

New Enrollment, Interest Cards Are Introduced

Dear Bahá'í Friends:

We are happy to inform you of the new procedures adopted by the National Spiritual Assembly to aid and clarify the two-step process of enrollment: the new BAHÁ'Í INTEREST CARD, and the new BAHÁ'Í MEMBERSHIP ENROLLMENT CARD.

The first is intended for use by individual believers in their teaching work in place of the declaration card, which is being discontinued.

The second enables both the declarant and the enrolling institution to use the same form and takes the place of both the declaration card and the data report form used by Assemblies until now. The data report form should of course be kept for other purposes.

The interest card exists primarily for the use of individuals, whereas the enrollment card is used only by authorized institutions. The interest card is designed in such a way as to enable the Bahá'í teacher to determine the nature of the interest of an inquirer and to respond to that interest. When the inquirer fills out the card, he does not commit himself to anything, but indicates his level of interest in the Faith. This tells the teacher how to act.

The reverse side of the interest card may be stamped with the community's name and address, or with those of the individual teacher. Communities are free to print their own copies of the interest card for their teaching efforts, but they may not change the wording. Supplies of these cards are available from the Bahá'í National Center.

Shown here are the new Bahá'í Interest Card (**right**) and Bahá'í Membership Enrollment Card (**below**).

It is important to remember the responsibilities of individuals and institutions in the enrollment process. As already stated in **Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies**, the distinction between declaration and enrollment is essential.

Declaration is a statement of belief on the part of the seeker. In declaring his belief, the individual signifies his acceptance of the Manifestation of God and his readiness to receive basic information about the Faith that will prepare him for Bahá'í membership.

The teacher, or in his absence the Spiritual Assembly, is responsible for providing the basic information needed, and for knowing when the person is qualified for enrollment.

When a person recognizes Bahá'u'lláh, he will no longer be asked to sign a declaration card at that time. Rather, he will be nurtured by the teacher into true understanding of Bahá'í fundamentals until he qualifies for admission into the Bahá'í community.

The Spiritual Assembly, its enrollment committee, or other rep-

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I am interested in the Bahá'í Faith. Please provide me with information about it. I would prefer:

- literature sent to me
- teachers to visit me
- to attend study classes
- information on how to join

Name _____
 Address _____
 Town/State _____ Zip _____
 Telephone _____
 Remarks: _____

Bahá'í Membership Enrollment

Bahá'í ID Number _____
To be assigned by National Center

Date of Birth _____ Adult Youth

Telephone: Home _____
Area Code Number

Work _____
Area Code Number

Bahá'í Locality Code _____
If Known

In signing this card, I declare my belief in Bahá'u'lláh, the Promised One of God. I also recognize the Báb, His Forerunner, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Center of His Covenant.

I request enrollment in the Bahá'í Community with the understanding that Bahá'u'lláh has established sacred principles, laws, and institutions which I must obey.

Signature _____ Date _____
 Please sign here and along left edge.

Mr.
 Mrs. _____
 Miss _____
 Name _____
Full name—DO NOT use nicknames

Residence Address _____
House or Space Number, Street, or Description

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Mail Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Bahá'í Community _____
Name of Local Assembly, group, or isolated locality where enrollee resides

Membership becomes effective when card is countersigned

Signature _____
AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE

For _____

Date _____

Signature _____
 SENT TO MEMBERSHIP & RECORDS

TEMPORARY ID CARD

Date _____

While copy - Temporary ID Card
 Pink copy - To be retained by enrolling agency
 Yellow copy - Send to Membership & Records, 112 Linden Avenue, Wilmette, IL 60091.
 Card - Must be signed twice and returned to Membership & Records at above address.
 Please use ballpoint pen and press firmly

representative should meet with the new declarant. Although the Local Spiritual Assembly is responsible for verifying enrollments, it may, if it so decides, delegate the enrollment function to a committee composed of responsible persons fully conversant with the qualifications for Bahá'í membership.

The declarant should, in the presence of the Assembly or its agent, sign the Bahá'í membership enrollment card. The counter-signature at the same time on behalf of the institution completes the process of enrollment. District Teaching Committees should follow these same enrollment procedures.

We are confident that the use of these cards will have two important effects, namely: it will free individuals to teach with greater certainty of the needs of the seeker; and it will simplify the work of Assemblies and their enrolling agencies. Furthermore, it will enable the Assemblies to carry out fully the guidelines given in the statement on enrollment published in **Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies**.

With these benefits in view, our community is better prepared to absorb what must become a steadily increasing flow of enrollments into the Cause of God.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

National Spiritual Assembly of
the Baha'is of the United States
Glenford E. Mitchell, Secretary

Ceremony Set To Recognize New Assemblies

The formation of a Local Spiritual Assembly is an event of momentous significance. It marks the birth of an institution ordained by Bahá'u'lláh to be the channel through which the life-giving energies that flow from His Almighty Covenant are channeled throughout the remainder of the Bahá'í Dispensation to the people who live within the area of its jurisdiction. The formation of the Local Spiritual Assembly, which someday will evolve into a Local House of Justice and will enjoy all the powers which that name implies, may well be the most important event that will take place in a given locality.

To commemorate befittingly the formation of a Local Spiritual Assembly, the National Spiritual Assembly has determined that a Recognition Ceremony be held. The Ceremony is intended to give the Bahá'ís in the locality an opportunity to celebrate the formation of their Assembly and to savor the significance of the occasion. It also enables the Bahá'ís in nearby communities to share in their joy and to welcome the new institution. Moreover, the Auxiliary Board and the National Spiritual Assembly have the opportunity to greet the new Assembly and to establish a warm and cooperative relationship with it. The tone of the Ceremony is to be festive, but should reflect the seriousness of the event.

The Recognition Ceremony also provides an opportunity for the Bahá'ís to proclaim the Faith to the public by inviting local dignitaries to participate in the commemoration of the birth of the new Assembly and by sending a press release to the local newspaper. (A sample press release is sent to the new Assembly along with a copy of this statement after the Assembly has been recognized by the National Assembly.)

The District Teaching Committee or the Local Spiritual Assembly

that sponsored the formation of the new Assembly is responsible for making the arrangements for the Recognition Ceremony. The sponsoring body must:

1. **Set the date, time, and place for the Recognition Ceremony in consultation with the Group.** The tentative date should be set five to six weeks after the date of the formation of the Assembly. (This allows time for the formation forms to be sent to the National Assembly, for the Assembly to be recognized, for the news to be communicated to the Assembly and the sponsoring body, and for the National Assembly's gift and the recognition certificate to be mailed to the sponsoring body.) If the date is changed, please notify the National Spiritual Assembly.
2. **Inform the National Assembly of the date, time, and place of the Recognition Ceremony.**
3. **Invite the Auxiliary Board member for the area to attend the Recognition Ceremony.** The invitation should be made after the National Assembly has given its approval for the Assembly's formation. The Auxiliary Board member may be unable to attend and may appoint an assistant to represent him at the Ceremony. If efforts to accommodate the schedule of the Auxiliary Board member or the assistant are unsuccessful, the meeting should proceed as planned.
4. **Invite Baha'is in the surrounding area to attend the Recognition Ceremony.** The invitation should be made after the National Assembly has given its approval for the new Assembly's formation.
5. **Be certain that the Recognition Ceremony includes the items on the agenda provided by the National Assembly and send a representative to the Ceremony.** (The sponsoring body and the Group may decide in consultation who will serve as Chairman of the Ceremony.) The National Spiritual Assembly will appoint a representative who will present a gift and the certificate of recognition to the new Assembly.
6. **See that a photograph of the new Assembly is taken at the formation meeting.** (The photograph should be a black and white glossy at least three inches by five inches, preferably five inches by seven inches.) Please develop the photograph and send it to the National Spiritual Assembly. Also, encourage the new Assembly to send a copy of the photograph to the local newspaper along with a press release. (If the photograph is to be published in **The American Bahá'í**, all nine members should be in it.)

Observing Christian Holidays Discouraged

Should Bahá'ís observe Christmas and New Year's? This is the time of the year when that question is asked. The Guardian answered it. His reply, published in **Bahá'í News**, March 1940 (No. 134) was as follows:

"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-Rúz..."

Further Guidelines for Assemblies

National Assembly Answers Questions Frequently Asked

Meetings Must Be Held With a Quorum

The National Spiritual Assembly has noted recently that some Assemblies meet and attempt to conduct official business without a quorum of five. Such meetings are invalid. Recently the National Spiritual Assembly asked the Universal House of Justice for clarification of Article VIII, Section 1 of the **By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly**; i.e., "Five members of the Assembly present at a meeting shall constitute a quorum, and a majority vote of those present and constituting a quorum shall be sufficient for the conduct of business, except as otherwise provided in the By-Laws . . ." In reply, the Universal House of Justice stated:

"A majority of the members present and constituting a quorum is sufficient to carry a motion. Thus, if only five members of the Assembly are present at a meeting, a majority of three is sufficient.

"However, Assemblies should take into account the last clause of the first sentence of Section 1 of Article VIII reading as follows: . . . and with due regard to the principle of unity and cordial fellowship involved in the institution of a Spiritual Assembly."

"In other words, members of a Spiritual Assembly should not take advantage of a quorum as an expedient to pass a motion that would violate the spirit of the above quoted passage.

"As your National Assembly has stated, it is desirable that all nine members of a Local Spiritual Assembly be present at every meeting."

If an Assembly is unable to gather a quorum in order to conduct its business, the matter should be reported to the National Assembly.

Assembly Members May Not Be Removed From Meetings

If a matter being consulted on by a Local Assembly involves a member of the Assembly, he may voluntarily choose to absent himself from the meeting, but he may **not** be asked to leave. An Assembly member's right to attend all sessions of his Assembly is inviolate.

Recommendation of the Local Assembly Needed on All Cases

Local Assemblies must include their recommendations to the National Spiritual Assembly in all cases involving questions of membership or violations of Bahá'í law. The National Assembly will not consider a case without the Local Assembly's recommendation.

Resignations From Assembly Membership

Before accepting a resignation from membership on a Local Spiritual Assembly, the Assembly should be certain the resignation is for acceptable reasons. Legitimate reasons for resignation are prolonged illness or travel, and an unwillingness to participate actively on the Assembly. However, an unwillingness to serve must not be prompted by inharmony, personal differences, and disagreements among the members. If a resignation is accepted, the

matter should be reported in full to the National Spiritual Assembly. For a fuller discussion of the subject, please see **Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies**.

Correspondence With the National Spiritual Assembly

Letters to the National Assembly should include the following:

1. Complete address of the Local Spiritual Assembly including the state.
2. Date.
3. Date of National Spiritual Assembly letter, if the letter is in reply to such a letter.
4. Separate letter for each individual named when reporting cases.
5. Full names of individuals mentioned in the correspondence, and address if the person has moved recently. (Do not use nicknames in letters or membership reports.) The address is particularly important in instances where a couple have established separate residences.
6. Inclusion of a woman's maiden name if this will identify her properly.
7. The letter must be legible.
8. Signature of Local Spiritual Assembly member writing the letter.

If the letter concerns a case involving a violation of Bahá'í law or a person's membership in the Bahá'í community, the following should be included in addition to the above:

- a. A concise statement of the problem in the first paragraph.
- b. A summary of the case.
- c. A recommendation for action by the National Assembly.

Following these guidelines will greatly assist the National Assembly in answering its correspondence.

Please note: Enrollment problems and withdrawals from membership should not be reported on the Membership Data Report forms.

Assembly Stationery

The letterhead should read "the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of . . ." (The word local should be omitted). The design of the letterhead should be simple and dignified. It need not be decorated by photographs or artwork.

Bulletins and Newsletters

The purpose of the local bulletin or newsletter is to convey news of local activities and to inspire the friends to arise to greater levels of participation and sacrifice. Extensive guidance on local bulletins may be found in **Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies**. The National Assembly wishes to emphasize the following:

- a. Bulletins should not contain long extracts from the Bahá'í writings.
- b. The Greatest Name should not appear in local bulletins.
- c. Unauthenticated statements attributed to the Writings should not be used.

Notice to Overseas Travelers

Friends traveling outside the U.S. are encouraged to contact the National Spiritual Assembly for international credentials. It is necessary that those who are planning to travel to Israel for any reason, including pilgrimage, receive permission from the Universal House of Justice.

Bahá'ís Should Set Example for World In Their Marriages

The decay of the vital institution of marriage in present-day society is one of the clearest signs of the disintegration of the old world order. It is an area in which the world most desperately needs the example of the people of Bahá. By following the laws of marriage revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'ís can demonstrate their submission to God's latest Manifestation, Whose laws and teachings hold the answers for the world's ills.

The laws revealed by Bahá'u'lláh on marriage are binding on all Bahá'ís who marry regardless of their age. Local Spiritual Assemblies must see to it that these laws are known and understood by all members of their community, especially the youth. The basic requirements are as follows:

Bahá'ís who wish to marry must have the consent of the natural parents of both the man and the woman. This applies whether the parents are Bahá'ís divorced for years, or not. Where the parents are not Bahá'ís, they should be made to understand that the consent they are asked to give is to the marriage of the couple and does not constitute approval of the Faith. Moreover, the parents' consent must be freely given and their decision is final.

A Bahá'í wishing to marry must also have a Bahá'í marriage ceremony. If a Bahá'í marries a non-Bahá'í who wishes to have the religious ceremony of his or her faith, the Bahá'í may participate in that ceremony, provided that it is made clear (1) that the Bahá'í is a Bahá'í by religion, and (2) that by participating in the other ceremony he makes no commitment to any religion other than his own. If there are to be two ceremonies, both must take place on the same Gregorian calendar day.

A Bahá'í couple may not be married in the place of worship or by the marriage ceremony of another religion, nor may a Bahá'í couple have any form of ceremony that could give the impression of being performed by another religion.

If a Bahá'í knowingly fails to follow the above requirements of Bahá'í marriage, he is subject to the possible loss of his administrative rights and privileges in the Bahá'í community.

Assemblies: Our Lifeline

Illustration reprinted from
"The Trusted Ones of God"



"These Spiritual Assemblies are aided by the Spirit of God. Their defender is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Over them He spreadeth His Wings. What bounty is there greater than this? . . . 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."

Since a Local Spiritual Assembly has the ". . . sacred obligation to help, advise, protect and guide the believers . . ." there are many occasions when it will not wish to instruct in an absolute

manner, but will, rather, make suggestions and offer guidance and encouragement to an individual in order to assist him to make his own prayerful determination in the resolution of a problem.

"One of the healing remedies Bahá'u'lláh has given to a sick world is the Assembly . . . its members have very sacred and heavy responsibilities, its power to steer the Community, to protect and assist its members is likewise very great.

" . . . you should turn to your local Assembly, in the strictest confidence, and seek their aid and advice. . . . You should go to them as a child would to its parents . . ."

(All quoted passages are from **The Local Spiritual Assembly**, a compilation by the Universal House of Justice.)

Guidelines for Enrolling Persian Declarants Are Re-emphasized

Persians From Non-resident Bahá'í Families. A declarant from a Bahá'í family, whose parents are not **permanent** residents of the United States, must be registered through the National Spiritual Assembly of Irán.

In order to complete the registration process, the individual must provide the same information requested of Persian believers without credentials, which appears on page 88 of **Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies**. This information, along with three photographs, is forwarded to the National Spiritual Assembly of Irán. If that institution decides to process the enrollment, it will send registration cards to be completed by the individual and subsequently returned to the Iranian National Assembly for final action. When the registration has been completed, the National Spiritual Assembly of Irán will advise the United States National Assembly that the individual may be registered as a member of the American Bahá'í community.

This process will take at least six months to complete, during which time the individual cannot attend any Bahá'í administrative activities such as Feast. Therefore, it is much more desirable for the individual to declare his belief while he is in Persia and complete the process of registration in that country.

Persians From Non-Bahá'í Families. A Persian declarant from a non-Bahá'í family may be enrolled only under the guidelines given to National Spiritual Assemblies by the Universal House of Justice, as follows:

In view of the increasing activities of a number of agencies inimical to the Cause, we have decided to request you, for the present, not to accept declarations of faith by Persians unless you are absolutely sure that they are bona fide residents of your countries. . .

If Persians who accept the Faith insist on being enrolled, they must be told that when they return to Persia they should apply to the National Spiritual Assembly of Irán.

These instructions are supplemental to the advice already given to the friends not to seek out Muslims from the Middle East for the purpose of teaching the Faith. These instructions also appeared in the **Bahá'í National Review** in February 1974.

Bahá'ís Should Not Interfere in Politics

In this politically-oriented world, it is imperative that acts of unwisdom and ignorance by Bahá'ís be avoided. These are the principles that should guide our relationship to political campaigns:

1. A Bahá'í may not become a member of, or associate with a political party or organization designed to support a political party.
2. It is inappropriate for a Bahá'í to contribute funds or services to political parties or campaigns.
3. A Bahá'í, however, is free to exercise his right as an American citizen to vote for candidates in national and local elections as his conscience dictates. If you are a registered voter, you should be listed as non-partisan.

It is important that we understand the implications of the Bahá'í principle of noninterference in political affairs. In a letter to the National Spiritual Assemblies of Africa dated February 8, 1970, the Universal House of Justice said:

"Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi have given us clear and convincing reasons why we must uphold this principle. These reasons are summarized below for the study and deepening of the friends. It is our hope that these observations will not only help the friends to intelligently and radiantly follow the holy teachings on this matter, but will help them to explain the Bahá'í attitude to those who may question its wisdom and usefulness:

"The Faith of God is the sole source of salvation for mankind today. The true cause of the ills of humanity is its disunity. No matter how perfect may be the machinery devised by the leaders of men for the political unity of the world, it will still not provide the antidote to the poison sapping the vigor of present-day society. These ills can be cured only through the instrumentality of God's Faith. There are many well-wishers of mankind who devote their efforts to relief-work and charity and to the material well-being of man, but only Bahá'ís can do the work which God most wants done. When we devote ourselves to the work of the Faith we are doing a work which is the greatest aid and only refuge for a needy and divided world.

"The Bahá'í Community is a worldwide organization seeking to establish true and universal peace on earth. If a Bahá'í works for one political party to overcome another it is a negation of the very spirit of the Faith. Membership in any political party, therefore, necessarily entails repudiation of some or all of the principles of peace and unity proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá states: 'Our party is God's party; we do not belong to any party.'

"If a Bahá'í were to insist on his right to support a certain political party he could not deny the same degree of freedom to other believers. This would mean that within the ranks of the Faith, whose primary mission is to unite all men as one great family under God, there would be Bahá'ís opposed to each other. Where, then, would be the example of unity and harmony which the world is seeking?

"If the institutions of the Faith, God forbid, became involved in politics, the Bahá'ís would find themselves arousing antagonism instead of love. If they took one stand in one country, they would be bound to change the views of the people in another country about the aims and purposes of the Faith. By becoming involved in political disputes, the Bahá'ís instead of changing the world or helping it, would themselves be lost and destroyed. The world situation is so confused, so mixed up with selfish and battling factions, that the best way Bahá'ís can serve the highest interests

of their country and the cause of true salvation for the world, is to sacrifice their political pursuits and affiliations and wholeheartedly and fully support the divine system of Bahá'u'lláh.

"The Faith is not opposed to the true interests of any nation, nor is it against any party or faction. It holds aloof from all controversies and transcends them all, while enjoining upon its followers loyalty to government and a sane patriotism. This love for their country the Bahá'ís show by serving its well-being in their daily activity, or by working in the administrative channels of the government instead of through party politics or in diplomatic or political posts. The Bahá'ís may, indeed are encouraged to, mix with all strata of society, with the highest authorities and with leading personalities as well as with the mass of people, and should bring the knowledge of the Faith to them; but in so doing they should strictly avoid becoming indentified, or identifying the Faith, with political pursuits and party programs.

"So vital is this principle of noninterference in political matters, which must govern the acts and words of Bahá'ís in every land, that Shoghi Effendi has written that 'Neither the charges which the uninformed and the malicious may be led to bring against them, nor the allurements of honors and rewards' would ever induce the true believers to deviate from this path, and that their words and conduct must proclaim that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh 'are actuated by no selfish ambition, that they neither thirst for power, nor mind any wave of unpopularity, of distrust or criticism, which a strict adherence to their standards might provoke.'

"'Difficult and delicate though be our task,' he continues, 'the sustaining power of Bahá'u'lláh and His Divine guidance will assuredly assist us, if we follow steadfastly in His way, and strive to uphold the integrity of His laws. The light of His redeeming grace, which no earthly power can obscure, will, if we persevere, illuminate our path, as we steer our course amid the snares and pitfalls of a troubled age, and will enable us to discharge our duties in a manner that would resound to the glory and honor of His blessed Name.'

Correct Way to Handle Opposition to the Faith

From its inception, the Cause of God has come under attack from its opponents. The more the Faith advances, the more we may expect attacks upon it. In a letter dated November 26, 1974, addressed to National Spiritual Assemblies, the Universal House of Justice wrote:

"The marvellous victories won in the name of Bahá'u'lláh ... and the triumphs increasingly being achieved by His dedicated and ardent lovers in every land, will no doubt serve to rouse the internal and external enemies of the Faith to fresh attempts to attack the Faith and dampen the enthusiasm of its supporters. . ."

Opposition to the Faith is expressed through the publication of books that attack or deliberately misrepresent the Faith, through the publishing of articles in the press, or through correspondence which the believers sometimes receive from Covenant-breakers or enemies of the Faith.

Whenever an Assembly becomes aware of any form of opposition to the Faith it should contact the National Spiritual Assembly for advice. From time to time, the National Spiritual Assembly issues statements on this subject. Auxiliary Board members also hold meetings and discussions to counsel the friends and Assemblies in this regard.

Friends Should Lead Chaste and Holy Life As Example to World

Exercise of Moderation in Dress, Language, Amusements Important

"A chaste and holy life must be made the controlling principle in the behavior and conduct of all Bahá'ís, both in their social relations with the members of their own community, and in their contact with the world at large," Shoghi Effendi writes in the **The Advent of Divine Justice**, page 25.

The Guardian continues: "Such a chaste and holy life, with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness, involves no less than the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations. It demands daily vigilance in the control of one's carnal desires and corrupt inclinations. It calls for the abandonment of a frivolous conduct, with its excessive attachment to trivial and often misdirected pleasures. It requires total abstinence from similar habit-forming drugs. It condemns the prostitution of art and of literature, the practices of nudism and of companionate marriage, infidelity in marital relationships, and all manner of promiscuity, of easy familiarity, and of sexual vices. It can tolerate no compromise with the theories, the standards, the habits, and the excesses of a decadent age. Nay rather it seeks to demonstrate, through the dynamic force of its example, the pernicious character of such theories, the falsity of such standards, the hollowness of such claims, the perversity of such habits, and the sacrilegious character of such excesses."

In a letter through his secretary, the Guardian wrote on September 5, 1938:

"The Bahá'í Teachings on this matter, which is of such vital concern and about which there is such a wide divergency of views, are very clear and emphatic. Briefly stated, the Bahá'í view of sex is based on the belief that chastity should be strictly practiced by both sexes, not only because it is in itself highly commendable ethically, but also due to its being the only way to a happy and successful marital life. Sex relationships of any form, outside marriage, are not permissible therefore, and whoso violates this rule will not only be responsible to God, but will incur the necessary punishment from society.

"The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse, but condemns its illegitimate and improper expressions such as free love, companionate marriage and others, all of which it considers positively harmful to man and to the society in which he lives. The proper use of the sex instinct is the natural right of every individual, and it is precisely for this very purpose that the institution of marriage has been established. The Bahá'ís do not believe in the suppression of the sex impulse but in its regulation and control."

In a letter to an individual believer dated October 17, 1968, the Universal House of Justice set forth a set of rules covering every situation: "Rather is it the task of the individual believer to determine, according to his own prayerful understanding of the Writings, precisely what his course of conduct should be in relation to situations which he encounters in his daily life. If he is to fulfill his true mission in life as a follower of the Blessed Perfection, he will pattern his life according to the Teachings. The believer cannot

attain this objective merely by living according to a set of rigid regulations. When his life is oriented towards service to Bahá'u'lláh, and when every conscious act is performed within this frame of reference, he will not fail to achieve the true purpose of his life.

"Therefore every believer must continually study the sacred Writings and the instructions of the beloved Guardian, striving always to attain a new and better understanding of their import to him and to his society. He should pray fervently for Divine guidance, wisdom and strength to do what is pleasing to God, and to serve Him at all times and to the best of his ability."

Bahá'ís Shouldn't Use Meetings To Promote Products, Services

In recent months it has come to the attention of the National Spiritual Assembly that Bahá'ís sometimes take advantage of Feasts, firesides, other Bahá'í gatherings, and Bahá'í mailing lists to promote products which they sell or services in which they are engaged for a living. This cannot be permitted. Local Spiritual Assemblies must be alert to any tendency among the members of their communities to use Bahá'í meetings and mailing lists to promote products or services for personal gain. If such practices take place, the Local Spiritual Assembly having jurisdiction over the matter must request that they be discontinued at once.

Prayer for Bahá'ís Personal Obligation

Prayer is primarily a personal spiritual obligation and it would seem improper for Bahá'í institutions to develop or legislate specific activities in this area of Bahá'í life. The institutions do have the responsibility of calling the attention of the friends to the Writings which urge daily prayer as a spiritual obligation and to those prayers, such as the obligatory prayers and the Tablet of Ahmad, that are invested by Bahá'u'lláh with special potency and significance. On certain occasions the institutions make appeals to the friends for prayers in the interest of particular objectives, leaving it to them to respond to the extent to which they are moved. And, of course, the friends are free to agree among themselves as to the saying of certain prayers for reasons that are important to them. But the National Spiritual Assembly is wary of taking any institutional action that may tend toward a system or regimentation in acts of prayer, and feels it would be improper to go beyond the requirement of the Sacred Texts to legislate a nationwide program of specific prayers to be said at specific times under specific circumstances.

—National Spiritual Assembly

ATTENTION PERSIAN YOUTH! The Winter Youth Work/Study Program begins at the National Center December 26, the day the Persian Conference ends. Why not stay in Wilmette and learn more about the Administrative Order? Contact the National Youth Committee, 112 Linden Avenue, Wilmette, IL 60091, for details.

Teaching Committees And Use of 'Funds'

A recent appeal for funds from a District Teaching Committee treasurer appeared in the DTC bulletin. It said: "The District Teaching Committee has established three Fund goals for facilitating the teaching efforts in the District. The **Media Resource Fund** has been established to make various media items available for use by all of the believers in the District. The minimum amount established for this fund is \$200 to be achieved by the District Convention in October.

"The **Convention Proclamation Fund** was established to provide monies for proclamation and teaching activities during the time of the District Convention.

"The **Summer 1977 Teaching Conference Fund** has been established to provide monies for teaching conferences to be held at selected goal localities of the Five Year Plan. We lovingly request that all the friends set their own personal goals for contributing to these funds. Universal participation will make this goal sweeter and more victorious."

The Office of the Treasurer received the bulletin along with a query from an interested believer: "Can a District Teaching Committee establish such 'Funds' as mentioned in this bulletin article and ask the friends to contribute to them in this manner?"

Our reply to the individual was that the request does not violate Bahá'í principle. We are well aware of the fact that the National Bahá'í Fund cannot meet all of the financial needs of the District Teaching Committees, and that the National Spiritual Assembly has encouraged the various committees to seek local support.

We pointed out, however, that the manner in which the request was made and the use of the word "Fund" with a capital "F" was not appropriate. We were concerned that the friends who already feel there are so many Funds (for example, the Local Bahá'í Fund, the National Bahá'í Fund, the Continental Bahá'í Fund and the Bahá'í International Fund) would become bewildered.

If District Teaching Committees establish "Funds" on their own that, in the eyes of the believers, take on more or less the same importance as the Institutions established by the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice, a great deal of confusion may arise.

We suggest that a better approach for a District Teaching Committee would be (1) to point out the limited money available from the National Bahá'í Fund; (2) spell out the needs in its area that are not being met, and (3) encourage the friends to meet these special needs, reminding them that contributing to the District Teaching Committee should be over and above their regular contributions to their own Local Funds—**National Treasurer's Office**

Pilgrimage Application Should Be Made Through The National Assembly

Since the pilgrimage to the Bahá'í World Center is a privilege and bounty extended only to Bahá'ís in good standing, the Universal House of Justice has instructed that applications for pilgrimage are to be made through the believer's own National Spiritual Assembly

and are not to be sent directly to the Universal House of Justice. Therefore, American Bahá'ís wishing to make the pilgrimage should write to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States. The request must indicate the number of adults and children for whom the application is requested and a preferred time for the pilgrimage. However, since there is a long waiting list, there can be no guarantee that the preferred date can be granted. The request should also indicate whether the applicant can go on short notice and whether he wishes to go with another believer who may have applied or may apply in the future.

During 1978 there will be no pilgrimage between April 5 and June 4, as the World Center will be occupied with the International Convention during that time.

When an individual has been assigned a date and later finds that he cannot go, he must **not** offer his time and space to another individual who he knows would like to make the pilgrimage but has not yet applied for permission. Neither should an individual, hearing of someone who is unable to keep his assigned date, write and ask to take the place of the person who has had to cancel his date. When it is necessary for anyone to cancel his assigned date, **he should notify the National Spiritual Assembly at once** so that another person who may have been on the waiting list for some time may be given that place.

It should be noted that it is not possible for the National Spiritual Assembly to provide baby-sitting services for children and traveling companions for the elderly, ill, or incapacitated. Nor can such assistance be provided at the Bahá'í World Center.

The purpose of the pilgrimage to the Bahá'í World Center is to pray and meditate at the Sacred Shrines of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Bahá'ís who go on pilgrimage are expected to participate fully in the program arranged by the Universal House of Justice.

'Greatest Name' to Be Used With Taste, Discrimination

The National Spiritual Assembly wishes to remind the friends that while there has been no published statement regarding the use of the Greatest Name on cars, shirts, hats, etc., it is in keeping with Shoghi Effendi's guidance that we urge the friends to use the Greatest Name with good taste and discrimination, and discourage any use of it in an undignified way.

Many states have made provisions for motorists to purchase license plates that are made up of letters of their choice. "Bahá'í" is a form of the Greatest Name and should not be imprinted on license plates. In some areas of the country license plates are transferred with title when an automobile is sold. We must be careful in our enthusiasm to proclaim the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh to exercise good judgment and avoid any possibility or suggestion of demeaning the Faith we all love so well.

Warning to the Friends

Bahá'ís are advised not to lend money or offer hospitality to Albert Lee Bellamy, a newly-enrolled Bahá'í whose irresponsibility and untrustworthiness have caused harm and brought ill-repute to a number of Bahá'í communities. His whereabouts are unknown, and he may possess a current Bahá'í membership card. His appearance in a community should be reported immediately to the National Spiritual Assembly.

Backbiting, Gossip Forbidden to Bahá'ís

One of the most important of all divine Commandments, especially stressed in the Bahá'í Teachings, is: "Breathe not the sins of others so long as thou art thyself a sinner. Shouldst thou transgress this command, accused wouldst thou be, and to this I bear witness." (**Hidden Words**, 27.) Bahá'u'lláh further warns that "backbiting quenqueth the light of the heart, and extinguisheth the life of the soul." (**Gleanings**, p. 265.) In His **Will and Testament**, 'Abdu'l-Bahá adds: "According to the direct command of God, we are forbidden to utter slander."

In August, 1913, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote an American believer as follows: "...the worst human quality and the most great sin is backbiting, more especially when it emanates from the tongues of the believers of God. If some means were devised so that the doors of backbiting could be shut eternally and each one of the believers of God unsealed his tongue in the praise of the other, then the Teachings of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh would be spread, the hearts illumined, the spirits glorified and the human world would attain to everlasting felicity.

"I hope that the believers of God will shun completely backbiting, each one praising the other cordially, and believe that backbiting is the cause of the Divine wrath, to such an extent that if a person backbites to the extent of one word, he may become dishonored among all the people, because the most hateful characteristic of man is fault-finding. One must expose the praiseworthy qualities of the souls and not their evil attributes. The friends must overlook their shortcomings and faults and speak only of their virtues and not their defects."

In order to distinguish between legitimate reports to a Bahá'í administrative body that may affect the welfare of a Bahá'í community or an individual member thereof and unwarranted rumors, negative and hearsay gossip, slander and backbiting, intentionally or thoughtlessly circulated, the National Spiritual Assembly offers the following rules of action for the guidance of the Bahá'í Assemblies and communities under its jurisdiction.

1. In no case should the friends speak to their fellow believers in the community of any matter involving personal delinquencies, alleged or actual, of another member of the community, nor permit believers to speak to them of such matters. If a complaint is warranted, it should be brought directly to the Local Assembly for consideration.

2. A Local Assembly should assume jurisdiction only when the acts or words of a member of the Bahá'í community are such as to threaten the integrity of the Cause itself, or to undermine the good name and reputation of a believer.

3. This rule of action also applies for the protection of believers from any discussion of their alleged personal shortcomings in Bahá'í communities other than that in which such believers reside.

4. All such personal matters are strictly barred from discussion at the Nineteen Day Feasts.

5. In applying the Law of Bahá'u'lláh relative to the bringing of complaints and information to a Local Assembly concerning the alleged or actual shortcomings of individual believers, the Assembly should not entertain or listen to any complaint based upon hearsay or rumor, but should, in all cases, insist that the complainant or witness speak only of such matters and present such evidence as he or she knows to be true, of his or her own knowledge.

6. In the event that a Local Assembly is unable to stop or prevent the continued discussion or circulation of criticisms and unfounded rumors after it has taken jurisdiction of the matter, it is to report such cases immediately to the National Spiritual Assembly. The National Spiritual Assembly, after careful investigation, will take vigorous action to remove the misunderstandings and misrepresentations that have arisen and render full justice to the individual believer or believers concerned.

If any gossip or backbiting is initiated by an isolated believer, the matter should be brought immediately to the attention of the National Spiritual Assembly.

The new World Order is and must be held sacred and free from this grave defect in human relationships that not only often inflicts unmerited injury upon the individual but, more important, destroys the solidarity of the Bahá'í community. Whispering and backbiting is equivalent to separation among the friends of God, and, in the final analysis, is the will to harm and to alienate the hearts.

The National Spiritual Assembly feels assured and confident that all the friends will make every effort to realize in their individual and community lives a greater love and unity of purpose, and be ever mindful of Bahá'u'lláh's injunction: "Attribute not to any soul that which thou wouldst not have attributed to thee, and say not that which thou doest not. This is My Command to thee, do thou observe it." (**Hidden Words**, 29.)

"O my servants! Deprive not yourselves of the unfading and resplendent Light that shineth within the Lamp of Divine Glory. Let the flame of the love of God burn brightly within your radiant hearts. Feed it with the oil of Divine guidance, and protect it within the shelter of your constancy. Guard it within the globe of trust and detachment from all else but God, so that the whisperings of the ungodly may not extinguish its light." (**Gleanings**, pp. 325-6.)

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

Friends in Businesses Must Follow Bahá'í Law

Bahá'ís who manage or own businesses are obligated to conform their practices and dealings to the laws and teachings of the Faith. In a letter to the Bahá'ís of the West, the beloved Guardian wrote:

Institutions that are entirely managed by Bahá'ís 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 whatsoever that they should act otherwise. . .

(Quoted by the Universal House of Justice in a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States dated September 25, 1964)

Thus, a restaurant managed by a Bahá'í could not serve alcohol or feature entertainment that is inconsistent with the Teachings. On the question of engaging in the sale of alcohol, the Universal House of Justice wrote in a letter dated February 8, 1968, to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the British Isles:

For the time being the friends should consider this as a matter of conscience and should avoid either engaging in the sale of liquor or in employment involving the sale of liquor inasmuch as such actions are in violation of the spirit of the prohibitions in Bahá'í law. (From a letter of the Universal House of Justice in reply to a query whether a Bahá'í may work in bars or taverns.)