

*'The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh is the divinely ordained system  
for which nations and peoples so desperately search.'*  
Universal House of Justice 2007

## **My role in Bahá'í elections – Introduction**

This study material has been created on behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly in preparation for our participation in Unit Convention. It is based on passages from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (p. 14), the 25 March 2007 letter, Ridván 2010 and 28 December 2010 letters of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World. It has three parts, two of which can be found in this document. It is hoped that the friends will consult together on this material over three sessions.

**Purpose:** To help us understand better the nature and significance of the Bahá'í electoral process and the qualities we must look for in those for whom we cast our votes; to increase our appreciation of the sacred responsibility of participating in Bahá'í elections and our part in the three tier process of the election of the Supreme Body, the Universal House of Justice; to help us increase our desire to attend Unit Convention and play an active part in the election and consultation there.

**Practice:** To wholeheartedly participate in all Bahá'í elections in which we are called upon to vote.

**Facilitation:** The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and letters of the Universal House of Justice offer significant opportunities for study and sharing of insights. The purpose of this deepening activity is not to complete a comprehensive study of the guidance quoted in these documents but to begin or further that process.

## STUDY MATERIAL – Section 1

**Timing:** This section of the study guide should take no more than 40 minutes.

1. Please read the first three paragraphs of the 25 March 2007 letter, reproduced below, and then answer the questions. Please undertake this activity in pairs or small groups. (15 minutes.)

To the Bahá'ís of the World  
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

One of the signs of the breakdown of society in all parts of the world is the erosion of trust and collaboration between the individual and the institutions of governance. In many nations the electoral process has become discredited because of endemic corruption. Contributing to the widening distrust of so vital a process are the influence on the outcome from vested interests having access to lavish funds, the restrictions on freedom of choice inherent in the party system, and the distortion in public perception of the candidates by the bias expressed in the media. Apathy, alienation, and disillusionment are a consequence, too, as is a growing sense of despair of the unlikelihood that the most capable citizens will emerge to deal with the manifold problems of a defective social order. Evident everywhere is a yearning for institutions which will dispense justice, dispel oppression, and foster an enduring unity between the disparate elements of society.

The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh is the divinely ordained system for which nations and peoples so desperately search. Hailed by the Báb in the Persian Bayán, its foundational features prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, this Order is without precedent in human history for its standard of justice and its commitment to the practical realization of the oneness of mankind, as well as for its capacity to promote change and the advancement of world civilization. It provides the means by which the Divine Will illumines the path of human progress and guides the eventual establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Throughout the entire planet the devoted followers of Bahá'u'lláh are labouring to develop further the Bahá'í Administrative Order described by the Guardian 'not only as the nucleus but the very pattern of the New World Order', thus setting the foundation for a world civilization destined to yield its dazzling splendour in the centuries to come. They do so notwithstanding the conditions of turmoil and disorder alluded to by Bahá'u'lláh in affirming that 'the world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System – the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.

- a) What are the implications of the above paragraphs for the life of the Bahá'í community? (For example in terms of its characteristics, level of activity, attitudes of its members and so on.)
- b) How might we as individuals and in our own community develop these qualities?

---

---

---

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
2. In the same pairs or small groups please read the passages below and share your reflections. (15 minutes.)

With the concerted worldwide endeavour to advance the process of entry by troops gathering momentum through implementation of the provisions of the Five Year Plan, it is now opportune that the believers everywhere give greater attention to strengthening the process by which Assemblies, national and local, are elected. 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. (25 March 2007, paragraph 4.)

Let no one fail to appreciate the possibilities thus created. Passivity is bred by the forces of society today. A desire to be entertained is nurtured from childhood, with increasing efficiency, cultivating generations willing to be led by whoever proves skilful at appealing to superficial emotions. Even in many educational systems students are treated as though they were receptacles designed to receive information. That the Bahá'í world has succeeded in developing a culture which promotes a way of thinking, studying, and acting, in which all consider themselves as treading a common path of service--supporting one another and advancing together, respectful of the knowledge that each one possesses at any given moment and avoiding the tendency to divide the believers into categories such as deepened and uninformed--is an accomplishment of enormous proportions. And therein lie the dynamics of an irrepressible movement. (Ridván 2010, paragraph 10.)

- a) How can we learn to increase universal participation in all election processes?
- b) What attitudes, capacities and skills are developed in each of us when we are engaged in the electoral process?

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

3. In the whole group please consult on the following question. Please take around 10 minutes.

How might study of these passages assist us in understanding our part in creating the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh?

## STUDY MATERIAL – Section 2

**Timing:** This section of the study guide should take not more than 40 minutes.

1. Please read the passages below and consult on what we learn from them. Please undertake this activity in pairs or small groups. (20 minutes.)

And now, concerning the House of Justice which God hath ordained as the source of all good and freed from all error, it must be elected by universal suffrage, that is, by the believers. Its members must be manifestations of the fear of God and daysprings of knowledge and understanding, must be steadfast in God's faith and the well-wishers of all mankind. By this House is meant the Universal House of Justice, that is, in all countries a secondary House of Justice must be instituted, and these secondary Houses of Justice must elect the members of the Universal one. Unto this body all things must be referred. It enacteth all ordinances and regulations that are not to be found in the explicit Holy Text... This House of Justice enacteth the laws and the government enforceth them. The legislative body must reinforce the executive, the executive must aid and assist the legislative body so that through the close union and harmony of these two forces, the foundation of fairness and justice may become firm and strong, that all the regions of the world may become even as Paradise itself... (Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 14.)

In describing Bahá'í elections, Shoghi Effendi, through a letter written on his behalf, conveyed that 'Bahá'í electoral procedures and methods have, indeed, for one of their essential purposes the development in every believer of the spirit of responsibility. By emphasizing the necessity of maintaining his full freedom in the elections, they make it incumbent upon him to become an active and well-informed member of the Bahá'í community in which he lives.' The manner in which the elector exercises the right and privilege to cast his vote is therefore of great significance. Shoghi Effendi's instruction in this passage further explains that 'to be able to make a wise choice at the election time, it is necessary for him to be in close and continued contact with all local activities, be they teaching, administrative or otherwise, and to fully and wholeheartedly participate in the affairs of the local as well as national committees and assemblies in his country. It is only in this way that a believer can develop a true social consciousness and acquire a true sense of responsibility in matters affecting the interests of the Cause. Bahá'í community life thus makes it a duty for every loyal and faithful believer to become an intelligent, well-informed and responsible elector, and also gives him the opportunity of raising himself to such a station. (25 March 2007 letter, paragraph 5.)

- a) You may wish to consider the following questions. How can we learn more about the sacred nature of elections? In what spaces can we get to know each other and become 'an active and well-informed member of the Bahá'í community'? How can we become 'intelligent, well-informed and responsible' electors?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

- b) Please consult in the same groups on what might be some of the challenges to universal participation and how we as individuals, institutions and as a community can overcome these. (10 minutes.)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

2. Please read the following paragraph together as a whole group and reflect on how we can learn to accompany each other more to participate in the Unit Convention. (10 minutes.)

The developments we have mentioned thus far--the rise in capacity to teach the Faith directly and to enter into purposeful discussion on themes of spiritual import with people from every walk of life, the efflorescence of an approach to study of the writings that is wedded to action, the renewal of commitment to provide spiritual education to the young in neighbourhoods and villages on a regular basis, and the spread in influence of a programme that instils in junior youth the sense of a twofold moral purpose, to develop their inherent potentialities and to contribute to the transformation of society--are all reinforced, in no small measure, by yet another advance at the level of culture, the implications of which are far-reaching indeed. This evolution in collective consciousness is discernable in the growing frequency with which the word 'accompany' appears in conversations among the friends, a word that is being endowed with new meaning as it is integrated into the common vocabulary of the Bahá'í community. It signals the significant strengthening of a culture in which learning is the mode of operation, a mode that fosters the informed participation of more and more people in a united effort to apply Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to the construction of a divine civilization, which the Guardian states is the primary mission of the Faith. Such an approach offers a striking contrast to the spiritually bankrupt and moribund ways of an old social order that so often seeks to harness human energy through domination, through greed, through guilt or through manipulation... (Ridván 2010, paragraph 19.)

## STUDY MATERIAL – Section 3

**Timing:** This study session should take no more than 30 minutes.

1. Please read paragraphs 28-30 of the letter of 28 December 2010 and paragraph 7 of the letter of 25 March 2007, quoted below. What might we wish to learn from our consultations when undertaking these study sessions? What are the qualities and skills we are looking for in the individual we elect as delegate to National Convention? Please undertake this activity in pairs or small groups. (20 minutes.)

In setting out for you in these pages developments we are eager to see in the administrative work of the Faith during the next Five Year Plan, we are reminded of the repeated warnings raised by the Guardian in this regard. 'Let us take heed lest in our great concern for the perfection of the administrative machinery of the Cause,' he stated, 'we lose sight of the Divine Purpose for which it has been created.' The Bahá'í administrative machinery, he reiterated again and again, 'is to be regarded as a means, and not an end in itself'. It is intended, he made clear, 'to serve a twofold purpose'. On the one hand, 'it should aim at a steady and gradual expansion' of the Cause 'along lines that are at once broad, sound and universal.' On the other, 'it should ensure the internal consolidation of the work already achieved.' And he went on to explain: 'It 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 coordination of activities among the divers elements that constitute the Bahá'í community.

It is our earnest hope that, in your efforts over the next Plan to promote the sound and harmonious development of Bahá'í administration at all levels, from the local to the national, you will do your utmost to help the friends carry out their functions in the context of the organic process of growth gathering momentum across the globe. The realization of this hope will hinge, to a large extent, on the degree to which those who have been called upon to render such service...recognize the great privilege that is theirs and understand the boundaries which this privilege establishes for them.

Service on the institutions and agencies of the Faith is indeed a tremendous privilege, but not one that is sought by the individual; it is a duty and responsibility to which he or she may be called at any given time. It is understandable, of course, that all those involved in Bahá'í administration would rightly feel they have been invested with a singular honour in forming part, in whatever way, of a structure designed to be a channel through which the spirit of the Cause flows. Yet they should not imagine that such service entitles them to operate on the periphery of the learning process that is everywhere gaining strength, exempt from its inherent requirements. Nor should it be supposed that membership on administrative bodies provides an opportunity to promote one's own understanding of what is recorded in the Sacred Text and how the teachings should be applied, steering the community in whatever direction personal preferences dictate. 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.' (28 December 2010, paragraphs 28-30.)

While there should be no mention of personalities in connection with Bahá'í elections, it is quite appropriate for believers to discuss the requirements and qualifications for membership in the institution to be elected. Shoghi Effendi offers clear guidance on this point: 'I feel that reference to personalities before the election would give rise to misunderstanding and differences. 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 a membership without reference or application, however indirect, to particular individuals.' 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. The elector should make his choice after careful thought over an extended period before the actual election.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



2. As a whole group, please share any key reflections from this consultation. (10 minutes.)

Prior to the election, individuals should take time to reflect carefully on the qualities and skills required of the delegate to National Convention.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---