The decision, budding into determination, is blighted and instead becomes a wish or a vague longing. When determination is born, immediately take the next step. <p91>

Fourth Step. - Have faith and confidence that the power will flow through you, the right way will appear, the door will open, the right thought, the right message, the right principle or the right book will be given you. Have confidence, and the right thing will come to your need. Then, as you rise from prayer, take at once the fifth step.

Fifth Step. - Then, he said, lastly, ACT; Act as though it had all been answered. Then act with tireless, ceaseless energy. And as you act, you, yourself, will become a magnet, which will attract more power to your being, until you become an unobstructed channel for the Divine power to flow through you. Many pray but do not remain for the last half of the first step. Some who meditate arrive at a decision, but fail to hold it. Few have the determination to carry the decision through, still fewer have the confidence that the right thing will come to their need. But how many remember to act as though it had all been answered? How true are those words - "Greater than the prayer is the spirit in which it is uttered" and greater than the way it is uttered is the spirit in which it is carried out.

The above statement belongs properly to the class of statement known as "pilgrim's notes" and as such as no authority but, since it seems to be particularly helpful and clear, it was felt that believers should not be deprived of it.

(b) Selected Statements and Special Documents Prepared by the National Spiritual Assembly

THE BAHAI FUND

Declared Believers Only.

In the future World Order, Baha'u'llah has made provision for taxation, but even then one of the approved sources of revenue is "voluntary contributions". At present all Baha'i Funds are maintained voluntarily, and by declared believers only. The Cause does not <p92> accept money, except for charitable distribution, from people who are not members of the Faith. This is a clear indication of the spiritual basis of the Fund.

The Life-Blood.

The privilege of contributing to the Baha'i Fund, "the life-blood" of the Administrative Order, can only be won by open declaration of Faith. Baha'u'llah says, in effect, that He will receive the things of this world only from those who recognize Him as the "Possessor of all things", the "Giver", the "Independent". His Cause will be built by faith only, and the condition of the Fund, "the bedrock on which all other institutions must necessarily rest and be established", is the measure of this faith. It is this faith which built the Temple in America, which maintains a flow of money to all the varied activities of the Cause.

Strictly Voluntary.

Following this same spiritual principle, there are no collections at meetings, and there can be no compulsion whatever to contribute to the Fund. The Guardian writes on this point: "I feel urged to remind you of the necessity of ever bearing in mind the cardinal principle that all contributions to the Fund are to be purely and strictly voluntary in character. It should be made clear and evident to everyone that any form of compulsion, however slight and indirect, strikes at the very root of the principle underlying the formation of the Fund ever since its inception. While appeals of a general character carefully worded and moving and dignified in tone are welcome under all circumstances it should be left entirely to the discretion of every conscientious believer to decide upon the nature, the amount, and purpose of his or her own contribution for the propagation of the Cause."

Earmarking.

Further, believers are free to specify for what particular Baha'i purpose their contribution should be spent although the Guardian has written about this: "As I have previously intimated, although individual friends and local <p93> Assemblies are absolutely free to specify the object of their donations to the National Spiritual Assembly, yet, in my opinion, I regard it of the utmost vital importance that individuals, as well as local Assemblies throughout the land should, in view of the paramount importance of National Teaching and as an evidence of their absolute confidence in their national representatives,

endeavour, however small at first, to contribute freely towards the upkeep and the increase of the National Baha'i Fund, so that the members of the National Assembly may at their full discretion expend it for whatever they deem urgent and necessary."

Exclusive Control by Spiritual Assembly.

About the Fund itself the Guardian says:

"As the progress and extension of spiritual activities is dependent and conditioned upon material means, it is of absolute necessity that immediately after the establishment of local as well as national Spiritual Assemblies, a Baha'i Fund be established, to be placed under the exclusive control of the Spiritual Assembly. All donations and contributions should be offered the Treasurer of the Assembly, for the express purpose of promoting the interests of the Cause, throughout that locality or country. It is the sacred obligation of every conscientious and faithful servant of Baha'u'llah 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 Baha'i institutions, to extend in every way possible their sphere of service."

Making Your Contribution.

To make your contribution to the Fund, you must find out who is your local Treasurer. If you are the only believer in your locality you should send direct to the National Treasurer.

The amount you give is entirely your own affair, and is confidential. Some believers give every week, some every <p94> nineteen days, some every calendar month. It is obviously a help to the Spiritual Assembly, or Group, if it can estimate its income. Therefore you will be helping the Cause if you make your contribution regularly.

This contribution to the Fund is an essential part of Baha'i life. Not the amount you give, but the very act of doing your part to ensure an ample supply of "life-blood" to the body of the Cause, is the important thing. No individual is functioning as a full member of the World Order of Baha'u'llah who does not support the Fund, however modestly. Collective action is ensured by everyone contributing; the spiritual reality of "one soul in many bodies" is expressed through the Fund when it is supported by every believer.

The individual Baha'i shares in his or her community life by contributing to the Fund, and the community shares in the life of the national community by sending regular contributions to the National Fund. In like manner, the National Spiritual Assemblies contribute to the International Fund, and thus every believer who supports the Fund is sharing in the world-wide activities of the Faith.

Measure of Faith.

"Contributions to this fund constitute, in addition, a practical and effective way whereby every believer can test the measure and character of his faith, and prove in deeds the intensity of his devotion and attachment to the Cause."

In these days of building up the Faith, and learning the ways of Baha'u'llah's World Order, it is important to do everything which will increase unified action and permit the organic life of the Cause to increasingly express itself. We know that community life is the pattern and basis of the Kingdom, and therefore every individual must share in that life, or the foundation will not be universal and God's wish of seeing the human race as "one soul in one body" will not be realized.

We are asked to be mature and conscious of our responsibilities in this Day, so no believer will be pestered by requests <p95> for money. But we should all know that it is part of our Baha'i life to contribute to the Fund. "It is the sacred obligation of every conscientious and faithful servant of Baha'u'llah who desires to see His Cause advance, to contribute freely and generously for the increase of that Fund.

The Secret of Right Living.

"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 - that is the secret of right living."

ATTITUDE TO MILITARY SERVICE

The attitude of the Baha'is to military service is fully explained in the following instructions received from the Guardian of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi, who lived in Haifa, Palestine. According to the Will of 'Abdu'l-Baha he was the spiritual head of the Faith and the authorized interpreter of its scriptures.

"It is still his firm conviction that the believers, while expressing their readiness to unreservedly obey any directions that the authorities may issue in time of war, should also, and while there is yet no outbreak of hostilities, appeal to the government for exemption from active military service in a combatant capacity, stressing the fact that in doing so they are not prompted by any selfish considerations but by the sole and supreme motive of upholding the Teachings of their Faith, which makes it a moral obligation for them to desist from any act that would involve them in direct warfare with their fellow-humans of any other race or nation. There are many other avenues through which the believers can assist in times of war by enlisting in services of a non-combatant nature - services that do not involve the direct shedding of blood - <p96> such as ambulance work, air raid precaution service, office and administrative works, and it is for such types of national service that they should volunteer.

"It is immaterial whether such activities would still expose them to dangers, either at home or in the front, since their desire is not to protect their lives, but to desist from any acts of wilful murder."

And in a later letter:

"In connection with your application for exemption from active military service, the Guardian trusts that the authorities will give careful consideration to this matter, and will find it possible to relieve the Friends from the necessity of serving in the army in a combatant capacity. Should they, however, refuse to grant such exemption, the believers should unhesitatingly assure them of their unqualified obedience, and of their readiness to join and serve in the army in whatever manner the government deems best."

It will thus be seen that Baha'is, while availing themselves of the opportunity provided by the government for applying for national service in a non-combatant capacity, do not exalt their own consciences over the rulings of the authorities, and hold it a religious duty to be loyal and obedient to the State.

ELECTION OF CONVENTION DELEGATES

Representation at Convention.

I have already replied to your cable in connection with the representation of groups of less than nine adult believers at the annual Convention and the matter of proxy, the latter being left to the discretion of the National Spiritual Assembly. Should the conditions be altered, and the number of Baha'i localities multiply, the situation will have to be considered afresh and a new basis for representation adopted. (Shoghi Effendi)

Electoral Unit System.

We have just reviewed the number of delegates to the various National Conventions in relation <p97> to the size of their respective communities, and we have decided that the number of delegates to the Convention of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United Kingdom shall be 95 effective with the Convention next Ridvan.

Hereafter, however, delegates to your National Convention will be elected by the electoral unit system. Under this system the entire area under your jurisdiction is divided, by you and at your discretion, into a number of electoral units. Every believer in the country is therefore included within the electoral system and every adult Baha'i in good standing will be able to vote at the Unit Convention, which must of course take place before the National Convention. The number of electoral units must of course be less than the number of delegates assigned to your National Convention but you may delineate the electoral units in whichever way you consider is most convenient for the friends to gather at the Unit Convention. You are not bound by political boundaries - such as state, province or county - although these may be used if you so decide.

The number of delegates to be elected from each electoral unit is in the same proportion to the adult Baha'i population of that unit as the number of delegates to the National Convention is proportional to the adult population of the entire national Baha'i community. For example; a national Baha'i community with an adult population of 969 is assigned, say, 19 delegates. That is, one delegate is allocated for each 51 adult believers. Every electoral unit area, therefore, having 51 believers or less will be assigned one delegate and the remaining number of delegates will be proportionally allocated to those areas having more than 51 believers.

It is highly desirable to hold a Convention in each electoral unit at which the number of delegates for the National Convention assigned to that electoral unit can be elected. Provision should be made, as in the case of any Baha'i election, for ballots of those who cannot attend the Convention in the <p98> electoral unit to be collected and included in the counting.

Each electoral Unit Convention will be called by a Convenor appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly, or by any committee it may appoint to organize the electoral Unit Convention, and as soon as the Unit Convention has come to order it will elect its own Chairman and Secretary. Also, provision should be made for the appointment of tellers. A full report will be sent to the National Spiritual Assembly from each Convention. (Universal House of Justice)