

The Universal House of Justice

7 August 1985

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

This letter and the annexed memorandum of comments are addressed primarily to those National Spiritual Assemblies whose communities include large numbers of materially poor people but inasmuch as the principles expressed, as distinct from some of the procedures suggested, are of universal application, they are being sent to all National Assemblies.

There is a profound aspect to the relationship between a believer and the Fund, which holds true irrespective of his or her economic condition. When a human soul accepts Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this age and enters into the divine Covenant, that soul should progressively bring his or her whole life into harmony with the divine purpose—he becomes a co-worker in the Cause of God and receives the bounty of being permitted to devote his material possessions, no matter how meager, to the work of the Faith.

Giving to the Fund, therefore, is a spiritual privilege not open to those who have not accepted Bahá'u'lláh, of which no believer should deny himself. It is both a responsibility and a source of bounty. This is an aspect of the Cause which, we feel, is an essential part of the basic teaching and deepening of new believers. The importance of contributing resides in the degree of sacrifice of the giver, the spirit of devotion with which the contribution is made and the unity of the friends in this service; these attract the confirmations of God and enhance the dignity and self-respect of the individuals and the community.

To reemphasize the spiritual significance of contributing to the Faith by all members of the Bahá'í community, we quote the following extract from a letter of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Central and East Africa dated 8 August 1957:

All, no matter how modest their resources, must participate. Upon the degree of self-sacrifice involved in these individual contributions will directly depend the efficacy and the spiritual influence which these nascent administrative institutions, called into being through the power of Bahá'u'lláh, and by virtue of the Design conceived by the Center of His Covenant, will exert. A sustained and strenuous effort must henceforth be made by the rank and file of the avowed upholders of the Faith ...

We assure you of our prayers at the Sacred Threshold for your guidance and confirmation as you labor to develop this aspect of Bahá'í life in your communities.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Development of the Local and National Funds of the Faith Some Comments and Suggestions

While the friends have the sacred obligation and privilege to contribute to the Fund, each Local and National Assembly also has the inescapable duty of educating itself and the believers in the spiritual principles related to Bahá'í contributions, to devise simple methods to facilitate the flow and receipt of contributions, and to formulate effective procedures to ensure the wise expenditure of the funds of the Faith. The following comments and suggestions have been compiled at the request of the Universal House of Justice and are being shared with National Spiritual Assemblies to assist them in these important tasks.

A primary requisite for all who have responsibility for the care of the funds of the Faith is trustworthiness. This, as Bahá'u'lláh has stressed, is one of the most basic and vital of all human virtues, and its exercise has a direct and profound influence on the willingness of the believers to contribute to the Fund.

Conditions vary from country to country and, therefore, in educating the believers and developing the Fund, each National Spiritual Assembly needs to tailor its actions to the conditions of its area of jurisdiction.

In many parts of the world gifts of produce and handicrafts may be a large potential source of regular donations and could well be encouraged, proper arrangements being made for their collection and sale and the disposition of the proceeds.

Pledges can be useful as a means of encouraging contributions and of bringing the financial needs of the Cause to the attention of the friends. This method can be particularly helpful in a situation where a Spiritual Assembly has a major task to perform, such as the building of a Ḥazíratu'l-Quds or the establishment of a tutorial school, and needs to have some idea in advance of whether the funds for the project will be available. However, it would be entirely contrary to Bahá'í principles to bring any pressure to bear when calling for pledges or when endeavoring to collect them. Once a pledge has been given it is permissible to remind the donor, privately, of his expressed intention to contribute and to inquire courteously if it would be possible for him to honor his pledge, but Assemblies must be aware that such pledges are not an obligation in any legal sense; their redemption is entirely a matter of conscience. Lists of those making pledges must not be publicized.

The beloved Guardian has explained that the general and national interests of the Cause take precedence over local ones; thus contributions to local funds are secondary to those to national funds. However, the stability of the National Assembly rests on the firmness of the Local Spiritual Assemblies, and in the matter of educating the friends in the importance of the Fund, it is often most practical and efficacious to concentrate at first on the development of the local funds and the efficient operation of the Local Spiritual Assemblies. Then, once the friends understand the principle and learn from experience at a local level, they will the more easily understand the importance of the national fund and the work of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Regarding the local funds, it is suggested that until such time as the friends have developed the habit of contributing regularly and freely, any Local Spiritual Assembly which has a large community might appoint a small committee to assist the local treasurer in the discharge of his responsibilities. Such committees could be appointed after consultation with the Auxiliary Board member or assistant for the area. Great care must be taken in the appointment of the members of the committees; they must be both trustworthy and conscientious and must be imbued with awareness of the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of contributions to the funds. It is envisaged that these Treasury Committees would serve a number of functions:

- To render general assistance to the treasurer, as needed; for example, members of the committee could assist with issuing receipts or keeping accounts.
- To arrange for inspirational talks and discussions at Nineteen Day Feasts or at specially called meetings for the education of the friends in the spiritual and practical importance of contributing to the funds.
- To receive donations of money on behalf of the local treasurer and transmit these to him.
- To receive gifts of produce and handicrafts. The committee would be responsible for arranging for their sale and for handing over the proceeds to the local treasurer.

- To receive from the friends written pledges of their hope or intention of making a contribution to the local or national funds, whether in cash or in kind, and to assist in collecting them.

As to the national fund, in those areas where there are problems as a result of lack of banking facilities, unreliable mail systems and general difficulties of communication, it would be desirable for the National Spiritual Assembly to appoint a national committee to assist the national treasurer in a manner similar to that outlined above for Local Spiritual Assemblies. Further, it may even be necessary to subsidize, from the national fund, one or more trusted individuals, depending on the size of the national community, who would travel to rural areas to meet with the local Treasury Committees, assist them in the execution of their functions, explain the needs of the national fund, collect the donations to the national fund from the local areas and transmit them to the national treasurer.

In considering the above suggestions and their applicability to its national community, each National Assembly should also bear in mind the following points:

- It may find it valuable to study the methods being used already in those rural areas where notable success has been achieved in bringing about participation in sacrifice and giving.
- Voluntary service for the Faith could also be stressed. It has an effect on the Fund by reducing the cost of carrying out the work of the Faith, and should be undertaken with joy by the friends.
- It can be useful and helpful for both National and Local Spiritual Assemblies to make plans for financial self-sufficiency, set goals for levels of contributions, and share the news of progress towards such goals.
- Assemblies should take the members of their communities into their confidence and regularly inform them of the uses to which the Fund is put and the projects for which money is needed.