

XI. CONSULTATION

Compiled from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l

Original English



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1. No Welfare, Well-Being Can Be Attained Except Through Consultation

"...Say: No man can attain his true station except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation."

(Bahá'u'lláh: Consultation: A Compilation, p. 3, from a previously untranslated Tablet)

1. Consultation and Compassion

"...The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion...."

(Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 126)

1. Consultation, Frank and Unfettered

"...Consultation, frank and unfettered, is the bedrock of this unique order. Authority is concentrated in the hands of the elected members of the National Assembly. Power and initiative are primarily vested in the entire body of the believers acting through their local representatives."

(From a postscript by the Guardian to a letter written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, November 18, 1933)

1. The Purpose of Consultation — Should the People of a Village Consult One Another...

"The purpose of consultation is to show that the views of several individuals are assuredly preferable to one man, even as the power of a number of men is of course greater than the power of one man. Thus consultation is acceptable in the presence of the Almighty, and hath been enjoined upon the believers, so that they may confer upon ordinary and personal matters, as well as on affairs which are general in nature and universal."



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"For instance, when a man hath a project to accomplish, should he consult with some of his brethren, that which is agreeable will of course be investigated and unveiled to his eyes, and the truth will be disclosed. Likewise on a higher level, should the people of a village consult one another about their affairs, the right solution will certainly be revealed. In like manner, the members of each profession, such as in industry, should consult, and those in commerce should similarly consult on business affairs. In short, consultation is desirable and acceptable in all things and on all issues."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Consultation: A Compilation, quoted in the Guardian's letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of Persia, February 15, 1922, p. 8, Wilmette 1980 ed.)

1. Each Bosom Must Be a Telegraph Station

"Each bosom must be a telegraph station — one terminus of the wire attached to the soul, the other, fixed in the Supreme Concourse — so that inspiration may [pg 177] descend from the Kingdom of Abha and questions of reality be discussed. Then opinions will coincide with truth; day by day there will be progression and the meetings become more radiant and spiritual. The attainment is conditioned upon unity and agreement. The more perfect the love and agreement, the more the divine confirmations and assistance of the Blessed Perfection will descend... In discussions look toward the reality without being self-opinionated. Let no one assert and insist upon his own mere opinion; nay, rather, let each investigate the reality with the greatest love and fellowship. Consult upon every matter and when one presents the point of view of the reality itself, that shall be acceptable to all. Then will spiritual unity increase among you, individual illumination will be greater, happiness more abundant and you will draw nearer and nearer to the Kingdom of God."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 183)

1. Any Person Can Refer a Matter to the Assembly

"Regarding consultation: Any person can refer a matter to the Assembly for consultation whether the other party wishes to or not. In matters which affect the Cause the Assembly should, if it deems it necessary, intervene even if both sides don't want it to, because the whole purpose of the Assemblies is to protect the Faith, the Communities and the individual Bahá'ís as well."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, October 17, 1944)

1. Every Member to Express Freely and Openly His Views

"But before the majority of the Assembly comes to a decision, it is not only the right but the sacred obligation of every member to express freely and openly his views, without being afraid of displeasing or alienating any of his fellow-members. In view of this important administrative principle of frank and open consultation, 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."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, October 28, 1935)

1. Abstaining Does Not Arise in Bahá'í Voting

"It is important to realize that the spirit of Bahá'í consultation is very different from that current in the decision-making processes of non-Bahá'í bodies."

"The ideal of Bahá'í consultation is to arrive at a unanimous decision. When this is not possible a vote must be taken. In the words of the beloved Guardian: '...when they are called upon to arrive at a certain decision, they should, after dispassionate, anxious and cordial consultation, turn to God in prayer, and with earnestness and conviction and courage record their vote and abide by the voice of majority, which we are told by the Master to be the voice of truth, never to be challenged, and always to be whole-heartedly enforced.'" [pg 178]

"As soon as a decision is reached it becomes the decision of the whole Assembly, not merely of those members who happened to be among the majority."

"When it is proposed to put a matter to the vote, a member of the Assembly may feel that there are additional facts or views which must be sought before he can make up his mind and intelligently vote on the proposition. He should express this feeling to the Assembly, and it is for the Assembly to decide whether or not further consultation is needed before voting."

"Whenever it is decided to vote on a proposition all that is required is to ascertain how many of the members are in favour of it; if this is a majority of those present, the motion is carried; if it is a minority, the motion is defeated. Thus the whole question of 'abstaining' does not arise in Bahá'í voting. A member who does not vote in favour of a proposition is, in effect, voting against it, even if at the moment he himself feels that he has been unable to make up his mind on the matter."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, March 6, 1970: Consultation: A Compilation, p. 12, February 1978)

1. Majority Decisions — Instances When Assembly May Decide that All Nine Members Must Be Present

"Concerning a majority decision, ordinarily, the majority referred to is the majority of those present at a particular Assembly meeting. In any event, the Assembly can take no action unless at least a quorum of the members is present. There may be instances, however, in which the Assembly may specify that before voting on particularly important questions all nine members of the Assembly should be present and participate in the consultation and voting. This is within the discretion of the Assembly to decide."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Mexico, July 22, 1984)

1. No Dissenting Votes in the Cause

"There are no dissenting votes in the Cause. When the majority of an Assembly decides a matter the minority, we are told by the Master, should accept this. To insist on having one's dissenting vote recorded is not good, and achieves no constructive end. We must learn to look upon the laws of the Cause and administrative principles and not the shortcomings of the individual members of an Assembly."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, March 19, 1950)

1. Suspend Consultation when Enmity and Threats Occur

"The honoured members of the Spiritual Assembly should exert their efforts so that no differences may occur, and if such differences do occur, they should not reach the point of causing conflict, hatred and antagonism, which lead to threats. When you notice that a stage has been reached when enmity and threats are about to occur, you should immediately postpone discussion of the subject, until wranglings, disputations, and loud talk vanish, and a propitious time is at hand."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Consultation: A Compilation, from a previously untranslated Tablet) [pg 179]

1. Take No Important Step in Personal Affairs Without Consultation

"Settle all things, both great and small, by consultation. Without prior consultation, take no important step in your own personal affairs. Concern yourselves with one another. Help along one another's projects and plans. Grieve over one another. Let none in the whole country go in need. Befriend one another until ye become as a single body, one and all...."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Ibid.)

1. When a Believer Has a Problem Several Courses Open to Him

"Your letter of 14th 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 counsellors 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.'"

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, March 19, 1973: Consultation: A Compilation, pp. 12-13)

1. Assembly Cannot Require a Member to Absent Himself from Consultation

"In your letter of 4 April you enquire further about the principles governing the presence of a member of the National Assembly when a matter concerning him or her personally is being discussed."

"The first principle to bear in mind is that every member of an Assembly has an absolute and incontrovertible right to be present at every meeting of that [pg 180] body and to be fully informed of every matter coming before it."

"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 rancour. They must also learn to listen to the opinions of their fellow members without taking offence 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 offence at another member's statements."

"The third principle is that if a believer feels that he has been done an injustice by the Assembly, he should appeal the decision in the normal way."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Italy, August 26, 1965)

1. A Member May Wish to Absent Himself While Own Situation Being Discussed

"We note that ... left the room while the National Assembly discussed ways and means of helping her. Naturally, if one wishes to absent himself while his own situation is being discussed by the National Assembly, there is no objection. The National Assembly cannot require a member to remove himself from the consultation, and he is fully entitled to remain."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Italy, February 23, 1965)

"It should also be understood that a member may wish to absent himself from a meeting at which subjects in which he is personally involved are to be discussed. In such cases he may do so unless the Assembly requires him to be present."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the International Teaching Centre, January 22, 1975)

1. Frank, Full, Unprejudiced Consultation Must Govern Work

"There cannot be in our Faith any room for the political maneuverings so common to the outside world. Frankness, full unprejudiced consultation, must govern all Assembly and committee work, and anything less than this is not only unworthy of a Bahá'í, but a direct disobedience to the Master's instructions and a sign of lack of faith."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 29, 1948)
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