

# Attracting people of capacity and prominence to the Faith

*Dear Bahá'í Friends,*

*The Universal House of Justice draws to your attention that part of the most recent Ridván message in which the friends throughout the world are asked to focus on the need to attract people of capacity and prominence to the Faith. Because of the emphasis the House of Justice wishes the friends to place on this matter, the Research Department was asked to prepare a compilation of texts on the subject.*

*It is the ardent prayer of the House of Justice that careful study of the passages included will help the believers to appreciate the importance of fostering cordial relations with accomplished and distinguished figures, with people of capacity, and with those occupying prominent positions in society. The aim of the believers should be to make of them friends of the Faith, dispelling any misconceptions they may have and unfolding before their eyes the vision of world solidarity and peace enshrined in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. The friends should be confident that the spiritually minded and receptive souls among such people will eventually accept the truth of the Bahá'í Revelation and join the ranks of its active supporters.*

*With loving Bahá'í greetings,*

*Universal House of Justice  
Department of the Secretariat  
September 28, 1990*

## PROMINENT PEOPLE

**Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings and letters written by or on behalf of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice**

**Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice**  
**September 1990**

### I. The importance of guiding 'distinguished souls to the Cause'

*From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*

"I hope that thou wilt . . . endeavor to teach some high-ranking and influential persons, for the hearts of the people have become attracted to the Cause of God and their minds bewildered and enthralled by its awesome grandeur. Those who occupy high positions, too, have become profoundly receptive to its message. The loved ones of God should therefore make a determined effort and guide these distinguished souls to the Cause." (From a Tablet to an in-

portunity of the present hour and, with wisdom, firm resolve and cheerfulness, impress the verities of their Faith upon the attention of every reasonable-minded person in whom they find a willingness to listen, explaining to them its noble principles, its universal teachings, its basic tenets, and the fundamental laws of the new era inaugurated by Bahá'u'lláh. In like manner, they must clearly and convincingly demonstrate to their fellow-citizens, whether high or low, the necessity of accepting and recognizing the resplendent teachings of the Universal Manifestation of God; must show to the leaders of their country that the unity, the strength and spiritual vitality of the Bahá'í community are palpable and concrete realities; must eliminate and nullify the effects of prejudices, superstitions, misunderstandings and all fanciful and erroneous conceptions on the hearts of the pure and righteous people; and must attract to the community of the Greatest Name, through whatever channels and by whatever means, persons of capacity, experience and devotion who, joining the ranks of the believers, severing themselves from every extraneous attachment, identifying themselves whole-heartedly with the organized community of the Bahá'ís in that area, will labor heart and soul to consolidate the foundations of Bahá'í belief and proclaim the tidings of the Promised Day.

"With regard to the Bahá'í literacy classes, their continuation at the present time is a service beyond measure both profitable and desirable. Similarly, the establishment of contact and maintenance of friendly relations with government officials and other nationally distinguished figures is a matter that should be regarded by the friends as a binding obligation." (November 2, 1928, written by Shoghi Effendi to the Iran Central Spiritual Assembly, translated from the Persian)

"Shoghi Effendi was delighted to hear of your conversation with Sir . . . How much he hopes to have such scholars obtain a true understanding of the spirit and teaching of the Cause and arise to dissipate that veil of misconceptions that is prejudicing the mind of the scholars in the western world. The Cause is in great need for such competent and spiritually minded men who after a thorough study of the Movement would share with the world the fruit of their labors." (March 11, 1929, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi)

*From letters written by the Universal House of Justice*

" . . . one of the most important duties of each National Spiritual Assembly is to acquaint leaders of thought and prominent men and women in its country with the fundamental aims, the history and the present status and achievements of the Cause. Such an activity must be carried out with the utmost wisdom, discretion and dignity." (July 2, 1967, to all National Spiritual Assemblies, published in *Well-spring of Guidance: Messages 1963-1968*, 1st rev. ed. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976, p. 117)

"The paramount goal of the teaching work at the present time is to carry the message of Bahá'u'lláh to every stratum of human society and every walk of life. An eager response to the teachings will often be found in the most unexpected quarters, and any such response should be quickly followed up, for success in a fertile area awakens a response in those who were at first uninterested.

"The same presentation of the teachings will not appeal to everybody; the method of expression and the approach must be varied in accordance with the outlook and interests of the hearer. An approach which is designed to appeal to everybody will usually result in attracting the middle section, leaving both extremes untouched. No effort must be spared to ensure that the healing Word of God reaches the rich and the poor, the learned and the illiterate, the old and the young, the devout and the atheist, the dweller in the remote hills and islands, the inhabitant of the teeming cities, the suburban businessman, the laborer in the slums, the nomadic tribesman, the farmer, the university student; all must be brought consciously within the teaching plans of the Bahá'í community." (October 31, 1967, to all National Spiritual Assemblies, published in *Well-spring of Guidance: Messages 1963-1968*, p. 124)

"There have been notable advances in the process of gaining wider recognition for the Cause of God and in fostering cordial relations with civil authorities, a matter of vital importance in these days when there is a growth of opposition to the Faith from those who, misconstruing its true nature and aims, take alarm at its progress." (Ridván 1978 to the International Bahá'í Convention)

"Yet these disasters<sup>2</sup> have called forth fresh energies in the hearts of the friends, have fed the deep roots of the Cause, and in turn have strengthened the

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"You should always seek to guide prominent people inasmuch as once such a person is regenerated he is likely to bring about the quickening of a thousand souls. Thus the spirit of truth would flow forth unimpeded into the veins and arteries of a multitude." (From a Tablet to an individual believer, translated from the Persian)

"Wherefore thou shouldst seek to impart the Message to influential persons and become a cause of guidance to the learned and distinguished, that perchance there may be raised up in Iran wise, sagacious souls who shall be solicitous for both the good of the state and the welfare of the populace, who shall labor diligently night and day to the end that their great nation may retrieve its former glory and restore for all the world to see the splendor of the Kíyániyán kings, and that its illustrious people may shine out amongst mankind with an extraordinary brilliance and attain to lasting happiness and contentment. (From a Tablet to a group of believers, translated from the Persian)

"You should give serious concern to the matter of teaching, and think of ways of imparting the Message to prominent people, for once such persons have given their allegiance to the Faith they will cause the people to be led, troop after troop, to the wellspring of unfailing guidance." (From a Tablet to an individual believer, translated from the Persian)

*From letters written by or on behalf of Shoghi Effendi<sup>1</sup>*

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establishment or contact and maintenance or friendly relations with government officials and other nationally distinguished figures is a matter that should be regarded by the friends as a binding obligation." (November 2, 1928, written by Shoghi Effendi to the Iran Central Spiritual Assembly, translated from the Persian)

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". . . he feels that the great point is to confirm people of true capacity and ability—from whatever social stratum they may be—because the Cause needs now, and will ever-increasingly need, souls of great ability who can bring it before the public at large, administer its ever-growing affairs, and contribute to its advancement in every field." (October 30, 1941, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi)

"The more people of capacity who accept the Faith, the higher will become the standard of the entire group." (June 17, 1942, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi)

"The Cause of God has room for all. It would, indeed, not be the Cause of God if it did not take in and welcome everyone—poor and rich, educated and ignorant, the unknown, the prominent—God surely wants them all, as He created them all." (December 10, 1942, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi)

"He was very pleased to learn . . . that your reception was such a success, and that you now feel that people in high places are beginning to waken from their sleep and see the Light of Baha'u'llah. The time must come when they do; it just seems a question of how soon.

"A lot, also, depends on our having inside the Faith enough people of real capacity to form a nucleus that will attract to it similar souls. . . ." (November 22, 1949, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi)

"He hopes that your contact with Chief . . . will prove fruitful, and that his heart may open to the Message you have carried him. It would be a great asset to the Faith if a prominent Chief of some tribe should accept it and arise to serve it." (May 31, 1952, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi)

in the remote hills and islands, the inhabitant of the teeming cities, the suburban businessman, the laborer in the slums, the nomadic tribesman, the farmer, the university student; all must be brought consciously within the teaching plans of the Bahá'í community." (October 31, 1967, to all National Spiritual Assemblies, published in *Wellspring of Guidance: Messages 1963-1968*, p. 124)

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"Yet these disasters<sup>2</sup> have called forth fresh energies in the hearts of the friends, have fed the deep roots of the Cause and given rise to a great harvest of signal victories. Chief among these are the successful conclusion of the Five Year Plan; the launching of the Seven Year Plan, now in the final year of its second phase; and unprecedented proclamation of the Faith to Heads of States, parliaments and parliamentarians, government ministers and officials, leaders of thought and people prominent in the professions, resulting in a change of attitude on the part of the mass media, which now increasingly approach us for information about the Cause. . . .

"The growing maturity of a world-wide religious community which all these processes indicate is further evidenced in the reaching out, by a number of national communities, to the social and economic life of their countries, exemplified by the founding of tutorial schools, the inception of radio stations, the pursuit of rural development programs and the operation of medical and agricultural schemes. To these early beginnings must be added the undoubtedly skills acquired, as a result of the Iranian crisis, in dealing with international organizations, national governments and the mass media—the very elements of society with which it must increasingly collaborate toward the realization of peace on earth." (Ridván 1983 to the Bahá'ís of the world)

"The entrance of the Cause onto the world scene is apparent from a number of public statements in which we have been characterized as 'model citizens,' 'gentle,' 'law-abiding,' 'not guilty of any political offense or crime'; all excellent but utterly inadequate

2. The "loss of six Hands of the Cause" and the "waves of bitter persecution" directed against the Bahá'í community in Iran.

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insofar as the reality of the Faith and its aims and purposes are concerned. Nevertheless people are willing to hear about the Faith, and the opportunity must be seized. Persistently greater and greater efforts must be made to acquaint the leaders of the world, in all departments of life, with the true nature of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation as the sole hope for the pacification and unification of the world. Simultaneous with such a program must be unabated, vigorous pursuit of the teaching work, so that we may be seen to be a growing community, while universal observance by the friends of the Bahá'í laws of personal living will assert the fullness of, and arouse a desire to share in, the Bahá'í way of life. By all these means the public image of the Faith will become, gradually but constantly, nearer to its true character. . . .

"There can be no doubt that the progress of the Cause from this time onward will be characterized by an ever-increasing relationship to the agencies, activities, institutions and leading individuals of the non-Bahá'í world. We shall acquire greater stature at the United Nations, become better known in the deliberations of governments, a familiar figure to the media, a subject of interest to academics, and inevitably the envy of failing establishments. Our preparation for and response to this situation must be a continual deepening of our faith, an unwavering adherence to its principles of abstention from partisan politics and freedom from prejudices, and above all an increasing understanding of its fundamental verities and relevance to the modern world." (Ridván 1984 to the Bahá'ís of the world)

### II. Some guidelines for reaching prominent people

#### 2.1. 'Establish ties of friendship'

*From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*

"Some of the loved ones should establish ties of friendship with the notables of the region and manifest towards them the most affectionate regard. In this manner these men may become acquainted with the Bahá'í way of life, learn of the teachings of the Merciful One, and be informed of the pervasive influence of the Word of God in every quarter of the globe. If but one of these souls were attracted to the Cause, others would quickly be similarly moved,

to speak at your meetings. This is an effective way to make these take an active part in promoting the Faith and increasing their knowledge of its spirit and basic teachings.

"Shoghi Effendi hopes that some day they will come forward as devoted servants and consecrate their lives to it. . . . there are distinguished men who are friends and admirers of the Cause, but due to their natural conservative and cautious attitude towards anything new, prefer to be onlookers than passionate advocates. They cannot however keep on that dispassionate state of mind, some day they will feel unwittingly drawn into it. . . .

"He is sending you two copies of 'The Dawn-Breakers' to be presented to two distinguished friends of the Cause. One of these he wants to be presented to Sir . . . in acknowledgement of the services he has rendered to us. . . . This is one form of keeping up the interest of such distinguished men in the progress of the Faith. Maybe one day they will take an active part." (May 6, 1932)

"He was also very pleased to see that the Cause is receiving newspaper publicity there, and that you are winning the sympathetic interest of editors and people of importance. The Faith needs friends as well as adherents, and you should always endeavor to attract the hearts of enlightened leaders to its teachings." (October 5, 1945, to a local Spiritual Assembly)

"There are, as you truly say, many important admirers of the Faith at present in the U.S.A.—and, indeed, in other countries, but it is unlikely such people will actually embrace the Cause; they are not ready to identify themselves with an as yet struggling Movement with a relatively small following; moreover, many such people would be unwilling to make the effort required to live up to Bahá'í standards of conduct! Still, it is excellent that we are winning more friends and admirers; this in itself helps the Cause and adds to its prestige, and gradually some of these people may actually make the sacrifice of entering its service." (February 25, 1947)

"He feels that the believers should make every effort, in the proper way and with discretion, to keep in contact with important people. . . . We should make every effort to ensure that leaders of thought in public life are not merely familiar with the name Bahá'í, but if possible stand in a cordial relationship to some members of our Community, if not to the body of the Faith." (February 18, 1951, to a National Spiritual Assembly)

*From letters written by the Universal House of*

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"For we, the followers of the Blessed Beauty, should all be engaged in the service of the Cause of God, and become sources of guidance to humanity. Thou shouldst, if thou deemest it advisable and possible, proceed forthwith to organize a meeting of dignitaries. And when thy distinguished guests have assembled, speak to them about the Cause. Thou shouldst likewise advise the friends to arrange for another meeting with these same persons to be held one evening and to be addressed by them. This is a great service that I am entrusting to thee, and I pray to God that He may grant thee His assistance and confirmation, and bestow His blessings upon thy family." (From a Tablet to an individual believer, translated from the Persian)

*From letters written by or on behalf of Shoghi Effendi<sup>4</sup>*

"I do hope your passionate fervor, your mature experience and the ardor of your love will accomplish a great deal among the higher-class people with whom you associate. The Cause must capture the heights, and I look to you as the beloved and enthusiastic apostle of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to win to the Cause, cultured and capable souls. Be not disheartened and be assured of my constant loving prayers for the success of your much-valued efforts." (In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated April 2, 1925, written on his behalf)

"Ever since its<sup>5</sup> inception Shoghi Effendi has cherished the hope of making it a work that would prove interesting and illuminating to the reader. Destined mainly for the non-Bahá'ís, he has tried to attract through its pages the attention of educated and enlightened people and especially leaders in every country, with a view to acquainting them with the broad and fundamental principles of the Faith and to winning their consideration of the Movement as a growing force for good and for peace throughout the entire world. It is therefore with lively satisfaction that he has seen the publication grow yearly in importance and this feeling has been lately enhanced very much by the words of interest and appreciation which he has received from many quarters and leading men, among which was a remarkably encouraging letter from Sir Herbert Samuel. Indeed Shoghi Effendi has made it a point to send copies to as many leading men as possible and copies of last year's issue were presented to the Emperor of Japan, the Shah of Persia and Queen Marie of Rumania." (December 12, 1929, written on behalf of Shoghi Ef-

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"Ye should strive to widen the circle of those with whom ye enjoy friendly relations, and to establish the closest contact with those benevolent souls whose only thought is to do good, who are laboring in the cause of universal peace, and who cherish no desire but to witness the unification of the world of humanity. Ye should seek out the company of such people as these, that ye may imbue them with an awareness of the heavenly Kingdom, for albeit their motives are of the finest, yet they do not realize that all the powers of the earth are impotent either to establish universal peace or to promote the oneness of the human world. Nothing short of the power of the Word of God and the breaths of the Holy Spirit can ever succeed." (From a Tablet to a Spiritual Assembly, translated from the Persian)

#### *From letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi*<sup>3</sup>

"Our Guardian hopes and prays that you will be guided in your endeavor to bring together at the banquet various prominent citizens of various races and religions with the sole purpose of winning them ultimately to the recognition of God's sacred Faith. You must stress the universal aspect of the Cause and show utmost kindness and love to them all as a preparation for their eventual acceptance of the entire truth." (October 8, 1927)

"Some of the items were of great interest to him, especially that part which told of the contacts you have made with distinguished men and invited them

#### 3. To individual believers unless otherwise noted.

ment with a relatively small following; moreover, many such people would be unwilling to make the effort required to live up to Bahá'í standards of conduct! Still, it is excellent that we are winning more friends and admirers; this in itself helps the Cause and adds to its prestige, and gradually some of these people may actually make the sacrifice of entering its service." (February 25, 1947)

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#### *From letters written by the Universal House of Justice*

"A very important activity which has been pursued effectively in all too few countries is the undertaking by the National Spiritual Assembly of a sustained, planned effort to foster cordial relations with prominent people and responsible government officials and to familiarize them personally with the basic tenets and the teachings of the Faith. Such an activity must be carried out with wisdom and discretion, and requires the constant attention of a responsible committee as well as periodic review by the National Spiritual Assembly itself. Where successful it can effectively forestall opposition to the Faith and smooth the way for many essential aspects of the development of the Bahá'í community. (Naw-Rúz 1974 to all National Spiritual Assemblies)

"The House of Justice feels that your National Assembly must do more than distribute printed information about the Faith, as valuable as this is. A beginning should be made to identify the prominent persons in your country and ways be found to meet with them personally to acquaint them with the Faith. To this end, the House of Justice again urges you to appoint a committee to investigate the possibilities. If the few prominent Bahá'ís . . . are too busy to assist, then you will have to either redirect their efforts or call others to this task." (August 22, 1984, to a National Spiritual Assembly)

### 2.2 Attitudes and approaches

#### *From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*

"Be righteous, O servants, in your actions! Turn not away from the helpless; make mention of Me amidst the great, and have no fear." (From a Tablet, translated from the Persian)

attract through its pages the attention of educated and enlightened people and especially leaders in every country, with a view to acquainting them with the broad and fundamental principles of the Faith and to winning their consideration of the Movement as a growing force for good and for peace throughout the entire world. It is therefore with lively satisfaction that he has seen the publication grow yearly in importance and this feeling has been lately enhanced very much by the words of interest and appreciation which he has received from many quarters and leading men, among which was a remarkably encouraging letter from Sir Herbert Samuel. Indeed Shoghi Effendi has made it a point to send copies to as many leading men as possible and copies of last year's issue were presented to the Emperor of Japan, the Shah of Persia and Queen Marie of Rumania." (December 12, 1929, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi)

"As to teaching work in colleges and universities, this is very important, for students as a whole are open-minded and little influenced by tradition. They would easily enter the Cause if the subject is properly presented and their intellect and sentiments properly satisfied. This, however, should be attempted only by persons who have had university training and are therefore acquainted with the mind of the intelligent and educated youth." (February 3, 1932, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, published in *Bahá'í News* No. 64, July 1932, p. 4)

"The letter you addressed to the Secretary of State, he liked very much. He sincerely hopes that through such approaches and communications the authorities will come to take into consideration the importance of the Cause and gradually feel deep sympathy and admiration for its spirit. It is very important that they should know how we stand and what is our attitude towards some of the outstanding problems and issues that face the world in the present day. These are very difficult questions and most delicate, but the Master's spirit will surely guide you and inspire you to do what is proper and wise." (May 4, 1932, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the U.S. and Canada)

"It is really strange how much modern thinkers are, of their own accord, drawing nearer to the teachings of the Faith and voicing views very much like ours. It shows clearly the truth of the saying of the Master that the spirit of the Movement has permeated the hearts of all the people of the world. It is

4. To individual believers unless otherwise noted.

5. *The Bahá'í World*.

God's hands operating and guiding the nations and intellectual men and leaders of society to a gradual acceptance of His Message revealed through Baha'-u'llah.

"The way we can hasten the development of this process is by doing our share in spreading the words of God far and wide. Even though we may not see any case of sudden conversion on the part of these intellectuals, yet they are bound to be influenced in their views and look to the Faith with greater admiration and with a more willing desire to be led by its precepts. Shoghi Effendi, therefore, wishes me to encourage you in your work, in sending appropriate literature to such men of learning." (May 7, 1933, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi)

"Through the reading of such a challenging and scholarly work<sup>6</sup> many will, undoubtedly, be awakened and stimulated, while others will be infuriated to the extent of virulently attacking the Faith. The unprecedented publicity which the Cause will be thus receiving will in itself constitute an important step towards a wider and fuller recognition of the Movement by distinguished personalities, in both intellectual and social circles." (May 15, 1934, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly)

"Regarding your work with the upper classes, the Guardian quite agrees with you that the people of wealth and culture do sometimes have a great capacity for spiritual things. But they need the right type of people to approach them, and a method that can suit their mentality. Our teaching methods should allow a certain degree of elasticity in establishing contacts with various types of individual seekers. Every inquirer has to be approached from his own angle. Those who are essentially of the mystic type should first be given those teachings of the Cause which emphasize the nature and value of spiritual realities; while those who are practically minded and of a positive type are naturally more ready and inclined to accept the social aspect of the Teachings. But of course, gradually the *entire* Message, in all its aspects and with the full implications it entails, should be explained to the newcomer. For to be a believer means to accept the Cause in its wholeness, and not to adhere to some of its teachings. However, as already stated, this ought to be done gradually and tactfully. For conversion is after all a slow process." (December 28, 1936, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi)

distraught and fear-stricken multitudes. . . ." (June 5, 1947, written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America 1947-1957*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980, pp. 25-26)

"The lack of prejudice, (for the most part) the true altruism of the pure scientist, is pretty well demonstrated, and to such people the Faith, if properly presented, should have a great appeal; and moreover such people could do tremendous things for the Cause if they joined it in numbers.

"There is certainly a place in the Cause for outstanding people, and we need more of them. But the administration must function on a consultative basis, not leadership." (July 5, 1947, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi)

"It seems what we need now is a more profound and coordinated Bahá'í scholarship in order to attract such men as you are contacting. The world has—at least the thinking world—caught up by now with all the great and universal principles enunciated by Baha'u'llah over 70 years ago, and so of course it does not sound 'new' to them. But we know that the deeper teachings, the capacity of His projected World Order to re-create society, are new and dynamic. It is these we must learn to present intelligently and enticingly to such men! (July 3, 1949, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi)

"...the solution given to the world's problems by Baha'u'llah is the only solution—being Divine in origin—and most desperately needed; therefore we, the few who have caught the vision, should not waste our energies beating up and down the paths pursued by humanity, and which are not solving its ghastly present-day problems. We should concentrate on the Cause, because it is what is needed to cure the world. This is a sound attitude, for if we don't devote ourselves to the Bahá'í work and teaching, who will?

"On the other hand there is a big difference between this and learning. If the Bahá'ís want to be really effective in teaching the Cause they need to be much better informed and able to discuss intelligently, intellectually, the present condition of the world and its problems. We need Bahá'í scholars, not only people far, far more deeply aware of what our teachings really are, but also well-read and well-educated people, capable of correlating our teachings to the current thoughts of the leaders of society.

"We Bahá'ís should, in other words, arm our minds with knowledge in order to better demonstrate

"With the approach of the Year of Peace and the rapidly growing awareness among thinking people of the need for world-wide solutions to the problems threatening humankind, the House of Justice feels that there is a need for research and the writing of books and papers on subjects which are of immediate interest to the leaders of thought and the generality of mankind." (March 15, 1985, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the Association for Bahá'í Studies, Canada)

"It was also mentioned that there was a need to reach leaders of thought and people in authority with the Teachings; that there is a tendency for the people to more readily accept new ideas if they have already been accepted by the upper echelons of society. If this is so, perhaps a viable program could be developed of inviting prominent Bahá'ís from other countries to visit ... in order to contact prominent (individuals) of similar station or profession." (February 16, 1987, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

"National Bahá'í communities have organized and successfully conducted inter-religious conferences, peace seminars, symposiums on racism and other subjects on which we have a specific contribution to make, often achieving widespread publicity and the interest of highly placed leaders of society." (Ridván 1987, written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world)

### **2.3 The role of the Spiritual Assemblies**

*From letters written by or on behalf of Shoghi Effendi*<sup>8</sup>

"To approach such well-known and important persons is always an extremely delicate matter, since it requires a good deal of wisdom, courage and ability. But those friends who really feel the urge to do so, and possess the necessary qualifications, should cultivate such friendships which, if properly done, can be of an immense benefit to the Cause. In any case, however, the assistance and help of either the Local or the National Assembly is not only useful but necessary, if important contacts of this sort are to be fruitful and promising. . . ." (August 30, 1933, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi)

"...a resolute attempt should be made by the national elected representatives of the entire community, aided by their Public Relations, Race Unity, Public Meetings, Visual Education, College Speakers Bureau and Radio Committees, to reinforce the principles adopted for the resolution."

with various types of individual seekers. Every inquirer has to be approached from his own angle. Those who are essentially of the mystic type should first be given those teachings of the Cause which emphasize the nature and value of spiritual realities; while those who are practically minded and of a positive type are naturally more ready and inclined to accept the social aspect of the Teachings. But of course, gradually the *entire Message*, in all its aspects and with the full implications it entails, should be explained to the newcomer. For to be a believer means to accept the Cause in its wholeness, and not to adhere to some of its teachings. However, as already stated, this ought to be done gradually and tactfully. For conversion is after all a slow process." (December 28, 1936, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi)

"It is wonderful to see, at last, the intellectuals turning to the problems of the world and seeking to solve them. Side by side with this non-Bahá'í work, so close to many of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, we believers must carry on our purely Bahá'í work, which only we can do, and which has such tremendous implications for the future of humanity in every sphere." (April 14, 1947, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi)

"They<sup>7</sup> must be neither provocative nor supine, neither fanatical or excessively liberal, in their exposition of the fundamental and distinguishing features of their Faith. They must be either wary or bold, they must act swiftly or mark time, they must use the direct or indirect method, they must be challenging or conciliatory, in strict accordance with the spiritual receptivity of the soul with whom they come in contact, whether he be a nobleman or a commoner, a northerner or a southerner, a layman or a priest, a capitalist or a socialist, a statesman or a prince, an artisan or a beggar. In their presentation of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh 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 unshakeable courage, the Cup of Salvation, at so critical an hour, to the confused, the hungry, the

6. George Townshend, *The Promise of All Ages*.

7. American pioneers.

by humanity, and which are not solving its ghastly present-day problems. We should concentrate on the Cause, because it is what is needed to cure the world. This is a sound attitude, for if we don't devote ourselves to the Bahá'í work and teaching, who will?

"On the other hand there is a big difference between this and learning. If the Bahá'ís want to be really effective in teaching the Cause they need to be much better informed and able to discuss intelligently, intellectually, the present condition of the world and its problems. We need Bahá'í scholars, not only people far, far more deeply aware of what our teachings really are, but also well-read and well-educated people, capable of correlating our teachings to the current thoughts of the leaders of society.

"We Bahá'ís should, in other words, arm our minds with knowledge in order to better demonstrate to, especially, the educated classes, the truths enshrined in our Faith. What the Guardian, however, does not advise the friends to do is to dissipate their time and energies in serving movements that are akin to our principles but not, we believe, capable of solving the present spiritual crisis the world finds itself in. We can cooperate with such movements and their promoters to good effect, while at the same time openly standing forth as Bahá'ís with a specific program to offer society." (July 5, 1949, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi)

*From letters written by or on behalf of the Universal House of Justice*

"In view of the difficulty you have experienced in obtaining publicity about the Faith in the national press in ..., the House of Justice has instructed us to say that there are three courses of action which should assist you in achieving this in the future. First, it is important that there be certain believers, such as the members of a public information committee, who are given the task of cultivating personal contacts with influential figures in the national information media. This personal contact is a vital element in fostering the receptivity of the media to news about the Faith. Secondly, as an aid to promoting such links, your representatives could take with them examples of excellent material about the Faith that has been published in such important newspapers as *Le Monde*, *The Times* of London, and *The New York Times*. . . . Thirdly, repeated mention of the Faith in the local press will contribute to the willingness of the national press to regard the Bahá'í Faith as newsworthy material." (January 5, 1981, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

To approach such well-known and important persons is always an extremely delicate matter, since it requires a good deal of wisdom, courage and ability. But those friends who really feel the urge to do so, and possess the necessary qualifications, should cultivate such friendships which, if properly done, can be of an immense benefit to the Cause. In any case, however, the assistance and help of either the Local or the National Assembly is not only useful but necessary, if important contacts of this sort are to be fruitful and promising. . . ." (August 30, 1933, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi)

". . . a resolute attempt should be made by the national elected representatives of the entire community, aided by their Public Relations, Race Unity, Public Meetings, Visual Education, College Speakers Bureau and Radio Committees, to reinforce the measures already adopted for the proclamation, through the press and radio, of the verities of the Faith to the masses, and for the establishment of closer contact with the leaders of public thought, with colleges and universities and with newspaper and magazine editors." (June 5, 1947, written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America 1947-1957*, pp. 8-9)

"The National Assembly should not be timid about trying to contact important visitors to . . . The stature of the Faith is now such that its representatives can demand and receive attention. Whether they are always successful or not, is not the point; the point is to let people of importance realize we are active and on the world scene, so to speak." (November 23, 1951, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly)

"The Guardian was very happy to see your Assembly had had a successful meeting with both the Mayor of . . . and the Minister for Foreign Affairs; such important contacts should be carried out on a high level, and only believers able to perhaps offer hospitality or having some point of contact with the officials in question or being themselves attractive to meet, should be used by your Assembly, and in conjunction with your members, to meet such personages." (June 30, 1952, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly)

"He feels that the time has now come when you should establish a national committee to make contacts with civil authorities on a national level, and with important public figures in State and large City administrations. The purpose of these contacts is to

8. To individual believers unless otherwise noted.

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establish friendly relations with important public figures, so that they may be fully informed of the Faith and its principles, may gain confidence in the Bahá'ís and their activities, may understand the non-political aspect of the Faith, and in the future, be anxious to be of assistance to us as the Faith evolves." (December 29, 1953, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly)

*From letters written by or on behalf of the Universal House of Justice*

"National Spiritual Assemblies must promote wise and dignified approaches to people prominent in all areas of human endeavor, acquainting them with the nature of the Bahá'í community and the basic tenets of the Faith, and winning their esteem and friendship." (Naw-Rúz 1979, written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world)

"... the House of Justice is extremely happy that your National Assembly is continuing its wise, effective and ongoing efforts to familiarize the officials in your country about the Faith. Such approaches should be planned whenever the occasion arises. In the meantime, through your various proclamation efforts, the Bahá'í community should indirectly draw the attention of people of all strata of society to the Cause so that it will be easier for the Bahá'ís to have a positive access to the officials in the time of need. (July 26, 1987, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

"The spark which ignited the mounting interest in the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh was the heroic fortitude and patience of the beloved friends in Iran, which moved the Bahá'í world community to conduct a persistent, carefully orchestrated program of appeal to the conscience of the world. This vast undertaking involving the entire community acting unitedly through its Administrative Order was accompanied by equally vigorous and visible activities of that community in other spheres which have been detailed separately. Nonetheless, we are impelled to mention that an important outcome of this extensive exertion is our recognition of a new stage in the external affairs of the Cause, characterized by a marked maturation of Na-

borne around and all the souls that drink therefrom be inebriated with the wine of holy mysteries and truths." (From a Tablet to an individual believer, translated from the Persian)

*From letters written by or on behalf of Shoghi Effendi<sup>9</sup>*

"You mentioned in your letter your intention to make contact with the representatives of movements which are akin to the Cause in the principles they advocate. Shoghi Effendi trusts that in all such communications and activities you would maintain the prestige and superiority of the Cause. We should never compromise our principles for some temporary benefits we are apt to reap. It is very important to bring the Cause to the attention of such leaders of thought and for this purpose we have to get in touch with them, but our aim should be to draw them to the Cause rather than follow their footsteps." (November 29, 1926, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly)

"I entirely agree with you that non-interference in politics does not imply non-association on the part of the friends with the outside world. I hope you will impress the friends with the necessity of maintaining close, but not too intimate, relationships with the authorities, the foreign representatives, and the leaders of public thought in the capital. They should be on their guard, however, lest too close an association should lead, imperceptibly, to compromise on the principles which we cherish and uphold. They must mix with all classes of society without associating themselves with their policies and schemes." (In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated October 8, 1927, written on his behalf)

"It is our supreme obligation to endeavor to bring the knowledge of this Revelation to the highest authorities and the leading personalities among our countrymen, but to refrain from associating ourselves or identifying our Faith with their political pursuits, their conflicting ambitions and party programs. May the Almighty guide and sustain your high endeavors, and enable you to win for His Cause the most capable, the most virtuous and the most enlightened leaders of public opinion in that land." (In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter of April 15, 1932, written on his behalf)

"Shoghi Effendi fully approves your meeting of important men who are in power and have the reins of government in their hands. In fact he would urge

tained analysis of a situation, 'needlessly alienate or estrange any government or people,' or involve the Faith in 'the base clamorings and contentions of warring sects, factions and nations.' " (November 21, 1971, to an individual believer)

*From letters written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice*

"The House of Justice received your letter of December 13, 1986, inquiring about permissible activities of the Bahá'ís in relation towards governments . . .

"The general policy already enunciated by Shoghi Effendi in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pages 63-67, should be scrupulously upheld by the friends. However, as the Faith emerges from obscurity, the application of certain aspects of this policy will require the clarification of the House of Justice. With the passage of time, practices in the political realm will definitely undergo the profound changes anticipated in the Bahá'í writings. As a consequence, what we understand now of the policy of non-involvement in politics will also undergo a change; but as Shoghi Effendi has written, this instruction, 'at the present stage of the evolution of our Faith, should be increasingly emphasized, irrespective of its application to the East or to the West.'

"In view of the necessity of the Bahá'í community to relate to governments, whether for reasons of defending its persecuted members or of responding to opportunities to be of service, a correct understanding of what is legitimate Bahá'í action in the face of the policy of non-interference with government affairs is bound to be difficult to achieve on the part of individual friends. The force of circumstances, operating internally and externally, is pressing the Bahá'í community into certain relationships with governments. Hence, it is important that decisions as to the conduct of such relationships be made by authorized institutions of the Faith and not by individuals. In matters of this kind, given the utter complexity of human affairs with which the Bahá'í community must increasingly cope both spiritually and practically, individual judgment is not sufficient." (June 23, 1987, to an individual believer)

"This is a field of service in which much latitude for initiative must be given to individuals. For instance, in that aspect of the work which calls for reaching very important persons, it is necessary to rely on the personal relationships which individual Bahá'ís have developed or are capable of developing, to

a positive access to the officials in the time of need. (July 26, 1987, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

"The spark which ignited the mounting interest in the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh was the heroic fortitude and patience of the beloved friends in Iran, which moved the Bahá'í world community to conduct a persistent, carefully orchestrated program of appeal to the conscience of the world. This vast undertaking involving the entire community acting unitedly through its Administrative Order was accompanied by equally vigorous and visible activities of that community in other spheres which have been detailed separately. Nonetheless, we are impelled to mention that an important outcome of this extensive exertion is our recognition of a new stage in the external affairs of the Cause, characterized by a marked maturation of National Spiritual Assemblies in their growing relations with governmental and non-governmental organizations and with the public in general.

"This recognition prompted a meeting in Germany last November of national Bahá'í external affairs representatives from Europe and North America, together with senior representatives of the Offices of the Bahá'í International Community, intent on effecting greater coordination of their work. This was a preliminary step towards the gathering of more and more National Spiritual Assemblies into a harmoniously functioning international network capable of executing global undertakings in this rapidly expanding field. Related to these developments was the significant achievement of international recognition accorded the Faith through its formal acceptance last October into membership of the Network on Conservation and Religion of the renowned World Wide Fund for Nature." (Ridván 1988, written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world)

#### 2.4 The 'course of prudence'

##### *From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*

"... thou shouldst initially adopt that course of prudence that the Faith enjoins. In the early stages, thou shouldst seek out the company of the eminent members of the populace and, turning thyself in utter lowliness to the unseen realm of Glory, thou shouldst pray for succor and protection so that the Holy Spirit may, through the outpourings of its grace, grant thee its assistance. When, by thy godly conduct and demeanor, thy fervor, thy chaste and lucid utterance, thou shalt have succeeded in winning the affection of one and all, then shall the portals of heavenly guidance be opened wide; then shall the bounteous cup be

handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated October 8, 1927, written on his behalf)

"It is our supreme obligation to endeavor to bring the knowledge of this Revelation to the highest authorities and the leading personalities among our countrymen, but to refrain from associating ourselves or identifying our Faith with their political pursuits, their conflicting ambitions and party programs. May the Almighty guide and sustain your high endeavors, and enable you to win for His Cause the most capable, the most virtuous and the most enlightened leaders of public opinion in that land." (In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter of April 15, 1932, written on his behalf)

"Shoghi Effendi fully approves your meeting of important men who are in power and have the reins of government in their hands. In fact he would urge you to avail yourself of every such opportunity that presents itself. But you should be very careful not to discuss matters that are political and that are points of contention between the different parties. That would drag the Cause into political affairs, a thing which was strictly forbidden by the Master. Your concern in meeting such people should be to familiarize them with the teachings of the Cause and imbue them with the spirit of the Movement. Should such men embrace the Movement they would lead with themselves thousands of others into the Cause." (April 15, 1932, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi)

*From a letter written by the Universal House of Justice*

*"It is perfectly in order for Bahá'í institutions to present the Bahá'í view or recommendations on any subject of vital interest to the Faith which is under the consideration of a government, if the governmental authority itself invites such a submission, or if it is open to receive recommendations. The Bahá'í Assemblies should, however, refrain from bringing pressure to bear on the authorities in such matters, either separately or in concert with others. The Bahá'ís will submit their views, if permissible, expressing them as cogently and forcefully as the occasion warrants, but will not go beyond this to the stage of pressing the authorities to adopt those views. Moreover, when considering whether or not it is wise to make such a submission on any particular matter, the Bahá'í Assembly concerned must take care that it will not diffuse the energies of the community or divert its resources by making submissions unless the interests of the Faith demand it. Likewise the Assembly must ensure that it does not, by any minute and de-*

*9. To individual believers unless otherwise noted.*

individual friends. The force of circumstances, operating internally and externally, is pressing the Bahá'í community into certain relationships with governments. Hence, it is important that decisions as to the conduct of such relationships be made by authorized institutions of the Faith and not by individuals. In matters of this kind, given the utter complexity of human affairs with which the Bahá'í community must increasingly cope both spiritually and practically, individual judgment is not sufficient." (June 23, 1987, to an individual believer)

"This is a field of service in which much latitude for initiative must be given to individuals. For instance, in that aspect of the work which calls for reaching very important persons, it is necessary to rely on the personal relationships which individual Bahá'ís have developed or are capable of developing, to rely on their ability to engage the attention of such persons, because these Bahá'ís are themselves attractive in particular ways. While exercising careful judgment in selecting the individuals you can call on for such services, and providing them with any necessary guidance, you must also be sensitive to these points and avoid excessive control, or even the appearance of it, in your dealings with those who are engaged in these important services." (April 26, 1988, to a National Spiritual Assembly)

"Your comments concerning the maintenance of contacts with officials in the lower level of your government's hierarchy are well taken, and you should feel confident in pursuing this wise course of action.

"There is no objection to initiating contact with high officials of the Catholic Church. This would require your careful consideration as to the timeliness of such action and determination by you as to how to proceed without unduly arousing opposition to the Faith.

"Your Assembly is encouraged to establish contacts with national associations, bearing in mind the need to select such organizations wisely, so as not to stretch your human and financial resources beyond reasonable bounds or to distract the community from its primary teaching efforts. As this balance is sometimes difficult to achieve, you may wish to include this as an element of your consultation with the Counselors on the role of ... in the process of the Faith's emergence from obscurity in Latin America and the world." (March 23, 1989, to a National Spiritual Assembly)

"O loved ones of God! Each one of the friends must teach at least one soul each year. This is everlasting glory. This is eternal grace."

—'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Individual and Teaching*, p. 13