Compilation on National Bahá’í Conventions

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## Purpose of Conventions

1. **Within Context of Bahá’í Administration**
2. **Function and Purpose of the National Conventions**
3. **Consultation**
4. **Purpose of Consultations at National Conventions**

## The Institution of the National Spiritual Assembly

## Bahá’í Election

1. **Nature of Bahá’í Election**
2. **Preparation for Voting**
3. **Mind Set when Voting**
4. **Qualifications of Those to Vote For**
5. **Voting for Institution, not Individual**
6. **Changes in Membership**
7. **When it is Difficult to Find Suitable Candidates**
8. **Voting for One self**

## The Role of Delegates

## The Role of the National Spiritual Assembly
PURPOSE OF CONVENTIONS

WITHIN CONTEXT OF BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATION

It should be noted in this connection that this Administrative Order is fundamentally different from anything that any Prophet has previously established, inasmuch as Bahá'u'lláh has Himself revealed its principles, established its institutions, appointed the person to interpret His Word and conferred the necessary authority on the body designed to supplement and apply His legislative ordinances. Therein lies the secret of its strength, its fundamental distinction, and the guarantee against disintegration and schism. (Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 144)

Let no one, while this System is still in its infancy, misconceive its character, belittle its significance or misrepresent its purpose. The bedrock on which this Administrative Order is founded is God's immutable Purpose for mankind in this day. The Source from which it derives its inspiration is no one less than Bahá'u'lláh Himself. Its shield and defender are the embattled hosts of the Abha Kingdom. Its seed is the blood of no less than twenty thousand martyrs who have offered up their lives that it may be born and flourish. The axis round which its institutions revolve are the authentic provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Its guiding principles are the truths which He Who is the unerring Interpreter of the teachings of our Faith has so clearly enunciated in His public addresses throughout the West. The laws that govern its operation and limit its functions are those which have been expressly ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The seat round which its spiritual, its humanitarian and administrative activities will cluster are the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and its Dependencies. The pillars that sustain its authority and buttress its structure are the twin institutions of the Guardianship and of the Universal House of Justice. The central, the underlying aim which animates it is the establishment of the New World Order as adumbrated by Bahá'u'lláh. The methods it employs, the standard it inculcates, incline it to neither East nor West, neither Jew nor Gentile, neither rich nor poor, neither white nor colored. Its watchword is the unification of the human race; its standard the "Most Great Peace"; its consummation the advent of that golden millennium -- the Day when the kingdoms of this world shall have become the Kingdom of God Himself, the Kingdom of Bahá'u'lláh. (Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 156)

The administrative machinery of the Cause ... should both provide the impulse whereby the dynamic forces latent in the Faith can unfold, crystallize, and shape the lives and conduct of men, and serve as a medium for the interchange of thought and the co-ordination of activities among the divers elements that constitute the Bahá'í community. (Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932", p. 109)

...the annual Convention is not to be regarded as a body entitled to exercise functions similar to those which an ordinary parliament possesses under a democratic form of government. The Administrative Order which lies embedded in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and which the
American believers have championed and are now establishing, should, under no circumstances, be identified with the principles underlying present-day democracies. Nor is it identical with any purely aristocratic or autocratic form of government. The objectionable features inherent in each of these political systems are entirely avoided. It blends, as no system of human polity has as yet achieved, those salutary truths and beneficial elements which constitute the valuable contributions which each of these forms of government have made to society in the past. Consultation, frank and unfettered, is the bedrock of this unique Order. Authority is concentrated in the hands of the elected members of the National Assembly. Power and initiative are primarily vested in the entire body of the believers acting through their local representatives. (Postscript in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi appended to a letter dated 18 November 1933 written on his behalf to a National Spiritual Assembly)

**Function and Purpose of the National Conventions**

..., the assembled accredited representatives of the American believers should exercise not only the vital and responsible right of electing the National Assembly, but should also fulfil the functions of an enlightened, consultative and co-operative body that will enrich the experience, enhance the prestige, support the authority, and assist the deliberations of the National Spiritual Assembly. (Shoghi Effendi, from a letter dated 29 January 1925 to a National Spiritual Assembly, cf. "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932", pp. 78)

To generate those forces which must give birth to the body of their national administrators, and to confer, freely and fully and at fixed intervals, with both the incoming and outgoing National Assemblies, are the twofold functions, the supreme responsibility and sole prerogative of the delegates assembled in Convention. Nothing short of close and constant interaction between these various organs of Bahá'í administration can enable it to fulfil its high destiny. (Postscript in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi appended to a letter dated 18 November 1933 written on his behalf to a National Spiritual Assembly)

Concerning the status, rights and prerogatives of the Annual Bahá'í Convention, the Guardian wishes to make it quite clear to all the believers that this annual meeting of the delegates is by no means a continuous consultative body all through the year; that its twofold function of electing the body of the National Spiritual Assembly, and of offering any constructive suggestions in regard to the general administration of the Cause is limited to a definite period; ... (18 November 1933 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

As the principal purpose of Convention, apart from the election of the National Spiritual Assembly, is the consultation of the delegates with the National Spiritual Assembly, as much time as possible should be made available for the delegates to consult. (6 July 1971 to a National Spiritual Assembly)
...it is the sacred obligation and the primary function of the National Assembly not to restrict, under any circumstances, the freedom of the assembled delegates, whose twofold function is to elect their national representatives and to submit to them any recommendations they may feel inclined to make. The function of the Convention is purely advisory and though the advice it gives is not binding in its effects on those on whom rests the final decision in purely administrative matters, yet, the utmost caution and care should be exercised lest anything should hamper the delegates in the full and free exercise of their functions. (12 August 1933 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

It is important to remember, however, that the National Convention is not a conference, it is a consultative institution of the Faith; therefore, consultation and formal voting on recommendations should not be ruled out altogether. There may, for example, be disagreement among the delegates on certain proposals put forward, and it would be fruitful for the matter to be discussed and voted upon so that the National Spiritual Assembly will know the recommendation of the Convention as a whole on those issues. (19 June 1987 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

...I feel that the dominating purpose inspiring the assembled friends, delegates and visitors alike, should be a twofold one. The first is a challenge to the individual, the second a collective responsibility. The one seeks to reinforce the motive power of our spiritual activities, the second aims at raising the standard of administrative efficiency so vitally needed at this advanced stage of our work. We should first and foremost endeavour by every conceivable means to revitalize our precious Cause, rudely shaken by the constant vicissitudes attending the outward departure of a vigilant and gracious Master. Our next object should be to seek to approach, through more intimate association, fuller and more frequent consultation, and a closer familiarity with the character, the mission, and the teachings of the Cause, that standard of excellence which should characterize the co-operative efforts of Bahá’í Communities in every land. (Shoghi Effendi, Bahá’í Administration p 86)

CONSULTATION

The first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members of the assembly. They must be wholly free from estrangement and must manifest in themselves the Unity of God, for they are the waves of one sea, the drops of one river, the stars of one heaven, the rays of one sun, the trees of one orchard, the flowers of one garden. Should harmony of thought and absolute unity be non-existent, that gathering shall be dispersed and that assembly be brought to naught. The second condition: - They must when coming together turn their faces to the Kingdom on High and ask aid from the Realm of Glory. They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views. They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden. The honoured members must with all freedom express their own thoughts, and it is in no
wise permissible for one to belittle the thought of another, nay, he must with moderation set
forth the truth, and should differences of opinion arise a majority of voices must prevail, and all
must obey and submit to the majority. It is again not permitted that any one of the honoured
members object to or censure, whether in or out of the meeting, any decision arrived at
previously, though that decision be not right, for such criticism would prevent any decision from
being enforced. In short, whatsoever thing is arranged in harmony and with love and purity of
motive, its result is light, and should the least trace of estrangement prevail the result shall be
darkness upon darkness. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in “Bahá’í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-
1932” p.22)

...he would suggest that during the Nineteen Day Feasts, which occasions, as you certainly
know, afford the believers the opportunity of discussing community affairs and problems, you
openly express any criticisms or suggestions you wish to offer regarding any Assembly actions
and decisions. It is indeed the inalienable right of every recognized believer to express himself,
during all such occasions, on the manner in which community affairs in general are conducted,
and to offer the Assembly any views or recommendations he has on the subject. But in the
exercise of such right he should refrain from any such remarks or actions as would tend to belittle
the significance and undermine the authority of the Assembly itself, as an institution established
by Bahá’u’lláh. (8 March 1940 to an individual believer)

The unfettered freedom of the individual should be tempered with mutual consultation and
sacrifice, and the spirit of initiative and enterprise should be reinforced by a deeper realization of
the supreme necessity for concerted action and a fuller devotion to the common weal. (Shoghi
Effendi, Baha’i Administration, p. 87)

Disruptive forces, which are but the outcome of human passion and selfishness, should be
totally crushed down and should give way to a living and constructive faith which alone can
ensure the efficiency and the high quality of the work to be achieved. It is hoped that future
Conventions will be more constructive in their spiritual effects and will reflect more adequately
the spirit of the Cause. (25 July 1933 to an individual believer on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi in
Compilations, National Convention)

**Purpose of Consultations at National Conventions**

The delegates must be wholly independent of any administrative agency, must approach their
task with absolute detachment and must concentrate their attention on the most important and
pressing issues." (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual
Assembly of the United States and Canada, August 18, 1933: The National Spiritual Assembly, pp.
23-24)

The purpose of consultation at the Annual Convention is threefold: to arrive at full and
complete knowledge of the current conditions, problems and possibilities of the Faith in the
country; to give the incoming National Assembly the benefit of the collective wisdom, guidance and constructive suggestions of the assembled delegates; and to contribute to the unity, in spirit and action, of the entire Bahá’í community. (A Procedure for the Conduct of the Annual Bahá’í Convention, Bahá’í World, Vol. IX, pp. 517-18.)

As you are aware the principal purpose of a National Convention is to give an opportunity to the delegates to consult on the affairs of the Faith and to elect the members of the National Spiritual Assembly. Obviously the National Assembly is primarily interested in the general views and reactions of the delegates, and particularly in knowing what are the recommendations adopted by those present at the Convention, but this does not prohibit the National Assembly, if it so wishes, from having a record for its consideration of recommendations which were turned down, or individual suggestions from the delegates, which because of the shortness of time, or otherwise, could not or did not reach the stage which would lead to consideration by the Convention in session. (26 July 1982 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

... the delegates at National Convention should be encouraged to consult upon the national work of the Cause rather than purely local matters. (29 June 1973 to the Hands of the Cause of God in the Holy Land)

The Guardian was so glad to share your impressions about the Convention. He has already received many reports of a similar nature and the opinion which he has come to form is that most of the delegates have spent too much time on problems of a purely secondary importance, with the result that the meetings were somewhat lacking in spiritual force. The friends should always be on their guard lest they consider the Administration as an aim in itself and fail to grasp the spiritual and moral development which is its purpose to achieve. The Convention meetings are not intended to be purely administrative. Their main and essential purpose is to enable the assembled delegates and friends to have a deeper and broader vision of the Cause through an increase in the spirit of unity and of whole-hearted co-operation. (25 July 1933 to an individual believer on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi in Compilations, National Convention)

THE INSTITUTION OF THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

It would be impossible at this stage to ignore the indispensability or to overestimate the unique significance of the institution of the National Spiritual Assembly - the pivot round which revolve the activities of the believers throughout the American continent. Supreme is their position, grave their responsibilities, manifold and arduous their duties. (From a letter dated 3 June 1925 to a National Convention, cf. "Bahá’í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932", pp. 87)

The National Spiritual Assembly, designated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and Testament as the "secondary House of Justice", is the supreme Bahá’í administrative authority in each land. The National Assembly is characterized by Shoghi Effendi as "the trusted guardian and the mainspring
of the manifold activities and interests of every national community in the Bahá’í world”. He states that these Assemblies constitute the electoral bodies in the formation of the International House of Justice, and are empowered to direct, unify, co-ordinate and stimulate the activities of individuals as well as local Assemblies within their jurisdiction. (National Convention Compilation prepared by the research department of the Universal House of Justice, Dec 1999)

...the National Body is like the beating of a healthy heart in the midst of the Community, pumping spiritual love, energy and encouragement out to all the members. (From a letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Assembly, dated 30 June 1957)

Let it be made clear to every inquiring reader that among the most outstanding and sacred duties incumbent upon those who have been called upon to initiate, direct and co-ordinate the affairs of the Cause are those that require them to win by every means in their power the confidence and affection of those whom it is their privilege to serve. (From a letter dated 18 October 1927 to National Spiritual Assembly, cf. "Bahá’í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932", pp. 143-44)

**Bахá’í Election**

**Nature of Bahá’í Election**

As you know very well, the method of Bahá’í elections is at complete variance with the methods and practices of elections in political systems. The beloved Guardian has pointed out to us that should we follow the method of the politicians in our Bahá’í elections, misunderstandings and differences will arise, chaos and confusion will ensue, mischief will abound and the confirmations of God will be cut off from that Bahá’í community. In view of these grave warnings, the utmost care must always be exercised so that the purity and spiritual character of Bahá’í elections are maintained and preserved. (Bahá’í Elections, No. 23, p. 8.)

Equally significant to the procedures for election -- to further extend the example -- is the evocation of that rarefied atmosphere of prayer and reflection, that quiet dignity of the process, devoid of nominations and campaigning, in which the individual’s freedom to choose is limited only by his own conscience, exercised in private in an attitude that invites communion with the Holy Spirit. In this sphere, the elector regards the outcome as an expression of the will of God, and those elected as being primarily responsible to that will, not to the constituency which elected them. An election thus conducted portrays an aspect of that organic unity of the inner and outer realities of human life which is necessary to the construction of a mature society in this new Age. In no other system do individuals exercise such a breadth of freedom in the electoral process. (Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh: A statement by The Universal House of Justice 1992; Bahá’í Publishing Trust, USA; p. 10.)
The manner of participation by all adult members of the community in these elections is a distinguishing feature of the System of Bahá’u’lláh; for it is a bounden duty that confers a high privilege upon every Bahá’í to select, as a responsible citizen of the new world being brought into existence, the composition of the institutions having authority over the functioning of the Bahá’í community. In this regard, indifference and neglect on the part of any believer are alien to the spirit of the Cause. The friends must strive ceaselessly to avoid being contaminated with these destructive attitudes, which have inflicted such damage on the integrity and authority of the institutions of a declining world order. (Letter from the Universal House of Justice dated 25th of March 2007)

The aim should always be so to educate the friends during the year that they consider their participation in Bahá’í elections not only as a right they exercise, but as a spiritual obligation which, when discharged in the proper Bahá’í spirit, contributes to the health and growth of the Bahá’í community. (Bahá’í Elections: A compilation of extracts from the Bahá’í Writings prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, No. 6, p. 2.)

When called upon to vote in a Bahá’í election, believers should be aware that they are carrying out a sacred task unique to this Dispensation. They should approach this duty in a prayerful attitude, seeking divine guidance and confirmation. As Shoghi Effendi has advised, "they must turn completely to God, and with a purity of motive, a freedom of spirit and a sanctity of heart, participate in the elections." (From the letter of the Universal House of Justice, 25 March 2007)

**Preparation for voting**

What the friends should do is to get thoroughly acquainted with one another, to exchange views, to mix freely and discuss among themselves the requirements and qualifications for such membership (i.e. membership of the Regional Assembly) without reference or application, however indirect, to particular individuals. (Bahá’í Elections: A compilation of extracts from the Bahá’í Writings prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, No. 25, p. 9)

It is also expected that, through the training and experience in the process and spirit of Bahá’í elections, the members of the electorate will have raised their consciousness of their responsibility to vote for only those who satisfy the requirements that the Guardian has outlined. They will, therefore, see it as their continuing duty to familiarise themselves with the character and abilities of those who are active in the community so that, when the time for an election comes, they will already have some idea of the people from among whom they must make their choice. (Bahá’í Elections: A compilation of extracts from the Bahá’í Writings prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, No. 18, p. 6).
... Shoghi Effendi finds no other practical method that is in conformity with the spirit of the teachings, except through better acquaintance of the friends during the annual conventions and summer schools. It is the duty of the individual friends to come to know one another and find out who are the persons best fitted to become members of that body. This is a slow process but surely the best one and gives the greatest freedom of choice to the electors. (Lights of Guidance 3rd ed., 1994, No. 64, p. 19.)

**Mind set when voting**

... in the time of election, the friends should be in the mood of prayer, disinterestedness and detachment from worldly motives. Then they will be inspired to elect the proper members to the assemblies. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, June 7, 1924)

On the election day, the friends must wholeheartedly participate in the elections, in unity and amity, turning their hearts to God, detached from all things but Him, seeking His guidance and supplicating His aid and bounty. (27 February 1923 to the Baha’is in the East -- translated from the Persian)

Let us recall His explicit and often repeated assurances that every Assembly elected in that rarefied atmosphere of selflessness and detachment is in truth appointed of God. (23 February 1924 to the Baha’is in North America, published in "Baha’i Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932")

... the elector... is called upon to vote for none but those whom prayer and reflection have inspired him to uphold. Moreover, the practice of nomination, so detrimental to the atmosphere of a silent and prayerful election, is viewed with mistrust, inasmuch as it gives the right,... to deny that God-given right of every elector to vote only in favour of those who he is conscientiously convinced are the most worthy candidates. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, May 27, 1927: Baha’i Administration, p. 136)

Let them exercise the utmost vigilance so that the elections are carried out freely, universally and by secret ballot. Any form of intrigue, deception, collusion and compulsion must be stopped and is forbidden. (In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 8 March 1932 to a Local Spiritual Assembly translated from the Persian)

The friends must avoid the evil methods and detestable practices of the politicians. They must turn completely to God, and with a purity of motive, a freedom of spirit and a sanctity of heart, participate in the elections; otherwise the outcome will be chaos and confusion, serious difficulties will ensue, mischief will abound and the confirmation of God will be cut off. (In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 16 January 1923 to the Central Spiritual Assembly of Iran translated from the Persian)
QUALIFICATIONS OF THOSE TO VOTE FOR

The strength and progress of the Bahá’í community depend upon the election of pure, faithful and active souls. (Bahá’í Elections No. 22, p. 7.)

... it is incumbent upon the chosen delegates to consider without the least trace of passion and prejudice, and irrespective of any material consideration, the names of only those who can best combine the necessary qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience. (Bahá’í Elections., No. 9, p. 3.)

The electors ... must prayerfully and devotedly and after meditation and reflection elect faithful, sincere, experienced, capable and competent souls who are worthy of membership. (Bahá’í Elections No. 13, p. 4.)

Among the "necessary qualities" specified by the Guardian are those "of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience". With a heightened awareness of the functions to be performed by the elected body, the believer can properly assess those for whom a vote should be cast. From among the pool of those whom the elector believes to be qualified to serve, selection should be made with due consideration given to such other factors as age distribution, diversity, and gender. (From the letter of the Universal House of Justice, 25 March 2007)

... I do not feel it to be in keeping with the spirit of the Cause to impose any limitation upon the freedom of the believers to choose those of any race, nationality or temperament who best combine the essential qualifications for membership of administrative institutions. They should disregard personalities and concentrate their attention on the qualities and requirements of office, without prejudice, passion or partiality. The Assembly should be representative of the choicest and most varied and capable elements in every Bahá’í community. (Bahá’í Elections, No. 11, p. 4.)

Referring to members of Spiritual Assemblies, the Guardian wrote that they “must disregard utterly their own likes and dislikes, their personal interests and inclinations, and concentrate their minds upon those measures that will conduce to the welfare and happiness of the Bahá’í Community and promote the common weal.” Bahá’í institutions do exercise authority to guide the friends, and exert moral, spiritual and intellectual influence on the lives of individuals and communities. However, such functions are to be performed with the realization that an ethos of loving service pervades Bahá’í institutional identity. Qualifying authority and influence in this manner implies sacrifice on the part of those entrusted to administer the affairs of the Faith. Does not ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tell us that “when a lump of iron is cast into the forge, its ferrous qualities of blackness, coldness and solidity, which symbolize the attributes of the human world, are concealed and disappear, while the fire’s distinctive qualities of redness, heat and fluidity, which symbolize the virtues of the Kingdom, become visibly apparent in it.” As He averred, “ye must in
this matter—that is, the serving of humankind—lay down your very lives, and as ye yield yourselves, rejoice." (From the message of the Universal House of Justice of the 28th December, 2010)

**VOTING FOR INSTITUTION, NOT INDIVIDUAL**

With reference to your next question concerning the qualifications of the members of the Spiritual Assembly: there is a distinction of fundamental importance which should be always remembered in this connection, and this is between the Spiritual Assembly as an institution, and the persons who compose it. These are by no means supposed to be perfect, nor can they be considered as being inherently superior to the rest of their fellow-believers. It is precisely because they are subject to the same human limitations that characterize the other members of the community that they have to be elected every year. (From a letter dated 15 November 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers)

We should respect the N.S.A, and the local S.A because they are institutions founded by Bahá’u’lláh. It has nothing to do with personality, but is far above it. It will be a great day when the friends, on and off the assemblies, come to fully grasp the fact that it is not the individuals on an assembly which is important, but the assembly as an institution. (National Spiritual Assembly compilation, p. 9)

**CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP**

The elections, especially when annual, give the community a good opportunity to remedy any defect or imperfection from which the Assembly may suffer as a result of the actions of its members. Thus a safe method has been established whereby the quality of membership in Bahá’í Assemblies can be continually raised and improved. But, as already stated, the institution of the Spiritual Assembly should under no circumstances be identified with, or be estimated merely through, the personal qualifications of the members that compose it. (Bahá’í Elections, No 28, p. 10.)

There is no objection in principle to an Assembly being re-elected, whether in total or in part, provided the members are considered to be well qualified for that post. It is individual merit that counts. Novelty or the mere act of renewal of elections are purely secondary considerations. Changes in Assembly membership would be welcome so far as they do not prejudice the quality of such membership... (Bahá’í Elections No. 16, p. 5)

Shoghi Effendi has never said that the members of the National Assembly have to be renewed partially every year. The important thing is that they should be properly elected. It would be nice if there should be new members elected, for new blood always adds to the energy of the
group and will keep up their spirit. But this depends entirely upon the will of the delegates as represented in the result of their voting. (Lights of Guidance, 3rd ed., 1994, No. 63, p. 19.)

**WHEN IT IS DIFFICULT TO FIND SUITABLE CANDIDATES**

In regard to your question about qualifications of delegates and Assembly members: the qualifications which he outlined are really applicable to anyone we elect to a Bahá’í office, whatever its nature. But these are only an indication, they do not mean people who don’t fulfil them cannot be elected to office. We must aim as high as we can. He does not feel the friends should attach so much importance to limitations -- such as people perhaps not being able to attend Assembly or Convention meetings, because if they do, then the fundamental concept of everyone being willing to do Bahá’í service on administrative bodies will be weakened, and the friends may be tempted to vote for those who because of independent means or circumstances in their lives are freer to come and go but less qualified to serve. (Bahá’í Elections. No. 17, p. 6.)

It is a basic principle of elections for Bahá’í Spiritual Assemblies that each voter must vote for the nine people who, in his or her opinion, are best suited to serve. He may have a low opinion of all those who are eligible, but his duty is to vote for those nine from among them who, in his estimation, best meet the standards for service on a Spiritual Assembly. This is how it is possible to vote for exactly nine names. Since the membership of an Assembly is nine it would give rise to a number of statistical anomalies if voters were permitted to record votes for fewer or more than nine names. (Lights of Guidance, 3rd ed., 1994, No. 68, p. 21.)

... the elector ... is called upon to vote for none but those whom prayer and reflection have inspired him to uphold ... (Bahá’í Elections, No. 10, p. 4.)

**VOTING FOR ONESELF**

A believer has the right to vote for himself during the election time, if he conscientiously feels the urge to do so. This does not necessarily imply that he is ambitious or selfish, for he might conscientiously believe that his qualifications entitle him to membership in a Bahá’í administrative body, and he might be right. The essential, however, is that he should be sincere in his belief, and should act according to the dictates of his conscience. Moreover, membership in an Assembly or committee is a form of service, and should not be looked upon as a mark of inherent superiority, or a means for selfpraise. (Bahá’í Elections No. 15, p. 5.)
THE ROLE OF DELEGATES

... the delegates are lovingly made aware of their sacred responsibilities to attend, to consult and to vote. Admittedly, it is preferable that the delegates attend the sessions of the Convention in person so they may take an active part in all of its proceedings and acquaint their fellow-workers on their return with an account of the accomplishments, decisions and plans of their national community. (National Convention Compilation prepared by the research department of the Universal House of Justice, Dec 1999)

How great the privilege, how delicate the task of the assembled delegates whose function it is to elect such national representatives as would by their record of service ennoble and enrich the annals of the Cause! (From a letter dated 3 June 1925 to a National Convention, cf. "Bahá’í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932", pp. 87-88)

It is the vital duty of the delegates to unburden their hearts, state their grievances, disclose their views, and explain their motives. (Postscript in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi appended to a letter dated 13 April 1927 written on his behalf to a Local Spiritual Assembly)

In the exercise of their function as "an enlightened, consultative and co-operative body ", the delegates have an important contribution to make to the creation of an atmosphere conducive to effective consultation. For example, when offering advice and constructive recommendations to the National Spiritual Assembly, the delegates are called upon to "approach their task with ... detachment and ... concentrate their attention on the most important ... issues". Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf, states that the concentration on "problems of a purely secondary importance" will result in the meetings of the Convention being "somewhat lacking in spiritual force". Further, since the National Convention is a national Bahá‘í institution, the delegates must needs give attention to the interests of the Cause throughout the nation, rather than limiting their focus only to the needs of the region from which a particular delegate has been elected. (National Convention Compilation prepared by the research department of the Universal House of Justice, Dec 1999)

THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

It is the duty of the National Assembly to give earnest, prompt and prayerful consideration to the views of the delegates, weigh carefully their arguments and ponder their considered judgements, before they resort to voting and undertake to arrive at a decision according to the dictates of their conscience. They should explain their motives and not dictate, seek information and invite discussion. (Postscript in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi appended to a letter dated 13 April 1927 written on his behalf to a Local Spiritual Assembly)

Thirs is the duty to investigate and acquaint themselves with the considered views, the prevailing sentiments, the personal convictions of those whose welfare it is their solemn
obligation to promote. Theirs is the duty to purge once for all their deliberations and the general conduct of their affairs from that air of self-contained aloofness, from the suspicion of secrecy, the stifling atmosphere of dictatorial assertiveness, in short from every word and deed that might savour of partiality, self-centeredness and prejudice. Theirs is the duty, while retaining the sacred and exclusive right of final decision in their hands, to invite discussion, provide information, ventilate grievances, welcome advice from even the most humble and insignificant member of the Bahá’í Family, expose their motives, set forth their plans, justify their actions, revise if necessary their verdict, foster the spirit of individual initiative and enterprise, and fortify the sense of interdependence and co-partnership, of understanding and mutual confidence between them on one hand and all Local Assemblies and individual believers on the other. (From a letter dated 18 October 1927 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

It is my firm conviction that it is the bounden duty, in the interests of the Cause we all love and serve, of the members of the incoming National Assembly, once elected by the delegates at Convention time, to seek and have the utmost regard, individually as well as collectively, for the advice, the considered opinion and the true sentiments of the assembled delegates. Banishing every vestige of secrecy, of undue reticence, of dictatorial aloofness, from their midst, they should radiantly and abundantly unfold to the eyes of the delegates, by whom they are elected, their plans, their hopes, and their cares. They should familiarize the delegates with the various matters that will have to be considered in the current year, and calmly and conscientiously study and weigh the opinions and judgements of the delegates. The newly elected National Assembly, during the few days when the Convention is in session and after the dispersal of the delegates, should seek ways and means to cultivate understanding, facilitate and maintain the exchange of views, deepen confidence, and vindicate by every tangible evidence their one desire to serve and advance the common weal. Not infrequently, nay oftentimes, the most lowly, untutored, and inexperienced among the friends will, by the sheer inspiring force of selfless and ardent devotion, contribute a distinct and memorable share to a highly involved discussion in any given assembly. Great must be the regard paid by those whom the delegates call upon to serve in high position to this all-important though inconspicuous manifestation of the revealing power of sincere and earnest devotion. (From a letter dated 29 January 1925 to a National Spiritual Assembly, cf. "Bahá’í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932", pp. 78-80)

Concerning the status of members of the National Spiritual Assembly at Convention sessions the Guardian feels that the members of both the incoming and the outgoing Assemblies should be given the full right to participate in the Convention discussions. Those members of the National Spiritual Assembly who have been elected delegates will, in addition to the light of participation, be entitled to vote. The Guardian wishes thereby to render more effective the deliberations and the recommendations of the national representatives. He feels that the exercise of such a right by the members of the National Spiritual Assembly will enable them to consult more fully with the assembled delegates, to exchange fully and frankly with them their views, and to consider collectively the interests, needs and requirements of the Cause, This, he believes, is one of the primary functions of the Convention. (25 December 1933 to a National Spiritual Assembly)
The National Spiritual Assembly is present at the Convention as an institution, and its members are present as individual participants in the consultations. These two facts are not incompatible. All the delegates and the members of the National Spiritual Assembly should take part in the Convention in the spirit of free, frank, loving Bahá’í consultation. Most Bahá’ís perform many different functions in their lives. Very often a member of the National Assembly is also a delegate, a member of a Local Assembly, a member of one or more committees, and possibly also an assistant to an Auxiliary Board member. These multiple functions should not prevent him from expressing his views frankly and courteously in any consultation. (26 October 1983 to an individual believer)