# XIX. THE NINETEEN DAY FEAST

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

Original English

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### A. Nature and Function

1. **Purpose of the Nineteen Day Feast**

"...The main purpose of the Nineteen Day Feasts is to enable individual believers to offer any suggestion to the Local Assembly which in its turn will pass it to the National Spiritual Assembly. The Local Assembly is, therefore, the proper medium through which local Bahá'í communities can communicate with the body of the national representatives...."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, November 18, 1933: The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 24, A Compilation from the Universal House of Justice)

1. **The Lord's Supper — The Nineteen Day Feast**

"You must continue to keep the Nineteen Day Feast. It is very important; it is very good. But when you present yourselves in the meetings, before entering them, free yourselves from all that you have in your heart, free your thoughts and your minds from all else save God, and speak to your heart. That all may make this a gathering of love, make it the cause of illumination, make it a gathering of attraction of the hearts, surround this gathering with the Lights of the Supreme Concourse, so that you may be gathered together with the utmost love."

"Each one of you must think how to make happy and pleased the other members of your Assembly, and each one must consider all those who are present as better and greater than himself, and each one must consider himself less than the rest. Know their station as high, and think of your own station as low."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Star of the West, Vol. IV, No. 7, p. 120)

1. **Abdu'l-Bahá is Present in Heart and Soul**

"Make ye an effort in every meeting that the Lord's Supper may become realised and the heavenly food descend. This heavenly food is knowledge, understanding, faith, assurance, love, affinity, kindness, purity of purpose, attraction of hearts and the union of souls.... When the

meeting is conducted after this manner, then Abdu'l-Bahá also is present in heart and soul, though His body may not be with you."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Bahá'í World Faith, pp. 407-408)

1. **Attendance at Nineteen Day Feasts Not Obligatory**

"Attendance at Nineteen Day Feasts is not obligatory but very important, and every believer should consider it a duty and a privilege to be present on such occasions."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, December 15, 1947: Bahá'í News, No. 210, p. 3, August 1948) [pg 241]

1. **If Feasts Be Held in Proper Fashion...**

"As to the Nineteen Day Feast, it rejoiceth mind and heart. If this feast be held in the proper fashion, the friends will, once in nineteen days, find themselves spiritually restored, and endued with a power that is not of this world."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 91)

1. **Prophecies About Feasts**

"...This is that 'divine table' (or food) of which mention is made in the prophecies: 'On that day they shall gather together at the divine table', and 'people shall come from the East and the West and arrive in His Kingdom'."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. II, p. 422, 1940 ed.)

1. **Visitors Can Take Part in Consultation, They Cannot Vote**

"As to visitors to a Nineteen Day Feast, Bahá'ís from anywhere in the world should of course be warmly welcomed, and may take part in consultation. However, only members of the local community can vote on recommendations to the Local Spiritual Assembly."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, December 1, 1968)

1. **Omit Consultative Part of Feast if Non-Bahá'í Appears**

"The rule that only Bahá'ís may take part in Nineteen Day Feasts is not a new one, indeed it was often reiterated by the beloved Guardian. However, when a non-Bahá'í does appear at a Feast he should not be asked to leave; rather the Assembly should omit the consultative part of the Feast, and the non-Bahá'í should be made welcome. Of course, if the non-Bahá'í is well known to the Bahá'ís and no hurt feelings would be caused, he might be asked to retire during the consultative part. In general, however, it is much better to avoid such problems where possible,

and you seem to have taken the wisest course during your friends' last visit by taking them out for the evening, so avoiding the problem."

"During the period of consultation the Bahá'ís should be able to enjoy perfect freedom to express their views on the work of the Cause, unembarrassed by the feeling that all they are saying is being heard by someone who has not accepted Bahá'u'lláh and who might, thereby, gain a very distorted picture of the Faith. It would also be very embarrassing for any sensitive non-Bahá'í to find himself plunged into the midst of a discussion of the detailed affairs of a Bahá'í Community of which he is not a part."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, March 24, 1970)

1. **Voting Rights Cannot Be Removed for Failure to Attend Feast**

"The Guardian has never heard of any ruling by which a believer who does not attend three consecutive 19 Day Feasts can be deprived of his voting rights. He does not consider that such action is justifiable at all. The whole question is whether a person considers himself a Bahá'í or not, and is willing to adhere [pg 242] to the principles of the Faith and accept the authority of the Guardian and the Administration — whether that individual is able, or always in a condition psychologically to attend Feasts and Bahá'í meetings is an entirely different subject...."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria, March 2, 1951)

1. **Non-Bahá'í Attendance at Nineteen Day Feast**

"With regard to the attendance of non-Bahá'ís at a Nineteen Day Feast, you can explain to ... the essentially domestic, administrative nature of the Nineteen Day Feast.... The Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf on 21 September, 1946:

'As regards your question concerning Nineteen Day Feasts ... as to non-Bahá'ís attending, this should by all means be avoided, but if non-believers come to a Nineteen Day Feast, they should not be put out, as this might hurt their feelings.'"

"This is why, if a non-Bahá'í does appear at a Nineteen Day Feast he should be made to feel welcome, but a Bahá'í should certainly not invite a non-Bahá'í to attend."

"A non-Bahá'í who asks to be invited to a Feast will usually understand if this matter is explained to him."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, March 13, 1967)

1. **The Nineteen Day Feast for Bahá'ís Exclusively — No Variation from this Principle Permitted**

"The beloved Guardian has instructed me to write you concerning an action recently taken by your National Assembly, as published in your January-February Bahá'í News, that non-Bahá'ís

may attend 19 Day Feasts if 'the earnestness of their interest in the Faith' is vouched for by a declared believer.

"The Guardian wishes me to direct your attention to the fact that none of the institutions of the Faith nor its cardinal principles may be changed under any circumstances."

"The 19 Day Feast is an institution of the Cause, first established by the Bab, later confirmed by Bahá'u'lláh, and now made a prominent part of the administrative order of the Faith. These 19 Day Feasts are for the Bahá'ís, and the Bahá'ís exclusively, and no variation from this principle is permitted."

"Thus the Guardian feels you should rescind the action taken by your Assembly in opening the Feasts to 'near Bahá'ís', as it is not consistent with the spirit of the administrative order for non-Bahá'ís or near Bahá'ís to attend the 19 Day Feasts, particularly the administrative portion of the Feast."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria, May 28, 1954: The Nineteen Day Feast, November 1975)

1. **Bahá'í Groups, Isolated Believers and Friends Should Observe the Nineteen Day Feast**

"In reply to your letter of November 8th we feel that all friends, whatever their circumstances, should be encouraged to observe the Nineteen Day Feast. [pg 243] Obviously it can only be an official administrative occasion where there is a Local Spiritual Assembly to take charge of it, present reports to the friends, and receive their recommendations. But groups, spontaneous gatherings of friends, and even isolated believers should certainly remember the day and say prayers together. In the case of a group it may well hold the Feast in the manner in which a Local Spiritual Assembly would do so, recognizing of course that it has no official administrative standing."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, December 1, 1968, Bahá'í Journal of the British Isles, No. 190, March-April 1969)

1. **Where Nineteen Day Feast Should Be Held**

"The matter of where the Nineteen Day Feasts should be held is certainly one for the Spiritual Assembly to decide; but the Haziratu'l-Quds seems the logical place on most occasions. Until the friends have a place of worship ... this building will also be used for devotional meetings, as well as for administrative purposes."

"If under some circumstances, some special Feast is offered in the home of one of the believers, with the approval of the Spiritual Assembly, there can be no objection; but, generally speaking, he feels it is better to use the Haziratu'l-Quds."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, February 18, 1954: The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 31)

1. **The Owner of the House Must Personally Serve**

"...The owner of the house must personally serve the beloved ones. He must seek after the comfort of all and with the utmost humility he must show forth kindness to every one. If the Feast is arranged in this manner and in the way mentioned, that supper is the 'Lord's Supper', for the result is the same result and the effect is the same effect."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. II, pp. 468-469)

1. **Children Up to Age Fifteen Permitted to Attend Feasts**

"Up to the age of fifteen, children of Bahá'í parents are considered to be Bahá'ís and are permitted to attend such functions as Feasts. Upon reaching the age of fifteen, however, the child must make his own declaration of faith if he wishes to continue as a Bahá'í. Again, the mechanics of enrollment are left to the discretion of the National Spiritual Assembly."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Brazil, March 27, 1968)

1. **District Nineteen Day Feasts**

"Each city will have its own Spiritual Assembly, not a number of district ones. Naturally, district 19 Day Feasts can be held where there are very many Bahá'ís in one city."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, March 31, 1949: The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 29) [pg 244]

## B. Time for Holding Nineteen Day Feast

1. **Time for Holding the Nineteen Day Feast**

"We have your letter of October 12, 1971 concerning the date for the holding of the Nineteen Day Feast. It is preferable that Nineteen Day Feasts be held on the first day of the Bahá'í month, but if it should be difficult to do so, it is permissible to hold it on a succeeding day of the Bahá'í month. The matter is left to the discretion of the Local Spiritual Assembly."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Teaching Committee of Iceland, October 28, 1971, Australian Bahá'í Bulletin, No. 213, May 1972, p. 7)

1. **If Feast Clashes with Regular Day for Public Meeting**

"The Nineteen Day Feast should be held, preferably, on the first day of the Bahá'í month, that is to say the Bahá'í day, beginning at sunset. If this is not possible for some good reason, for example that it clashes with the regular day for a public meeting, then it may be held later, but it must fall within that same Bahá'í month and should be on the nearest possible date."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, August 8, 1969)

1. **Feast Should Be Held on Prescribed Day Before Sunset**

"Regarding the time for holding of the Nineteen Day Feasts and elections: The Guardian would advise your Assembly to urge the friends to hold such gatherings on the prescribed day before sunset. If impossible, then it is permissible to hold them on the preceding day...."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, December 24, 1939: Bahá'í Meetings, The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 28)

1. **Feast Can Be Celebrated During Intercalary Days, Also Month of Fasting**

"...relative to the last Nineteen Day Feast, Shoghi Effendi sees no objection if the friends choose to celebrate it on one of the intercalary days. They may also celebrate it during the month of fasting, provided they abstain from food."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, August 2, 1929)

1. **In High Latitudes Permissible to Go by the Clock**

"As to whether the celebrating of the Feasts, Holy Days and the Fast should follow the rising and the setting of sun, in the high latitudes it is permissible to go by the clock."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Teaching Committee of Iceland October 28, 1971: Australian Bahá'í Bulletin, No. 213, May 1972, p. 7)

1. **"Most Suitable" Day for Celebrations of the Nineteen Day Feast**

"...You ask if it is within the discretion of a Local Spiritual Assembly, to schedule the Feasts at times other than the first day of a Bahá'í month, and point out that attendance was very low when the Feasts were held in the middle of a week, but that when held on a Saturday many more of the friends were [pg 245] able to attend. It seems obvious, therefore, that the intent of the Local Assembly, in loving consideration of the members of its community, was to make the participation in a Nineteen Day Feast available to as many of the believers as possible. Perhaps the Assembly was basing its decision on Abdu'l-Bahá's statement, taken from the compilation on the Nineteen Day Feast, that the 'object' of the Feast is 'concord, that through this fellowship hearts may become perfectly united...'"

"Other passages from that same compilation are: 'This Feast is a bringer of joy. It is the groundwork of agreement and unity. It is the key to affection and fellowship... 'The believers of God must assemble and associate with each other in the utmost love, joy and fragrance.'"

"On the other hand, since the beloved Guardian expressed a preference, and considered it 'most suitable', for the Feast to be held on the first day of each month, the House of Justice hopes that the friends everywhere will aim at scheduling their Nineteen Day Feasts in this way, and that the friends themselves will arrange their personal affairs to be able to attend."

"As in so many aspects of our beloved Faith, this is a matter of the gradual maturing of the Bahá'ís and of the institutions. The House of Justice feels that you should lovingly guide the Local Assemblies in this matter, but leave it to their discretion for the time being."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Mexico, October 10, 1985)

## C. Programme for the Nineteen Day Feast

### 1. Devotional Part of Feast

"The question regarding the devotional part of the Feast has been obscured because once he used the term 'devotional' in its strict sense, which of course means prayer, and once loosely, in the sense in which the Bahá'ís usually understand it, and that is the meeting together and reading from the teachings which precedes the administrative — or consultative — aspect of the 19 Day Feast. The two statements in no way change the method of holding this part of the Feast which, in the East at any rate, is always opened with prayers and afterwards Tablets and excerpts from Bahá'u'lláh's, or the Master's or the Guardian's writings may be read or, for that matter, the Bible or the Qur'an quoted."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, April 11, 1949: Bahá'í Meetings, The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 30)(Qur'án 46:15)

### 1. Programme for Devotions Outlined

"Concerning the matter of the devotions at Nineteen Day Feasts. We see no contradiction in the three statements of the beloved Guardian. In essence they all describe exactly the same procedure, namely, that the Feast is opened with devotional readings, that is to say prayers and meditations, from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Bab, and the Master. Following these passages may be read from other Tablets, from the Holy Scriptures of previous Dispensations, and from the writings of the Guardian. It is clear, however, that the beloved Guardian would not wish his own words to be read as part of an arranged devotional programme in which they would [pg 246] be interspersed among words of Holy Scripture. In other words, at the Nineteen Day Feast, where words of the Guardian are to be read they should follow any selections from the Scriptures and not be mixed with them. This does not mean, however, that subsequently in the Feast, any of these types of writings may not be read as suitable during the consultation."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Hands of the Cause of God, August 25, 1965: cited in a letter from the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, October 15, 1972)

### 1. Writings which Can Be Read in Spiritual Part of Feast

"The Writings of the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh can certainly be read any time at any place; likewise the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá are read freely during the spiritual part of the Feast. The Guardian has

instructed that during the spiritual part of the Feast, his own writings should not be read. In other words, during the spiritual part of the Feast, readings should be confined to the Writings of the Bab, Bahá'u'lláh and to a lesser extent, of the Master; but during that part of the Feast the Guardian's writings should not be read. During the period of administrative discussion of the Feast, then the Guardian's writings may be read. Of course, during the administrative part of the Feast there can be no objection to the reading of the Writings of the Bab, Bahá'u'lláh or Abdu'l-Bahá."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, April 27, 1956: Ibid., p. 9)

1. **Reading from Writings of the Guardian at Feast in Persia**

"Concerning the permissibility of reading selections from the writings of the beloved Guardian at Nineteen Day Feasts in Persia: It is true, as you rightly point out, that the beloved Guardian in a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States stated that only the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá should be read during the devotional part of the Nineteen Day Feast...."

"...it should be borne in mind that the Persian writings of Shoghi Effendi are unique in nature, and many of them, unlike his English letters and messages addressed to the western believers, are interspersed with supplications, prayers and homilies of a devotional character which are suitable for the spiritual part of Bahá'í Feasts."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, October 15, 1972)

1. **Advisable to Read from Our Own Holy Writings**

"First, he feels that although in principle there is certainly no reason why excerpts from other Sacred Scriptures should not be read in the spiritual part of our Feasts, that as this is particularly an occasion when Bahá'ís get together to deepen their own spiritual life, it is, generally speaking, advisable for them to read from their own holy Writings in the spiritual part of the Feast."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, February 18, 1954: Bahá'í Meetings and the Nineteen Day Feast, p. 31, Wilmette, 1976)

1. **Music at Bahá'í Feasts**

"Music is permitted during the spiritual part — or any part — of the 19 Day Feast."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, June 30, 1952: Ibid.) [pg 247]

1. **Advisable Believers Make Use of Hymns, Poems and Chants**

"With regard to your question concerning the use of music in the Nineteen Day Feasts, he wishes you to assure all the friends that not only he approves of such a practice, but thinks it even advisable that the believers should make use, in their meetings, of hymns composed by Bahá'ís themselves, and also of such hymns, poems and chants as are based on the Holy Words."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, April 7, 1935: Ibid., p. 5)

1. **Instrumental Music May Be Used at Feasts**

"Instrumental music may be used at the Bahá'í Feasts."

"There is no objection to showing appreciation by the clapping of hands."

"If an individual has a teaching appointment on the same evening as a 19 Day Feast, it is left to the individual to judge which is the most important."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, August 20, 1956: Ibid., p. 33)

1. **Shoghi Effendi Provided for the Period of Consultation**

"...In the Arabic Bayan the Bab called upon His followers to gather together once every nineteen days to show hospitality and fellowship. Bahá'u'lláh here confirms this and notes the unifying role of such occasions."

"Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi after Him have gradually unfolded the institutional significance of this injunction. Abdu'l-Bahá emphasized the importance of the spiritual and devotional character of these gatherings. Shoghi Effendi, besides further elaborating the devotional and social aspects of the Feast, has developed the administrative element of such gatherings and, in systematically instituting the Feast, has provided for a period of consultation on the affairs of the Bahá'í community, including the sharing of news and messages."

(Bahá'u'lláh: The Kitab-i-Aqdas: N. 82, p. 202)

1. **Consultation in the Nineteen Day Feast**[1]

"The Bahá'ís must learn to forget personalities and to overcome the desire — so natural in people — to take sides and fight about it. They must also learn to really make use of the great principle of consultation. There is a time set aside at the 19 Day Feasts for the community to express its views and make suggestions to its Assembly; the Assembly and the believers should look forward to this happy period of discussion, and neither fear it nor suppress it. Likewise, the Assembly members should fully consult, and in their decisions put the interest of the Cause first and not personalities, the will of the majority prevailing."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria, June 30, 1949: Bahá'í Meetings; The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 30)

1. **Selling of Items at the Nineteen Day Feast**

"As to the sale of items during the Nineteen Day Feast, we leave this to your discretion, bearing in mind that the principal purpose of holding the Feast should not be diverted and that pressure should not be placed upon the friends to participate in the purchase of articles offered for sale.

1. (See also: No. 288)

Neither should it become an habitual thing. It would be better if the sale was not conducted during the Feast itself, but held at a separate time before or after the Feast proper."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama, April 1, 1968) [pg 248]