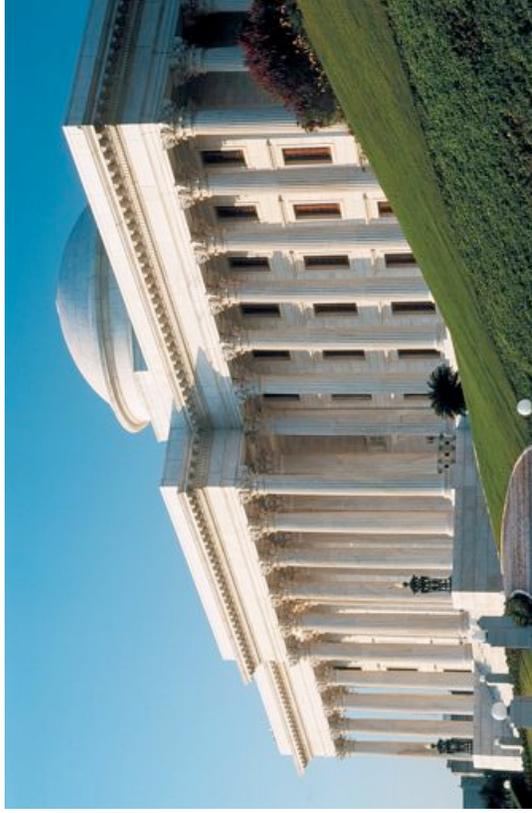


Prospects of the Future

The friends must never mistake the Baha'i administration for an end in itself. It is merely the instrument of the spirit of the Faith. This Cause is a Cause which God has revealed to humanity as a whole. It is designed to benefit the entire human race, and the only way it can do this is to re-form the community life of mankind, as well as seeking to regenerate the individual. The Baha'i Administration is only the first shaping of what in future will come to be the social life and laws of community living. As yet the believers are only just beginning to grasp and practise it properly. So we must have patience if at times it seems a little self-conscious and rigid in its workings. It is because we are learning something very difficult but very wonderful--how to live together as a community of Baha'is, according to the glorious teachings.

—From a letter written on behalf of *Shoghi Effendi*



The Local Spiritual Assembly



The institutions of the Faith, the Universal House of Justice tells us, represent the third participant in the building of the new civilization. Included in the commandments of Bahá'u'lláh are many related to the way society should be organized. In the past, the Manifestations of God have not said much about how their followers should organize themselves and people have had to discover how to do this by themselves. But, in the case of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh has brought His own Administrative Order, which means that He has told us what institutions we must create, how they should function, and how humanity should be governed.

You already know about the supreme institution, which is the Universal House of Justice. In each country, Bahá'ís elect once a year the National Spiritual Assembly, and in each locality, the Local Spiritual Assembly. This is the institution that you will get to know the soonest. There are no priests or clergy in the Bahá'í Faith, and it is the Local Spiritual Assembly that guides the affairs of the community and watches over the well-being of the individual believers. A Local Spiritual Assembly consists of nine members elected in a prayerful atmosphere by secret ballot by all the adult believers in the community. Spiritual Assemblies are extremely important to Bahá'ís. Through them we learn how human affairs are to be administered and how a new order can be established in society, an order which is to be known as the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

Assembly-Relation to Believers

There is no task more urgently necessary than the assurance of perfect harmony and fellowship among the friends, especially between the Local Assemblies and individual believers. The Local Assemblies should inspire confidence in the individual believers, and these in their turn should express their readiness to fully abide by the decisions and directions of the Local Assembly. The two must learn to co-operate, and to realize that only through such a cooperation can the institutions of the Cause effectively and permanently function. While obedience to the Local Assembly should be unqualified and whole-hearted, yet that body should enforce its decisions in such a way as to avoid giving the impression that it is animated by dictatorial motives. The spirit of the Cause is one of mutual co-operation, and not that of a dictatorship.

—From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Believers - Relation to Assembly

The believers should learn to turn more often to their Assemblies for advice and help and at an earlier date, and the Assemblies, on the other hand, should act with more vigilance and a greater sense of Community responsibility towards every situation that may damage the prestige of the Faith in the eyes of the public. When decisions have been reached by the Assembly, they must be carried out loyally and willingly by all concerned.

—From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Membership - Qualifications, Election:

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

—*Shoghi Effendi*

With reference to your next question concerning the qualifications of the members of the Spiritual Assembly: there is a distinction of fundamental importance which should be always remembered in this connection, and this is between the Spiritual Assembly as an institution, and the persons who compose it. These are by no means supposed to be perfect, nor can they be considered as being inherently superior to the rest of their fellow-believers. It is precisely because they are subject to the same human limitations that characterize the other members of the community that they have to be elected every year. The existence of elections is a sufficient indication that Assembly members, though forming part of an institution that is divine and perfect, are nevertheless themselves imperfect. But this does not necessarily imply that their judgement is defective. For as 'Abdu'l-Baha has repeatedly emphasized Bahá'í Assemblies are under the guidance and protection of

God. The elections, especially when annual, give the community a good opportunity to remedy any defect or imperfection from which the Assembly may suffer as a result of the actions of its members. Thus a safe method has been established whereby the quality of membership in Baha'i Assemblies can be continually raised and improved. But, as already stated, the institution of the Spiritual Assembly should under no circumstances be identified with, or be estimated merely through, the personal qualifications of the members that compose it.

—*From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi*

These local Spiritual Assemblies will have to be elected directly by the friends, and every declared believer of 21 years and above, far from standing aloof and assuming an indifferent or independent attitude, should regard it his sacred duty to take part, conscientiously and diligently, in the election, the consolidation, and the efficient working of his own local Assembly.

—*Shoghi Effendi*

...the elector ... is called upon to vote for none but those whom prayer and reflection have inspired him to uphold....the practice of nomination, so detrimental to the atmosphere of a silent and prayerful election, is viewed with mistrust inasmuch as it gives the right to the majority of a body that, in itself, under the present circumstances, often constitutes a minority of all the elected delegates, to deny that God-given right of every elector to vote only in favour of those whom he is conscientiously convinced are the most worthy candidates....

—*Shoghi Effendi*

Taking Counsel Together - Functions:

When in session it behooveth them to converse, on behalf of the servants of God, on matters dealing with the affairs and interests of the public. For instance, teaching the Cause of God must be accorded precedence, inasmuch as it is a matter of paramount importance, so that thereby all men may enter the pavilion of unity and all the peoples of the earth be regarded even as a single body...

Teaching the Cause must be viewed according to the conditions of the age and of the times so as to see what course is deemed proper to take. Other matters also should be dealt with in like manner. They must, however, take care that nothing doth take place contrary to the divine verses sent down in this glorious Manifestation, inasmuch as naught but that which hath been prescribed by the True One--exalted be His glory --would serve the interests of His servants. He, in truth, is more merciful to you than ye are unto yourselves. He, verily, is the One Who knoweth and is well informed of all. Should these souls comply with the prescribed conditions, they shall indeed, be aided through His invisible bestowals. This is truly a matter whose benefits will be conferred on all men...

—*Bahá'u'lláh*



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Establishment and Station:

The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice be established wherein shall gather counsellors to the number of Baha, and should it exceed this number it does not matter. It behooveth 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....

—*Bahá'u'lláh*

These Spiritual Assemblies are aided by the Spirit of God. Their defender is 'Abdu'l-Baha. Over them He spreadeth His Wings. What bounty is there greater than this? These Spiritual Assemblies are shining lamps and heavenly gardens, from which the fragrances of holiness are diffused over all regions, and the lights of knowledge are shed abroad over all created things. From them the spirit of life streameth in every direction. They, indeed, are the potent sources of the progress of man, at all times and under all conditions. Let us recall His explicit and often repeated assurances that every Assembly elected in that rarefied atmosphere of selflessness and detachment is in truth appointed of God, that its verdict is truly inspired, that one and all should submit to its decision unreservedly and with cheerfulness.

—*Shoghi Effendi*

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