

X. The Spirit and Form of Bahá'í Administration

Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi

Original English



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The time is indeed ripe for the manifold activities, wherein the servants and handmaids of Bahá'u'lláh are so devoutly and earnestly engaged, to be harmonized and conducted with unity, cooperation and efficiency, that the effect of such a combined and systematized effort, through which an All-powerful Spirit is steadily pouring, may transcend every other achievement of the past, however glorious it has been...

Shoghi Effendi, 'Bahá'í Administration', p. 24

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He is constantly yearning for happy news concerning the spread of the Message and this, he is firmly convinced, depends mainly on the united and combined efforts of the friends and the Assemblies. Without unity, co-operation and selfless service the friends will surely be unable to attain their goal. How can we possibly increase in number and in strength if we do not present a united front to those forces, both from without and within, which threaten to undermine the very edifice of the Cause?

Unity is, therefore, the main key to success. And the best way to ensure and consolidate the organic unity of the Faith is to strengthen the authority of the Local Assemblies and to bring them within the full orbit of the National Assembly's jurisdiction. The National Assembly is the head, and the Local Assemblies are the various organs of the body of the Cause. To ensure full co-operation between these various parts is to safeguard the best interests of the Faith by enabling it to counteract those forces which threaten to create a breach within the ranks of the faithful...

From a letter 20 September 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer



ORIGINAL



AUDIO

Administrative efficiency and order should always be accompanied by an equal degree of love, of devotion and of spiritual development. Both of them are essential and to attempt to dissociate one from the other is to deaden the body of the Cause. In these days, when the Faith is still in its infancy, great care must be taken lest mere administrative routine stifles the spirit which must feed the body of the Administration itself. That spirit is its propelling force and the motivating power of its very life.

But as already emphasized, both the spirit and the form are essential to the safe and speedy development of the Administration. To maintain full balance between them is the main and unique responsibility of the administrators of the Cause.

From a letter 10 December 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada

He fully appreciates the spirit which has prompted you to abide whole-heartedly and without any hesitation by the instructions of the National Assembly, and he strongly feels that your attitude in the whole matter constitutes an example which the friends will gladly learn to follow. You have [sacrificed], and must indeed continue to sacrifice, some of your personal opinions and views regarding the teaching work for the sake of upholding the authority of the National Spiritual Assembly. For such a sacrifice on your part does not involve submission to any individual, but has the effect of strengthening the authority of the community as a whole as expressed through the medium of its duly recognized representatives. We should, indeed, learn to curb our individualism when we are confronted with problems and issues affecting the general welfare of the Cause. For Bahá'í community life implies a consciousness of group solidarity strong enough to enable every individual believer to give up what is essentially personal for the sake of the common weal.

From a letter 31 May 1934 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers

It is indeed thrilling to note the rapidity and soundness with which the flourishing Bahá'í community in that far-off land is establishing the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, is fearlessly proclaiming its truths, upholding its verities and standards, multiplying its institutions, defending its interests, disseminating its literature, and exemplifying its invincible power and spirit. I rejoice, feel proud, and am eternally grateful. I cannot but pray, with redoubled fervour, to Him Who so manifestly guides and sustains you, to increase your

numbers, to remove every barrier that obstructs your path, to safeguard your unity, to bless your undertakings and to enable you to demonstrate, afresh and with still greater force, the reality of the faith that animates you in the discharge of your sacred duties. Be assured and persevere.

In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter 30 July 1941 written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand

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Excommunication is a spiritual thing and up until now the Guardian has always been the one who exerted this power, and he feels for the present he must continue to be. Only actual enemies of the Cause are excommunicated. On the other hand, those who conspicuously disgrace the Faith or refuse to abide by its laws can be deprived, as a punishment, of their voting rights; this in itself is a severe action, and he therefore always urges all National Assemblies (who can take such action) to first warn and repeatedly warn the evil-doer before taking the step of depriving him of his voting rights.

He feels your Assembly must act with the greatest wisdom in such matters, and only impose this sanction if a believer is seriously injuring the Faith in the eyes of the public through his conduct or flagrantly breaking the laws of God. If such a sanction were lightly used the friends would come to attach no importance to it, or to feel the N.S.A. used it every time they got angry with some individual's disobedience to them. We must always remember that, sad and often childish as it seems, some of those who make the worst nuisances of themselves to their National Bodies are often very loyal believers, who think they are protecting the true interests of their Faith by attacking N.S.A. decisions!

The Guardian feels very strongly that everywhere, throughout the entire Bahá'í world, the believers have got to master and follow the principles of their divinely laid down Administrative Order. They will never solve their problems by departing from the correct procedure.... The Bahá'ís have got to learn to live up to the laws of Bahá'u'lláh, which are infinitely higher, more exacting and more perfect than those the world is at present familiar with. Running away, fighting with each other, fostering dissension, is not going to advance the Indian or any other Community; all it is going to do is to bring Bahá'u'lláh's plans and work to a standstill until such time as the believers unite to serve Him, or new and more dedicated souls arise to take their place.

From a letter 8 May 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India, Pakistan and Burma

It is very unfortunate that some of the believers do not seem to grasp the fact that the administrative order, the Local and National Assemblies, are the pattern for the future, however inadequate they may sometimes seem. We must obey and support these bodies, for this is the Bahá'í law. Until we learn to do this we cannot make real progress. Those friends who believe that the N.S.A. is doing wrong in some matters are, unconsciously, implying the Guardian does not know what is going on, which is not true. He watches very carefully over the various National Assemblies, and never hesitates to intervene when he considers it necessary. To undermine confidence in the National Body disrupts the Faith, confuses and alienates the friends, and prevents the thing the Master desired above all else, that the Bahá'ís be as one spirit in many bodies, united and loving.

The Bahá'ís are far from perfect, as individuals or when they serve on elected bodies, but the system of Bahá'u'lláh is perfect and gradually the believers will mature and the system will work better. The watchful eye of the Guardian prevents any serious errors, and the believers should know this and co-operate with their Assemblies fully.

From a letter 1 November 1950 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

The friends should be helped to overcome their problems, deepen in the Faith, and increase their unity and their love for each other. In this way you will find that your work goes ahead speedily, and that the National Body is like the beating of a healthy heart in the midst of the Community, pumping spiritual love, energy and encouragement out to all the members.

From a letter 30 June 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Alaska

The National Assembly is the guardian of the welfare of the Faith, a most sacred and heavy responsibility and one which is inescapable. They must be ever vigilant, ever on the look-out, ever ready to take action, and, on all matters of fundamental principle, refuse to compromise for an instant. Only in this way can the body of the Faith be free of disease.

From a letter 14 August 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria

