

STAR OF THE WEST

"We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations; that all nations shall become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men shall be strengthened, that diversity of religion shall cease and differences of race be annulled. So it shall be; these fruitless strifes; these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come."—BAHA'O'LLAH.

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Bahai Organization

Notes from memory written at the request of several friends, from a talk given at the home of Herr and Frau Kommerzinrat Schwarz, in reply to questions of Herr Jager, Saturday, November 20, 1920.

BY CHARLES MASON REMEY

SPIRITUAL consultation is one of the fundamental principles of the Bahai organization. As the work of the Cause increases it is found to be necessary that such consultation be established for the guidance, well-being, and stability of the work. For this end in various assemblies of Bahais, according to the instructions of the Center of the Covenant, boards of spiritual consultation have been established for the organization and direction of the activities of the Cause.

When the friends assemble for spiritual consultation, it has been found to be good to read prayers and Tablets in order that all human thoughts in the minds of those present be changed to divine thoughts, that the spirit of the Kingdom penetrate into the souls of all present, thus a spiritual harmony is established which is the most necessary element of Bahai consultation.

After reading of the holy Utterances the various subjects to be considered may be presented. It has been found best to consider each matter in turn, all present concentrating upon one question until that question is settled—then proceeding to the next matter. With this procedure there is no confusion of thought nor diffusion of energies.

In meetings of consultation it has been found to be important that each member present should speak freely and without constraint, always with great gentleness and consideration for the happiness of all present. It is good for each one of the people of the board of

consultation to express himself in turn. When the circuit of all present has been made, it will often be found that the thoughts expressed by the friends give rise to other thoughts in the minds, and then it is well to have a second or a third opportunity for each to express himself. With this full expression of thoughts, when these thoughts are in harmony with the principles and the spirit of the Cause, the condition is made for decisions based upon the spiritual instructions and methods of the kingdom.

In consultation the best results can not be attained when the people do not express the convictions and thoughts which lie deep in their hearts, for when they feel constrained the heart is distressed, and cannot function spiritually with the hearts of the others present, and when the hearts are constrained perfect consultation is not attained.

When the heart is expressing itself freely it is in joy and happiness, and this is an essential element in consultation; without it true spiritual guidance is not attainable, therefore great care should be taken that each one present should express himself fully in all spiritual joy and gladness of heart.

With a good knowledge of the teachings, upon which basis of the revealed Word all Bahai considerations should be based, and with an exaltation of the spirit of the Covenant, the friends in consultation are of one spirit, and of one thought, and there is a unity of

thought. This is only attainable with knowledge of the teachings when the hearts of all present are in the utmost state of severance and humbleness before the threshold of the Covenant. When this ideal condition exists, the right solutions of all questions are found, and there are no doubts in the hearts of the consultants. However, at times ideal conditions may not exist, and there may be a division of opinion among the members of the assembly. Under these conditions the beloved Abdul-Baha has instructed the believers to cast a vote, and for those in the minority to abide by the will of the majority. It has been found by adhering to this command that a harmony is maintained which bridges over, as it were, the times when opinions are divided—then later, when the people have a better knowledge of the teachings, and a more abundant confirmation of the Spirit, their difference of opinion will cease to exist, and eventually they will unite in support of the reality of the Covenant.

✓ Some of the friends of the Bahai Cause have been a little confused regarding the organization of the holy Cause because of the wide circulation of some words, to the effect that this Cause should never be organized—thus some have imagined that no form of Bahai organization should exist. Now of late we are informed by pilgrims returning to their homes from Palestine that Abdul-Baha has explained that these words circulated to the effect that the Cause should never be organized, give an impression very different from that of the reality of his teachings. Experience in the Bahai Cause shows us that when special questions arise, it is always well to gather together all of the holy Words treating of the subject, for when studying all of the divine teachings treating of any one subject we obtain an all around and a comprehensive conception of the truth of the matter. From one short excerpt from the holy Words, separated from

its context, erroneous meanings may be obtained. This danger does not exist when we study the particular statement in its rightful relation with the entire teaching.

Applying this principle of the relation of any one statement contained in the holy Words to the instructions in the entire teaching to this statement that "the Bahai Cause can never be organized," we see immediately that there is a discrepancy, for in the principles of the Cause we find the foundation for a very highly developed spiritual organization which will center about the establishment of the Bahai House of Justice. Ample provision for this institution is found in the revealed Word. The House of Justice will be the organic center of the Bahai Cause. Its duties will be so important as to be the central point of all Bahai matters in this world, even to the explanation and amplification of the holy way Words. This will be a spiritual organization.

Let us consider these two kinds of organization, namely, human and divine. or organizations *spiritually inorganic* and *spiritually organic*. In a spiritually organic institution there is life and growth, the organization ministering to the growth of the activities of the institution and in no way cramping nor obstructing its life and development. However, it is quite the opposite with a spiritually inorganic institution—one in which the workings are so lifeless, crystallized and inflexible as to preclude all possibility of life, growth and development, following the principles of divine organization. In the spiritually inorganic realm there is no movement and no change, and consequently no growth nor development. In other words, there is crystallization but no life. For example, compare a living plant with a fossil. In one we have organization and life, whereas in the other we have crystallization or fossilization and death. Applying this principle to religion, we see that the Manifestations of God have

brought divine life and have established spiritual organizations in the world, but with the passage of time, as these organizations have lost their spiritual power and become crystallized forms of human thought, the spiritual life of religion becomes extinguished, and, as with the fossil, only the external form remains. The spiritual organization of the Bahai Cause is based upon divine doctrines, and the living principles of God's Kingdom, and not upon external or human forms and principles. In other words, the Bahai Cause is not an inflexible organization, for it has life in it, and consequently its details are ever changing and moving, allowing growth and development. Thus it may be truly said that the Bahai Cause is not crystallized, but that it is organized.

In carrying on the Bahai work, it is necessary that we should organize our institutions upon the divine plan outlined in the teaching, rather than according to the standards of men. When the work is thus spiritually organized, the forms of organization are so supple as to admit of limitless expansion and development; thus this spiritual organization is ever ministering to the life and growth of the Cause. However, if methods of human organization creep into the Bahai work, the growth of the Cause is hampered, and troubles ensue, and such continue until the cause is removed. When an iron band is placed around a living tree one of two things happen; if the band remains intact it kills the tree or seriously impairs its life; or, the growth of the tree bursts asunder the band. So it is with the Bahai Cause and the limitations of human thought. The life of the Cause will be impaired unless these human fetters give way, allowing the Cause to grow and develop after the divine plan of the Kingdom. The revealed utterances of the Revelation are the basis of all activities amongst the Bahais. A careful study of these principles is necessary in order that they be

put into effect in the working of the Cause.

As explained in the revealed Words, the duty of a spiritual board of consultation is to meet in the spirit of the Kingdom in order to apply the divine principles of the Abha Kingdom to the various problems which are continually arising in the administration of the Cause. In order to attain the best results in consultation, each of the members of the board should be well informed regarding the divine commands in order that with love and oneness of spirit they may unite in carrying out these holy instructions in the workings of the assembly.

For example, when any special problem presents itself for solution, it is well to make a study of the holy Words pertaining to the question. Then, when these words are familiar to all the friends of the consultation body and their hearts are freed from the self, they will be spiritually guided in their consultations and deliberations, and the result will be good for the well-being and the growth of the Cause.

According to the Bahai standard, the first requisite for the board of spiritual consultation in an assembly of friends, is that the members should be firm in the Covenant and well versed and strong in the teachings and in the principles of the Bahai Cause, and that they should have proved themselves worthy of the responsibility of membership on this board by a record of steadfastness and service to the Covenant. For this reason it has been found better to place people on the bodies of spiritual consultation who have had such experience in the Cause and whose record of service and steadfastness is well known and established beyond a doubt.

The second requisite for membership on these spiritual boards is that the members should be able to work together and to co-operate in service. That is to say, for example, they should be

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West Englewood. Then I entered his presence in Roy Wilhelm's house.

I had gone to West Englewood with Silvia. We walked up from the little station, through the sweet, wild country, past the grove where the tables were set for the feast, a great circle cleared of underbrush, shady and fragrant with tall pine-trees, in the midst of tangled woods; then on up to the house where he was, he whose presence filled our eyes with light and without whom our days had been very dim and lifeless!

Ah, there he was again! There, on a corner of the porch that unique figure in the flowing garments, which meant the Heavenly Garment to us! We sat on the porch with him for a while.

Later he led us to the grove. There he talked to the people, sitting beneath a great tree, with a poor old woman on one side, very poor and humble, but with the most shining faith, and on the other Mrs. Krug, with her radiant prettiness and rich clothes. His words have been preserved, I will not repeat them; I remember them, besides, very imperfectly. But he said one thing which woke all my being: "This is a New Day, a New Hour!" I could not take notes—it was so beautiful, so life-bestowing to watch him, as he sat beneath that great tree, the people grouped in circles around him, teaching them as Jesus used to do in the open—rustling leaves and sky above his head!

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Bahai Organization

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those who are able to attend the meetings of consultation, and who have time for the performance of their spiritual duties as members of the meeting of consultation.

Several months ago a board of spiritual consultation was organized in the Washington assembly, in America, according to the following procedure: A general meeting of the entire assembly was held at which a committee of five was appointed to make a selection of nine candidates for the assembly of spiritual consultation. This committee of five met several times and, after much prayer and consultation, they selected nine people. Four of these were of their own number. Then the general assembly met, and the result of the work of the committee was made known. The general assembly then unanimously elected these nine candidates. It was found much better to select the candidates in a committee of five rather than in an open meeting with all the assembly present, for there were many matters and details to be minutely discussed, and this discussion might not have been feasi-

ble in a large gathering. The meetings of this body of consultation were arranged at a time most generally convenient to all, when the friends were not hurried, but could remain as long as necessary for the pursuance of the spiritual work.

This Committee of Consultation is now the center of administration and direction of the Bahai work in Washington. Its first work was to appoint several working committees from among the people of the assembly who were not members of this central body. From time to time, as conditions required it, these various committees met with the Committee of Consultation, by special appointment, to talk over and arrange the many activities of the Cause. The Committee of Consultation recognizing the necessity of keeping all the friends actively engaged in serving the Cause, a special effort was made to interest the new and the young believers in the service of the Cause, in order that all might have the blessing of engaging actively in the pathway of the Covenant.

Charles Mason Remey.