

SOME ASPECTS OF BAHÁ'Í CONSULTATION

IN ALL THINGS IT IS NECESSARY TO CONSULT

1. "In all things it is necessary to consult. This matter should be forcibly stressed by thee, so that consultation may be observed by all. The intent of what hath been revealed from the Pen of the Most High is that consultation may be fully carried out among the friends, inasmuch as it is and will always be a cause of awareness and of awakening and a source of good and well-being." Bahá'u'lláh, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 3
2. "Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmutheth conjecture into certitude. It is a shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation." Bahá'u'lláh, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 3

HOW TO CONSULT

3. "... Therefore true consultation is spiritual conference in the attitude and atmosphere of love. Members must love each other in the spirit of fellowship in order that good results may be forthcoming. Love and fellowship are the foundation." 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 72
4. "The first duty of the members is to effect their own unity and harmony, in order to obtain good results. If there be no unity, or the Committee becomes the cause of inharmony, undoubtedly, it is better that it does not exist...
"Therefore, when the unity of the members of the Committee is established, their second duty is to read the verses and communes, to be in a state of commemoration and mindfulness, that they may see each other as if in the presence of God." 'Abdu'l-Bahá Published in "*Star of the West*", Vol. 8, No. 9, p. 114, quoted in *Compilation of Compilations I* pg. 101
5. "The prime requisites for them that take counsel together are
 - purity of motive,
 - radiance of spirit,
 - detachment from all else save God,
 - attraction to His Divine Fragrances,
 - humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones,
 - patience and long-suffering in difficulties
 - and servitude to His exalted Threshold.

Should they be graciously aided to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen kingdom of Bahá shall be vouchsafed to them...

"The members thereof must take counsel together in such wise that no occasion for ill-feeling or discord may arise. This can be attained when every member expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument. Should any one oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed."

'Abdu'l-Bahá quoted in *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 21, also: *Consultation: a Compilation*, p. 5

6. "The second principle is that of detachment in consultation. The members of an Assembly must learn to express their views frankly, calmly, without passion or rancor. They must also learn to listen to the opinions of their fellow members without taking offense or belittling the views of another. Bahá'í consultation is not an easy process. It requires love, kindness, moral courage and humility. Thus no member should ever allow himself to be prevented from expressing frankly his view because it may offend a fellow member; and realizing this, no member should take offense at another member's statements." from a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Italy, August 26 1965 , *Lights of Guidance* pg. 180

7 “Patience and restraint, however, should at all times characterize the discussions and deliberations of the elected representatives of the local community, and no fruitless and hair-splitting discussions indulged in, under any circumstances.” Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, pp. 16-17.

8. “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.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in *Bahá’í Administration*, p. 22

WHAT ABOUT RIGHT AND WRONG?

9. “Though one of the parties may be in the right and they disagree that will be the cause of a thousand wrongs, but if they agree and both parties are in the wrong, as it is in unity the truth will be revealed and the wrong made right.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 13-14

10. “If they agree upon a subject, even though it be wrong, it is better than to disagree and be in the right, for this difference will produce the demolition of the divine foundation.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 7

11. “Blessed are they who are the means of making unity among the friends, and pity on those who *in the right or wrong* are the cause of discord. For instance: when one is in the right in a case in dispute, and his minority prevents him from establishing this rightful matter, instead of agitating the subject, if he will humbly submit to sacrifice his position for the sake of unity and peace, God will accept that sacrifice and ere long the rightful matter will be established without any further dispute, by the Divine assistance; whereas without such sacrifice and submissiveness great harm might ensue. The friends must be prepared to efface themselves at all times. Seeking the approval of men is many times the cause of imperiling the approval of God.” - ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Star of the West*, Vol. 6, no. 6, p. 45

12. “The Assembly may make a mistake, but, as the Master pointed out, if the Community does not abide by its decisions, or the individual Bahá’í, the result is worse, as it undermines the very institution which must be strengthened in order to uphold the principles and laws of the Faith. He tells us God will right the wrongs done. We must have confidence in this and obey our Assemblies.” Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in *The Local Spiritual Assembly*, p. 27

EXPRESSING YOUR OPINION...

13. “The second principle is that of detachment in consultation. The members of an Assembly must learn to express their views frankly, calmly, without passion or rancor. They must also learn to listen to the opinions of their fellow members without taking offense or belittling the views of another. Bahá’í consultation is not an easy process. It requires love, kindness, moral courage and humility. Thus no member should ever allow himself to be prevented from expressing frankly his view because it may offend a fellow member; and, realizing this, no member should take offense at another member’s statements.” The Universal House of Justice, August 26, 1965; *Lights of Guidance*, p. 179-80

14. “The honored members must with all freedom express their own thoughts, and it is in no wise permissible for one to belittle the thought of another. . . .” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in *Bahá’í Administration*, p. 22

15. “They must . . . 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.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Bahá’í Administration*, p. 22

16. “. . . The Guardian would advise you to give up the method of asking other members to voice your opinion and suggestions. This indirect way of expressing your views to the Assembly not only creates an atmosphere of secrecy which is most alien to the spirit of the Cause, but would also lead to many misunderstandings and complications. The assembly members must have the courage of their convictions, but must also express whole-hearted and unqualified obedience to the well-considered judgment and directions of the majority of their fellow-members.” Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 16

THE CLASH OF DIFFERING OPINIONS...

17. “. . . Consultation must have for its object the investigation of truth. He who expresses an opinion should not voice it as correct and right but set it forth as a contribution to the consensus of opinion, for the light of reality becomes apparent when two opinions coincide. A spark is produced when flint and steel come together.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 72

18. “Through the clash of personal opinions, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated, the spark of truth is often ignited, and Divine guidance revealed. The friends should therefore not feel discouraged at the differences of opinion that may prevail among the members of an Assembly, for these, as experience has shown, and as the Master’s words attest, fulfill a valuable function in all Assembly deliberations.” Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 16

WHAT, WHERE, AND WITH WHOM TO CONSULT:

19. “Your letter of 14 February 1973 enquiring about the uses of Bahá’í consultation has been received.

“This is, of course, a matter in which rigidity should be avoided.

“When a believer has a problem concerning which he must make a decision, he has several courses open to him. If it is a matter that affects the interests of the Faith he should consult with the appropriate Assembly or committee, but individuals have many problems which are purely personal and there is no obligation upon them to take such problems to the institutions of the Faith; indeed, when the needs of the teaching work are of such urgency it is better if the friends will not burden their Assemblies with personal problems that they can solve by themselves.

“A Bahá’í who has a problem may wish to make his own decision upon it after prayer and after weighing all the aspects of it in his own mind; he may prefer to seek the counsel of individual friends or of professional counselors such as his doctor or lawyer so that he can consider such advice when making his decision; or in a case where several people are involved, such as a family situation, he may want to gather together those who are affected so that they may arrive at a collective decision. There is also no objection whatever to a Bahá’í asking a group of people to consult together on a problem facing him.

“It should be borne in mind that all consultation is aimed at arriving at a solution to a problem and is quite different from the sort of group baring of the soul that is popular in some circles these days and which borders on the kind of confession that is forbidden in the faith. On the subject of confession the Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf to an individual believer:

‘We are forbidden to confess to any person, as do the Catholics to their priests, our sins and shortcomings, or to do so in public, as some religious sects do. However, if we spontaneously desire to acknowledge we have been wrong in something, or that we have some fault of character, and ask another person’s forgiveness or pardon, we are quite free to do so. The Guardian wants to point out, however, that we are not obliged to do so. It rests entirely with the individual.’ ” Universal House of Justice, *Consultation: a Compilation*, p. 23. also in *The Compilation of Compilations Vol. I*, p. 109.