



6. The Spiritual Assembly, Its Treasurer, and My Envelope

Dedication to the Sacredness of the Bahá'í Fund Compiled by the National Spiritual Assembly of Azerbaijan



... appeals of a general character, carefully worded and moving and dignified in tone are welcome under all circumstances, [but] it should be left entirely to the discretion of every conscientious believer to decide upon the nature, the amount, and purpose of his or her contribution...

—Shoghi Effendi

All donations and contributions should be offered to the Treasurer of the Assembly, for the express purpose of promoting the interests of the Cause, throughout that locality or country.

—Shoghi Effendi

In previous issues of *The Roaring Fountains*, we discussed the role of the individual in unleashing the spiritual bounties of the Bahá'í Fund. The story of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the believer in Akká was a good example of how our stubborn inner voice can withhold from us the *"Holy Spirit's healing and quickening rays."* In this issue, we will examine the responsibility of the Spiritual Assembly and its treasurer. The Universal House of Justice urges Spiritual Assemblies to actively engage in the *"direct and unavoidable*

responsibility” of educating the friends on the “*spiritual principles related to Bahá’í contributions.*” This duty is so vital that the House of Justice cautions Spiritual Assemblies, stating that “*failure to educate the friends*” is equal to “*consciously depriving them of the spiritual benefits accruing from giving in the path of God.*”

A corollary to the sacred obligation of the friends to contribute to the Funds of the Faith, is the direct and unavoidable responsibility of each Local and National Assembly to educate them in the spiritual principles related to Bahá’í contributions. Failure to educate the friends in this aspect of the Faith is tantamount to consciously depriving them of the spiritual benefits accruing from giving in the path of God.

—*Universal House of Justice*

The above passage reveals that the Assembly’s responsibility is not simply to remind believers to contribute to the Bahá’í Fund, but to educate them on the “*spiritual principles*” of giving. These “*spiritual principles*” have been discussed in previous issues of *The Roaring Fountain* and include the importance of developing generosity, increasing our capacity for sacrifice, giving with a spirit of devotion, and actively serving the Cause—all so that we can open our hearts to “*confirmations from God, elevate our dignity and self-respect, and strengthen our spiritual progress.*”

The friends should certainly be encouraged and even urged to support financially this, as well as other national institutions of the Cause. But they should, under no circumstances, be required to do so.

—*Shoghi Effendi*



Shoghi Effendi, The Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith

Just as believers struggle to carry out their responsibilities toward the Bahá’í Fund, so do Assembly treasurers. Believers must conquer their fears and give sacrificially, but without hurting themselves or their dependents. Assembly treasurers, likewise, must draw a balance. They must conquer their fears and educate the believers, but without engaging in compulsion, which would harm the Fund and the community.

... I feel urged to remind you of the necessity of ever bearing in mind the cardinal principle that all contributions to the Fund are to be purely and strictly voluntary in character. It should be made clear and evident to every one that any form of compulsion, however slight and indirect, strikes at the very root principle underlying the formation of the Fund ever since its inception.

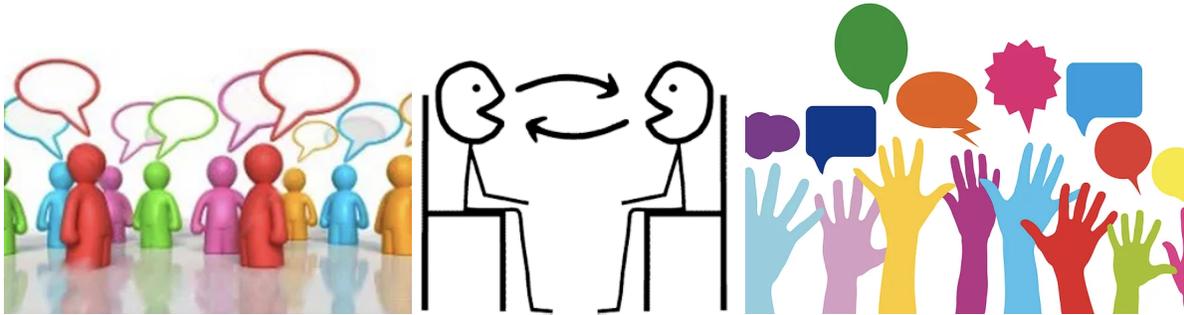
—*Shoghi Effendi*

In communities where Fund education is lacking, all of the friends do not participate, because they are not aware of the spiritual principle of regular and universal participation. Thus, a dearth of education leads to imbalanced participation—a few believers contribute large sums towards the Bahá'í Fund and others do not participate at all. The first group usually flourishes in their personal lives, while the latter group flounders. For our own spiritual growth, we should not be satisfied with this; the community should seek unity in universal participation.

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.

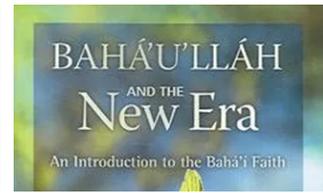
—*The Universal House of Justice*

A story recounted by Gloria Faizi about a very small Bahá'í community in Africa helped me understand the power of unified, universal participation in the Bahá'í Fund. She describes how, in one of the Nineteen Day Feasts, the Assembly treasurer presented educational material on the Bahá'í Fund and explained how universal participation would attract the confirmations of God and assistance from Concourse on High. Their community had never experienced full participation in the Bahá'í Fund, but that evening, everyone, including the children, decided to contribute. At the end of the Feast, the treasurer opened all the envelopes in a separate room and counted the contributions. A total of three dollars and ten cents had been collected.



The older members of the community were disheartened, certain that their community would be unable to carry out proclamation events with these limited funds. But a twelve-year-old youth stated, “If the Concourse on High says we can proclaim the Faith with three dollars and ten cents, then it means we can do it.”

Before she left the Feast, the Assembly secretary purchased a Bahá'í book, which she read on her bus ride home. The rain was coming down. At one of the stops, a man entered the bus, he was soaked and sat next to her. After a few stops, he asked her what she was reading, and she explained it was a Bahá'í book. A few stops later, he asked about the Bahá'í Faith. The secretary began to talk to him about the Faith, and he said how fortunate he felt to take the bus and learn about the Bahá'í Faith; it was the first time he had taken the bus in seven years!



The man was the editor of a well-known newspaper. When he was about to get off the bus, he asked if he could borrow the book and later meet the Bahá'í community. The following week, the editor assigned a photographer and a reporter to the community, and the newspaper published a series of 14 articles on the Bahá'í Faith. At the same time, he opened his company auditorium to the Bahá'ís for various proclamation events, and used his contacts to arrange for two radio and two television programs on the Bahá'í Faith. Three dollars and ten cents purchased 14 articles, two radio programs, and two television programs on the Faith—a true testament to the power of education and unity in participation to attract divine assistance and confirmation.

Personally, when our treasurer reports on how much we paid for electric and water bill, I cannot but imagine that I am contributing towards the utility bill but when he reads the Bahá'í Writings on generous and sacrificial contributions, my heart and soul are awakened by the fragrances of the Holy Writings; I am inspired to reflect deeply; and I am reminded of my unique spiritual privilege to contribute towards humanity's evolution. Perhaps that is why the House of Justice has made education a “direct and unavoidable responsibility” of each Assembly and cautioned against “failure to educate the friends in this aspect of the Faith.”

Failure to educate the friends in this aspect of the Faith is tantamount to consciously depriving them of the spiritual benefits accruing from giving in the path of God.

—Universal House of Justice

I can say with conviction that no Spiritual Assembly wishes to see believers deprived of “*spiritual benefits accruing from giving in the path of God.*” For this reason, Assemblies must try to eliminate barriers that prevent treasurers from educating the friends. As a former treasurer who struggled with my “*direct and unavoidable responsibility,*” I have used this issue of *The Roaring Fountain* to talk about some of the hindrances I faced. The reader should bear in mind, however, that my understanding of these spiritual principles may not always reflect the truth found in the Bahá'í writings.

As discussed at the beginning of this article, the most difficult challenge for a treasurer is the fear of crossing the fine line between spiritual education and compulsion. The treasurer must make an effort to control this fear, because it may hinder his ability to fulfill his spiritual duty. When focusing on avoiding compulsion, treasurers find it difficult to openly talk to the community, so much so that s/he often prefer not to say anything and only report on the income and expenditures. This deprives the friends and the community of spiritual benefits. But what fear can a treasurer have in light of Shoghi Effendi's eloquent framework for making appeals to the friends? He has provided four simple principles: they should be of a “*general character,*” “*carefully worded,*” “*moving,*” and “*dignified in tone.*”

... appeals of a general character, carefully worded and moving and dignified in tone are welcome under all circumstances, [but] it should be left entirely to the discretion of every conscientious believer to decide upon the nature, the amount, and purpose of his or her contribution...

—Shoghi Effendi

A treasurer who "carefully words" his appeals to the community with love, sincerity, and reliance on God will surely be confirmed in his endeavor. While educating the friends on the Fund is the Assembly's "direct and unavoidable responsibility," there is no requirement that the treasurer is the only individual to carry out this duty; the Spiritual Assembly may appoint other individuals to act under its direction. The words of Shoghi Effendi and the House of Justice, set forth in this issue, can guide such representatives in fulfilling the responsibility to educate the believers on the Fund.

A corollary to the sacred obligation of the friends to contribute to the Funds of the Faith, is the direct and unavoidable responsibility of each Local and National Assembly to educate them in the spiritual principles related to Bahá'í contributions. Failure to educate the friends in this aspect of the Faith is tantamount to consciously depriving them of the spiritual benefits accruing from giving in the path of God.

—Universal House of Justice



The Journey Continues...

Next Chapter: The Role of Assembly Treasurer (Part two)...

The Roaring Fountain Bulletins

Stories about the Fund

Fundraising Projects



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