

Participant Handouts

Builders of Communities:
**Restoring the Spirit —
Celebrating the Nineteen
Day Feast**

An Assembly Development Module Workshop

Celebrating the Nineteen Day Feast

OVERVIEW FOR PARTICIPANTS

Purpose

- ★ To create a deeper appreciation of what the experience of Feast is intended to be
- ★ To begin the process of consulting on creative ways to enhance and refine the celebration of Feast

This workshop is equally useful to Assemblies and to individuals. Its objective is to create a deeper appreciation of what the experience of Feast is intended to be and to begin the process of consulting on creative ways to enhance and refine the celebration of Feast.

Activities provide familiarity with the framework, purpose, and possibilities of the three parts of Feast. The workshop also focuses on preparation for Feast; integrating the arts into Feast; planning Feasts that meet the needs of children, youth, and adults; incorporating cultural diversity; and uniting hearts through hospitality and fellowship.

What you will find inside your handouts:

- ★ Quotations and worksheets for the various segments of the workshop
- ★ An evaluation form to be filled out by you
- ★ An evaluation form to be filled out by the Assembly within two months after the workshop

If you would like to have information on additional workshops or other Assembly development resources, ask your Assembly Development representative or contact the Office of Assembly Development at (847) 733-3490, by mail at 1233 Central Street, Evanston, IL 60201, or by e-mail at OAD@usbnc.org.

Note:

If time is short for any exercise, focus on the quotations in **bold**.

The Call to a New State of Mind

“The evolution of local and national Bahá’í Assemblies at this time calls for a new state of mind on the part of their members as well as on the part of those who elect them. . . .”

“The evolution of local and national Bahá’í Assemblies at this time calls for a new state of mind on the part of their members as well as on the part of those who elect them, for the Bahá’í community is engaged in an immense historical process that is entering a critical stage. Bahá’u’lláh has given to the world institutions to operate in an Order designed to canalize* the forces of a new civilization.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1996.

“. . . Spiritual Assemblies must rise to a new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities as channels of divine guidance, planners of the teaching work, developers of human resources, builders of communities, and loving shepherds of the multitudes. They can realize these prospects through increasing the ability of their members to take counsel together in accordance with the principles of the Faith and to consult with the friends under their jurisdiction, through fostering the spirit of service, through spontaneously collaborating with the Continental Counselors and their auxiliaries, and through cultivating their external relations. Particularly must the progress in the evolution of the institutions be manifest in the multiplication of localities in which the function of the Spiritual Assembly enhances the individual believer’s capacity to serve the Cause and fosters unified action. In sum, the maturity of the Spiritual Assembly must be measured not only by the regularity of its meetings and the efficiency of its functioning, but also by the continuity of the growth of Bahá’í membership, the effectiveness of the interaction between the Assembly and the members of its community, the quality of the spiritual and social life of the community, and the overall sense of vitality of a community in the process of dynamic, ever-advancing development.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1996.

“An expansion of thought and action in certain aspects of our work would enhance our possibilities for success in meeting our . . . commitments.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1990.

“The burgeoning influence of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation seemed . . . to have assumed the character of an onrushing wind blowing through the archaic structure of the old order, felling mighty pillars and clearing the ground for new conceptions of social organization. . . . Even the Community of

* **Canalize:** to channel into a particular direction; provide an outlet for

“... this quickening wind . . . ventilates the modes of thought of us all, renewing, clarifying, and amplifying our perspectives.”

the Most Great Name itself is experiencing the rigorous effects of this quickening wind as it ventilates the modes of thought of us all, renewing, clarifying, and amplifying our perspectives as to the purpose of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh in the wake of humanity's suffering and turmoil.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1992.

“Present-day conceptions of what is natural and appropriate in relationships – among human beings themselves, between human beings and nature, between the individual and society, and between the members of society and its institutions – reflect levels of understanding arrived at by the human race during earlier and less mature stages in its development. If humanity is indeed coming of age, if all the inhabitants of the planet constitute a single people, if justice is to be the ruling principle of social organization – then existing conceptions that were born out of ignorance of these emerging realities have to be recast.

“Movement in this direction has barely begun.”

Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information, January 23, 1995, in *The Prosperity of Humankind*, section III.

“. . . the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behavior: those patterns by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly is manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth. . . . It involves the practice of collective worship of God.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1996.

“. . . change, ever more rapid change, is a constant characteristic of life at this time. . . .”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1990.

“Change is an evolutionary process requiring patience with one's self and others, loving education and the passage of time as the believers deepen their knowledge of the principles of the Faith, gradually discard long-held traditional attitudes and progressively conform their lives to the unifying teachings of the Cause.”

The Universal House of Justice, July 25, 1984, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986*, p. 634.

Purposes of the Nineteen Day Feast

Focus questions

- ★ What metaphors and expressions are used to describe the Feast?
- ★ What are purposes of the Feast?

“The Nineteen Day Feast, its framework, purpose and possibilities, have in recent years become a subject of increasing inquiry among the friends . . . and we feel the time has come for us to offer clarifications.”

The Universal House of Justice, August 27, 1989, in *A Wider Horizon, Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1983-1992*, p. 66; also in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 9.13.

“‘If this feast be held in the proper fashion,’ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states, ‘the friends will, once in nineteen days, find themselves spiritually restored, and endued* with a power that is not of this world.’ To ensure this glorious outcome the concept of the Feast must be adequately understood by all the friends.”

The Universal House of Justice, August 27, 1989, in *A Wider Horizon, Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1983-1992*, p. 66; also in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 9.14.

“Do not call it a meeting. Call it a confluence* of holy souls; a convocation* of those who love the Lord; a retreat for the people of the All-Merciful; a palace-hall for all who sing His praise. For the members of that gathering are each one a lighted taper, and that council a mansion of the moon and stars. It hath been blessed by the Lord of all mankind, and hath made current the Feast as set forth in the Most Holy Book.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p.11, #15.

“The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh encompasses all units of human society; integrates the spiritual, administrative and social processes of life; and canalizes* human expression in its varied forms towards the construction of a new civilization. The Nineteen Day Feast embraces all these aspects at the very base of society. Functioning in the village, the town, the city, it is an institution of which all the people of Bahá are members. It is intended to promote unity, ensure progress, and foster joy.”

The Universal House of Justice, August 27, 1989, in *A Wider Horizon, Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1983-1992*, p. 66; also in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 9.13-9.14.

“. . . it is illuminating indeed to view the Nineteen Day Feast in the context in which it was conceived. It is ordained in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* in these words: ‘It hath been enjoined upon you once a month to offer hospitality, even should ye serve no more than water, for God hath willed to bind your hearts together, though it be through heavenly and earthly means combined.’ It is

- * **Endue:** to invest or endow with a gift or quality; to clothe
- * **Confluence:** a coming together, as the flowing together of two or more streams; an assemblage
- * **Convocation:** a group of people gathered in answer to a summons; an assembly
- * **Canalize:** to channel into a particular direction; provide an outlet for

Purposes of the Nineteen Day Feast, continued

“The Nineteen Day Feast represents the new stage in this enlightened age to which the basic expression of community life has evolved.”

clear, then, that the Feast is rooted in hospitality, with all its implications of friendliness, courtesy, service, generosity and conviviality*. The very idea of hospitality as the sustaining spirit of so significant an institution introduces a revolutionary new attitude to the conduct of human affairs at all levels, an attitude which is critical to that world unity which the Central Figures of our Faith laboured so long and suffered so much cruelty to bring into being. It is in this divine festival that the foundation is laid for the realization of so unprecedented a reality.”

The Universal House of Justice, August 27, 1989, in *A Wider Horizon, Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1983-1992*, p. 70; also in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 9.16.

“It is notable that the concept of the Feast evolved in stages in relation to the development of the Faith. At its earliest stage in Iran, the individual friends, in response to Bahá’u’lláh’s injunctions, hosted gatherings in their homes to show hospitality once every nineteen days and derived inspiration from the reading and discussion of the Teachings. As the community grew, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá delineated and emphasized the devotional and social character of the event. After the establishment of Local Spiritual Assemblies, Shoghi Effendi introduced the administrative portion and acquainted the community with the idea of the Nineteen Day Feast as an institution. It was as if a symphony, in three movements, had now been completed.

“But it is not only in the sense of its gradual unfoldment as an institution that the evolution of the Feast must be regarded; there is a broader context yet. The Feast may well be seen in its unique combination of modes as the culmination of a great historic process in which primary elements of community life – acts of worship, of festivity and other forms of togetherness – over vast stretches of time have achieved a glorious convergence*. The Nineteen Day Feast represents the new stage in this enlightened age to which the basic expression of community life has evolved. Shoghi Effendi has described it as the foundation of the new World Order, and in a letter written on his behalf, it is referred to as constituting ‘a vital medium for maintaining close and continued contact between the believers themselves, and also between them and the body of their elected representatives in the local community.’

- * **Convivial:** festive; befitting a feast
- * **Convergent:** coming together; merging

Purposes of the Nineteen Day Feast, continued

“... the Feast is an arena of democracy at the very root of society. . . .”

“Moreover, because of the opportunity which it provides for conveying messages from the national and international levels of the administration and also for communicating the recommendations of the friends to those levels, the Feast becomes a link that connects the local community in a dynamic relationship with the entire structure of the Administrative Order. But considered in its local sphere alone there is much to thrill and amaze the heart. Here it links the individual to the collective processes by which a society is built or restored. Here, for instance, the Feast is an arena of democracy at the very root of society, where the Local Spiritual Assembly and the members of the community meet on common ground, where individuals are free to offer their gifts of thought, whether as new ideas or constructive criticism, to the building processes of an advancing civilization. Thus it can be seen that aside from its spiritual significance, this common institution of the people combines an array* of elemental social disciplines which educate its participants in the essentials of responsible citizenship.”

The Universal House of Justice, August 27, 1989, in *A Wider Horizon, Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1983-1992*, pp. 67-68; also in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 9.14-9.15.

“That you may all attain the high mark set for the Feast as a ‘bringer of joy’, the ‘groundwork of agreement and unity’, the ‘key to affection and fellowship’ will remain an object of our ardent supplications at the Holy Threshold.”

The Universal House of Justice, August 27, 1989, in *A Wider Horizon, Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1983-1992*, p. 70; also in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 9.16-9.17.

* **Array**: a large and impressive grouping or organization; a regular order or arrangement

Effects of the Nineteen Day Feast

Focus questions

- ★ What are the intended effects on the individual believer?
- ★ What are the intended effects on the community of friends?

“As to the Nineteen Day Feast, ye must give this your most careful attention, and firmly establish it. For this Feast bringeth bliss and unity and love to the lovers of God.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, pp. 7-8, #3.

“Ye have written of the Nineteen Day festivities. This Feast is a bringer of joy. It is the groundwork of agreement and unity. It is the key to affection and fellowship. It diffuseth the oneness of mankind.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 8, #4.

“Give ye great weight to the Nineteen Day gatherings, so that on these occasions the beloved of the Lord and the handmaids of the Merciful may turn their faces toward the Kingdom, chant the communes, beseech God’s help, become joyfully enamoured each of the other, and grow in purity and holiness, and in the fear of God, and in resistance to passion and self. Thus will they separate themselves from this elemental world, and immerse themselves in the ardours of the spirit.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 9, #7.

“You have asked as to the Feast in every Bahá’í month. This Feast is held to foster comradeship and love, to call God to mind and supplicate Him with contrite hearts, and to encourage benevolent pursuits. That is, the friends should there dwell upon God and glorify Him, read the prayers and holy verses, and treat one another with the utmost affection and love. . . . Let all discussion centre on the doing of charitable acts and holy deeds, that laudable results may be the fruit thereof.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 9, #9.

“. . . make of the Feasts occasions of joy and fellowship reminiscent of the feasts [the agape or ‘love feasts’ of the early Christians] that our forebears used to hold in connection with their commemoration of the Lord’s Supper. . . .”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 10, #12.

“The Nineteen Day Feast was inaugurated by the Báb and ratified by Bahá’u’lláh, in His holy book, the Akdas [sic], so that people may gather together and outwardly show fellowship and love, that the divine mysteries may be

Effects of the Nineteen Day Feast, continued

“All who are present will be intoxicated with the breezes of the Love of God, and the Breath of the Holy Spirit will with tremendous power inspire the hearts.”

disclosed. The object is concord, that through this fellowship hearts may become perfectly united, and reciprocity and mutual helpfulness be established. Because the members of the world of humanity are unable to exist without being banded together, cooperation and mutual helpfulness is the basis of human society. Without the realization of these two great principles no great movement is pressed forward. . . .

“In brief, this is my hope: that the Nineteen Day Feast become the cause of great spiritual solidarity* between the friends, that it may bring believers into the bond of unity, and we will then be so united together that love and wisdom will spread from this centre to all parts. This Feast is a divine Feast. It is a Lord’s supper. It attracts confirmation of God like a magnet. It is the cause of the enlightenment of hearts. . . .

“When they gather in this meeting, all those present must turn their faces toward the Kingdom of Abhá, and from their hearts supplicate, invoke and entreat toward the lofty throne, beg of God’s forgiveness for all shortcomings, read the teachings and arise to His service.

“Then spread the feast and give refreshments. Assuredly great results will be the outcome of such meetings. Material and spiritual benefits will be assured. All who are present will be intoxicated with the breezes of the Love of God, and the Breath of the Holy Spirit will with tremendous power inspire the hearts.

“If this meeting be established on such a rock, it will become a power which will attract heavenly confirmations, be the means of the appearance of the Light of God, and the reality of every subject will become unfolded. Such a meeting will be under the protection of God. It is my hope that you will continually hold these meetings and that each time it will become more and more the centre of all the virtues, the point for the effulgence* of God.

* **Solidarity:** union or fellowship arising from common responsibilities and interests

* **Effulgence:** shining forth brilliantly; radiant

May your hearts be enlightened!

May your faces become radiant!

May your spirits be illumined!

May your thoughts find wider range of vision!

May your spiritual susceptibilities be increased!

Effects of the Nineteen Day Feast, continued

“... these [Feasts] form a rallying-point for the friends and help to unite them and deepen them in the Faith.”

May the realm of God surround you, and may your hearts become the treasury of heaven!

This is my hope.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, pp. 12, 13, #18.

“He was very glad to know you are holding the Feasts, as these form a rallying-point for the friends and help to unite them and deepen them in the Faith.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, March 5, 1946, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 16, #25.

The Framework of the Nineteen Day Feast

Focus questions

- ★ What do the various parts of the Feast contribute to the whole experience?
- ★ Why is maintaining a balance between them important?

“The Nineteen Day Feast, its framework, purpose and possibilities, have in recent years become a subject of increasing inquiry among the friends . . . and we feel the time has come for us to offer clarifications.”

The Universal House of Justice, August 27, 1989, in *A Wider Horizon, Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1983-1992*, p. 66; also in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 9.13.

“The Feast is known to have three distinct but related parts: the devotional, the administrative, and the social. The first entails the recitation of prayers and reading from the Holy Texts. The second is a general meeting where the Local Spiritual Assembly reports its activities, plans and problems to the community, shares news and messages from the World Centre and the National Assembly, and receives the thoughts and recommendations of the friends through a process of consultation. The third involves the partaking of refreshments and engaging in other activities meant to foster fellowship in a culturally determined diversity of forms which do not violate principles of the Faith or the essential character of the Feast.”

The Universal House of Justice, August 27, 1989, in *A Wider Horizon, Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1983-1992*, pp. 66-67.

“As to your question concerning Bahá'í Feasts, Shoghi Effendi strongly feels that on such occasions the friends should emphasize both the spiritual and the administrative elements. For these are equally essential to the success of every Bahá'í festival. To maintain the right balance between them is, therefore, the duty and responsibility of every individual Bahá'í or group. Until the believers learn to combine the two, there can be no hope of their gaining any real and permanent benefit from such religious celebrations. A good part of the Feast must of course be devoted to the reading of the Holy Words. For it is through them that the friends can get the inspiration and the vision they need for the successful accomplishment of their work for the Cause.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, May 27, 1934, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 15, #21; portions of this passage are also in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 9.21 and 9.22.

“. . . this Feast has been regarded by Bahá'u'lláh as highly desirable and meritorious. In the *Aqdas* He has specially emphasized its spiritual and devotional character, and also its social importance in the Bahá'í community as a means for

The Framework of the Nineteen Day Feast, continued

“When these three features are all combined [devotional, social, and administrative], this Feast can and will surely yield the best and the maximum of results.”

bringing about closer fellowship and unity among the believers. The administrative significance of this Feast has been stated by the Guardian in view of the increasing need among the friends for better training in the principles and methods of Bahá’í Administration.

“The significance of the Nineteen Day Feast is thus threefold. It is a gathering of a devotional, social and administrative importance. When these three features are all combined, this Feast can and will surely yield the best and the maximum of results.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, October 2, 1935, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 16, #24.

Devotional Readings at the Feast

Focus questions

- ★ What readings may be included in the devotional portion of a Feast?
- ★ Under what circumstances can the words of Shoghi Effendi be used during a Feast?

“During the devotional part of the Nineteen Day Feast any part of the writings of the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh and the Master can be read, also from the Bible and Qur’án, as these are all sacred scriptures. This part of the meeting need not be confined to prayers, though prayers can and should be read during it.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, October 18, 1948, *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 31, #69.

“. . . 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, 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.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, February 18, 1954, *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 32, #72.

“. . . the Feast is opened with devotional readings, that is to say prayers and meditations, from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, 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 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.”

The Universal House of Justice, August 25, 1965, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 9. 22-9.23; also in *Lights of Guidance* (5th ed.), pp. 245-246, #818.

“Moreover, 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.”

The Universal House of Justice, October 15, 1972, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 33, #76.

* **Homily:** religious discourse addressed to a congregation

Attendance at Feast

Focus questions

- ★ Is attendance at Feast obligatory?
- ★ Can close friends of the Faith or non-Bahá'ís family members attend a Feast? Why?
- ★ What should be done if a non-Bahá'í inadvertently attends a Feast?
- ★ Can believers attend a Feast outside their own community?

“With regard to your question concerning the Nineteen Day Feasts: These gatherings are no doubt of a special importance to the friends, as they have both a social and an administrative significance, and as such should be regularly attended by all confirmed believers.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, April 12, 1935, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, pp. 15-16, #22.

“Regarding the Nineteen Day Feast: in a previous letter to the National Spiritual Assembly the Guardian had made it clear that, although not a binding ordinance, this Feast has been regarded by Bahá'u'lláh as highly desirable and meritorious.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, October 2, 1935, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 16, #24.

“Attendance at Nineteen Day Feasts is not obligatory, but highly desirable, and effort should be made by the friends not to deprive themselves of this spiritual and communal rallying-point once in every Bahá'í month.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, December 23, 1948, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 22, #43.

“Also regarding the Nineteen Day Feasts: these are not strictly obligatory, but the believers should endeavour to regularly attend them, mainly for the following two reasons: first, because they foster the spirit of service and fellowship in the community and secondly, in view of the fact that they afford the believers a splendid opportunity to fully discuss the affairs of the Cause and to find ways and means for continued improvement in the conduct of Bahá'í activities.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, November 30, 1936, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 9.26; also in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 22, #42.

“Isolated believers and the members of groups may also, of course, attend the Nineteen Day Feasts of communities when they wish to.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 23, 1985, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 9.26; also in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 24, #49.

“The 19-Day Feast is an institution of the Cause, first established by the Báb, 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.

Attendance at Feast, continued

“ . . . it is not consistent with the spirit of the administrative order for non-Bahá’ís . . . to attend the 19-Day Feasts. . . . ”

“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.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, May, 28, 1954, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, pp. 25-26, #52.

“Regarding the Nineteen Day Feast, the principle universally applicable is that non-Bahá’ís are not invited to attend, and if you are asked about this you can explain that the nature of the Feast is essentially domestic and administrative. 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. A non-Bahá’í who asks to be invited to a Feast will usually understand if this matter is explained to him.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, August 12, 1981, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 27, #57; a portion of the quotation is also in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 9.29.

“ . . . 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. . . . ”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, January 8, 1985, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 9.29.

“It is not quite correct to say that a Nineteen Day Feast is changed into a Unity Feast as a result of the presence of non-Bahá’ís. What can happen is that the consultative portion of the Feast has to be postponed. . . . ”

“If it is decided to postpone part or all of the consultative portion of the Feast, the House of Justice states that it is within the discretion of the Local Spiritual Assembly to decide whether another meeting should be held during the Bahá’í month to

Attendance at Feast, continued

“... it is equally important for the friends to understand that they should refrain from inviting non-Bahá’ís to these special gatherings...”

complete it, or whether it can be postponed until the following Nineteen Day Feast.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, September 5, 1983, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 9.30; also in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 24, #48.

“... if a non-Bahá’í should inadvertently attend a Nineteen Day Feast he would be treated courteously. However, it is equally important for the friends to understand that they should refrain from inviting non-Bahá’ís to these special gatherings, ordained by Bahá’u’lláh not only for spiritual refreshment and unity, but also for consultation between the Spiritual Assembly and the body of believers on the domestic affairs of the community.”

The Universal House of Justice, February 4, 1974, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 26, #53.

When and Where Feast Celebrations Can be Held

Focus questions

- ★ What is the range of possible times for celebrating Feast?
- ★ What is the range of possible locations for celebrating Feast?

“Even though the observance of the Feast requires strict adherence to the threefold aspects in the sequence in which they have been defined, there is much room for variety in the total experience.”

The Universal House of Justice, August 27, 1989, in *A Wider Horizon: Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice 1983-1992*, p. 67.

“The Bahá’í Day is from sunset to sunset, therefore if in summer the sun sets too late to enable the Nineteen Day Feast to be held on the preceding evening, it should be held on the day itself. As long as the meeting begins before sunset it is considered to be held on the day which comes to an end with that sunset. Naturally Nineteen Day Feasts should be held on the first day of the Bahá’í month if possible, but if it should be difficult to do so, for example if it coincides with a regular public meeting evening, it is permissible to hold it on the following day, i.e. on a succeeding day of the Bahá’í month.”

The Universal House of Justice, June 23, 1964, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 9.19-9.20; also in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 18, #32.

“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 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. . . .

“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.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, October 10, 1985, in *Lights of Guidance* (5th ed.), pp. 244-245, #816.

When and Where Feast Celebrations Can be Held, continued

“There is no objection to holding meetings in the open air as long as they are conducted with dignity.”

“. . . the House of Justice is aware that in many areas only a limited time can be devoted to the Feast by the friends, because the Feast day may come during the week when most people have to work, and the evening hours do not allow much time for its observance. While the House of Justice does not wish to de-emphasize the preference expressed by Shoghi Effendi that the Feast be held on the first day of the Bahá’í month, it feels that in instances of difficulty, where the friends would otherwise be unable to attend, the National Spiritual Assembly may point out to Local Assemblies that it is permissible to hold the Feast at another time within the Bahá’í month, such as on a weekend.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, August 28, 1989, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 5.

“There is no objection to holding meetings in the open air as long as they are conducted with dignity.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, November 22, 1941, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 9.20; also in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 19, #33.

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

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, March 31, 1949, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 9.20; also in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 19, #34.

“We understand and appreciate the problems involved in the holding of Nineteen Day Feasts in the large cities such as New York and Los Angeles and we have no objection to your Assembly authorizing the Local Assembly to provide for the holding of the Feast in different localities as an experiment, if the Local Assembly so wishes, bearing in mind the following precautions:

The tendency in metropolitan areas is towards segregation, and therefore the Local Assembly should be alert to prevent a similar pattern developing in Bahá’í meetings by reason of the location of the Feast.

The Local Assembly should be watchful that neither the unity of the community nor control by the Local Assembly is dissipated by this practice.”

The Universal House of Justice, January 23, 1967, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 9.20; also in *Stirring of the Spirit*, pp. 19-20, #36.

When and Where Feast Celebrations Can be Held, continued

“... the Local Assembly [can]... hold more than one Feast within its area.”

“Difficulties of travelling to the Nineteen Day Feasts, and other occasions, which may be met in certain parishes can be overcome by your authorizing the Local Assembly in such a parish to hold more than one Feast within its area. There is no need to establish rigid boundaries for such a purpose, and the friends should be allowed to attend the Feasts in their parish most convenient to them; but all should note that every Feast in the area is a portion of the same Feast under the jurisdiction of the Local Spiritual Assembly. Occasions should be provided for the entire Bahá’í community of the parish to meet together, and Feast days need not be excluded from such occasions.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, January 14, 1980, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 20, #38.

Meeting on Common Ground: Consulting Together

Focus questions

- ★ How does this portion of the Feast “promote unity, ensure progress, and foster joy”?
- ★ What might be included in the “array of elemental social disciplines” which educate participants in “the essentials of responsible citizenship”?
- ★ In what specific ways can the consultative portion of the Feast be developed into a “happy period of discussion” to which everyone looks forward?

“The Nineteen Day Feast . . . is an institution of which all the people of Bahá are members. It is intended to promote unity, ensure progress, and foster joy.”

The Universal House of Justice, August 27, 1989, in *A Wider Horizon, Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1983-1992*, p. 66; also in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 9.14.

“. . . the Feast is an arena of democracy at the very root of society, where the Local Spiritual Assembly and the members of the community meet on common ground, where individuals are free to offer their gifts of thought, whether as new ideas or constructive criticism, to the building processes of an advancing civilization. Thus it can be seen that aside from its spiritual significance, this common institution of the people combines an array* of elemental social disciplines which educate its participants in the essentials of responsible citizenship.”

The Universal House of Justice, August 27, 1989, in *A Wider Horizon, Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1983-1992*, p. 68.

“There is a time set aside at the Nineteen 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.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, June 30, 1949, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 9.23; also in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 35, #80.

“The chief opportunity which the friends have for discussion on administrative questions is during the Nineteen Day Feasts, at which time the members of the Assembly can meet with the body of the believers and discuss in common the affairs of the Cause, and suggest new policies and methods.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, March 27, 1938, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 9.23; also in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 34, #78.

“Their [Assemblies] function is not to dictate, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the friends whom they represent. . . . They should, within the limits of wise discretion take the friends into their confidence, acquaint them with their plans, share with them their problems and anxieties, and seek their advice and counsel.”

Shoghi Effendi, February 23, 1924, in *Bahá’í Administration*, p. 64.

* **Array:** a large and impressive grouping or organization; a regular order or arrangement

Meeting on Common Ground: Consulting Together, continued

“ . . . there are specific occasions for the airing of one’s views in the community. The most frequent of these occasions for any Bahá’í is the Nineteen Day Feast. . . .”

“We note from reading your minutes that the enthusiasm of some of the new believers is being tested by the reading of long, wordy letters at Nineteen Day Feasts, and we think that something should be done about this. While it is important that the believers be informed about important messages from the Holy Land and other important items, it is true that the reading of messages at Nineteen Day Feasts can become a very boring and trying experience particularly for new believers not acquainted with many aspects of Bahá’í administration. We think you should consider other ways and means by which believers could be informed of vital and necessary information, such as through bulletins, institutes and other meetings.”

The Universal House of Justice, September 6, 1971, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 9.24; also in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 35, #81.

“The Administrative Order provides channels for expression of criticism, acknowledging, as a matter of principle, that ‘it is not only the right, but the vital responsibility of every loyal and intelligent member of the community to offer fully and frankly, but with due respect and consideration to the authority of the Assembly, any suggestion, recommendation or criticism he conscientiously feels he should in order to improve and remedy certain existing conditions or trends in his local community.’ Correspondingly, the Assembly has the duty ‘to give careful consideration to any such views submitted to them.’

“Apart from the direct access which one has to an Assembly, . . . there are specific occasions for the airing of one’s views in the community. The most frequent of these occasions for any Bahá’í is the Nineteen Day Feast which ‘besides its social and spiritual aspects, fulfills various administrative needs and requirements of the community, chief among them being the need for open and constructive criticism and deliberation regarding the state of affairs within the local Bahá’í community.’ At the same time, Shoghi Effendi’s advice, as conveyed by his secretary, goes on to stress the point that ‘all criticisms and discussion of a negative character which may result in undermining the authority of the Assembly as a body should be strictly avoided. For otherwise the order of the Cause itself will be endangered, and confusion and discord will reign in the community.’

Meeting on Common Ground: Consulting Together, continued

“This Feast is a bringer of joy. It is the groundwork of agreement and unity.”

“Clearly, then, there is more to be considered than the critic’s right to self-expression; the unifying spirit of the Cause of God must also be preserved, the authority of its laws and ordinances safeguarded. . . . Motive, manner, mode, become relevant; but there is also the matter of love: love for one’s fellows, love for one’s community, love for one’s institutions.”

The Universal House of Justice, December 29, 1988, in *Rights and Responsibilities: The Complementary Roles of the Individual and Institutions*, pp. 15-16; also in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 9.23-9.24.

“There are a number of factors involved in understanding the nature of appropriate interaction between a believer and his or her Local Spiritual Assembly during the consultative part of the Nineteen Day Feast. Chief among these is an appreciation of the purpose of this most important Institution of the Cause. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá described the Feast in these terms:

“This Feast is a bringer of joy. It is the groundwork of agreement and unity. It is the key to affection and fellowship. It diffuseth the oneness of mankind.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 25, 1984, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 37, #86.

“A Bahá’í who is visiting another community may participate fully in the consultation of the Nineteen Day Feast, but has no right to vote on recommendations being made to the Local Spiritual Assembly. Out of courtesy, however, a visitor would normally refrain from taking too much time of the consultation. . . .”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 23, 1985, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 24, #49.

Offering Critical Thought at Feast

“Clearly, then, there is more to be considered than the critic’s right to self-expression; the unifying spirit of the Cause of God must also be preserved. . . .”

“The Administrative Order provides channels for expression of criticism, acknowledging, as a matter of principle, that ‘it is not only the right, but the vital responsibility of every loyal and intelligent member of the community to offer fully and frankly, but with due respect and consideration to the authority of the Assembly, any suggestion, recommendation or criticism he conscientiously feels he should in order to improve and remedy certain existing conditions or trends in his local community.’ Correspondingly, the Assembly has the duty ‘to give careful consideration to any such views submitted to them.’

“Apart from the direct access which one has to an Assembly, . . . there are specific occasions for the airing of one’s views in the community. The most frequent of these occasions for any Bahá’í is the Nineteen Day Feast which ‘besides its social and spiritual aspects, fulfills various administrative needs and requirements of the community, chief among them being the need for open and constructive criticism and deliberation regarding the state of affairs within the local Bahá’í community.’ At the same time, Shoghi Effendi’s advice, as conveyed by his secretary, goes on to stress the point that ‘all criticisms and discussion of a negative character which may result in undermining the authority of the Assembly as a body should be strictly avoided. For otherwise the order of the Cause itself will be endangered, and confusion and discord will reign in the community.’

“Clearly, then, there is more to be considered than the critic’s right to self-expression; the unifying spirit of the Cause of God must also be preserved, the authority of its laws and ordinances safeguarded. . . . Motive, manner, mode, become relevant; but there is also the matter of love: love for one’s fellows, love for one’s community, love for one’s institutions.

“The responsibility resting on the individual to conduct himself in such a way as to ensure the stability of society takes on elemental importance in this context. For vital as it is to the progress of society, criticism is a two-edged sword: it is all too often the harbinger* of conflict and contention. The balanced processes of the Administrative Order are meant to prevent this essential activity from degenerating to any form of dissent that breeds opposition and its dreadful schismatic consequences. How incalculable* have been the negative results of ill-directed criticism. . . .

* **Harbinger:** a herald; an omen or sign; something that foreshadows a future event

* **Incalculable:** beyond measuring or calculation

“... the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh has been protected against the baneful effects of the misuse of the process of criticism.”

“... in this age, the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh has been protected against the baneful* effects of the misuse of the process of criticism.”

The Universal House of Justice, December 29, 1988, in *Rights and Responsibilities: The Complementary Roles of the Individual and Institutions*, pp. 15-16, 17.

* **Baneful:**
destructive,
pernicious,
poisonous

Feast Preparation

Focus questions

- ★ What are specific aspects or elements of preparation of the Feast?
- ★ What responsibilities rest with the Assembly?
- ★ What are ways in which individuals can prepare themselves for the Feast?

“If the Feast is to be properly experienced, beyond an understanding of the concept must also be the preparation of it and the preparation for it.”

The Universal House of Justice, August 27, 1989, in *A Wider Horizon, Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1983-1992*, pp. 68-69.

“... a Local Spiritual Assembly is responsible for the organization of Nineteen Day Feasts. . . .”

Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, February 15, 1982, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 36, #84.

“Although the Local Spiritual Assembly is administratively responsible for the conduct of the Feast, it often calls upon an individual or a group of individuals to make preparations – a practice which is consonant with the spirit of hospitality so vital to the occasion. Such individuals can act as hosts and are sometimes concerned with the selection of the prayers and readings for the devotional portion; they may also attend to the social portion. In small communities the aspect of personal hospitality is easy to carry out, but in large communities the Local Spiritual Assemblies, while retaining the concept of hospitality, may find it necessary to devise other measures.

“Important aspects of the preparation of the Feast include the proper selection of readings, the assignment, in advance, of good readers, and a sense of decorum both in the presentation and the reception of the devotional programme. Attention to the environment in which the Feast is to be held, whether indoors or outdoors, greatly influences the experience. Cleanliness, arrangement of the space in practical and decorative ways – all play a significant part. Punctuality is also a measure of good preparation.

“To a very large extent, the success of the Feast depends on the quality of the preparation and participation of the individual. The beloved Master offers the following advice: ‘Give ye great weight to the Nineteen Day gatherings, so that on these occasions the beloved of the Lord and the handmaids of the Merciful may turn their faces toward the Kingdom, chant the communes, beseech God’s help, become joyfully enamoured each of the other, and grow in purity and holiness, and in the fear of God, and in resistance to passion and self. Thus will they separate

Feast Preparation, continued

“... before entering . . . free yourselves from all that you have in your heart, free your thoughts and your minds from all else save God. . . .”

themselves from this elemental world, and immerse themselves in the ardours of the spirit.”

The Universal House of Justice, August 27, 1989, in *A Wider Horizon, Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1983-1992*, p. 69.

“It is my hope that the Nineteen Day Feast may become firmly established and organized so that the holy realities which are behind this meeting may leave behind all prejudices and conflict, and make their hearts as a treasury of love. Even if there is the slightest feeling between certain souls – a lack of love – it must be made to entirely disappear. There must be the utmost translucency and purity of intention.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 13, #18.

“... when you present yourselves in the meetings [Nineteen Day Feasts], 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.

“O God! Dispel all those elements which are the cause of discord, and prepare for us all those things which are the cause of unity and accord! O God! Descend upon us Heavenly Fragrance and change this gathering into a gathering of Heaven! Grant to us every benefit and every food. Prepare for us the Food of Love! Give to us the Food of Knowledge! Bestow upon us the Food of Heavenly Illumination!

In your hearts remember these things, and then enter the Unity Feast.

“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. Should you act and live according to these behests, know verily, of a certainty, that that Feast is the Heavenly Food. That Supper is the ‘Lord’s Supper’! I am the Servant of that gathering.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, pp. 11-12, #17.

Feast Preparation, continued

Take home assignment

Consult as an Assembly or with the community at an upcoming Feast on the following topics:

- ★ How can we implement the guidance of the Universal House of Justice regarding “the assignment, in advance, of good readers”? What qualities make a “good” reader? How can we assist one another to become better readers?
- ★ How can we implement the guidance of the Universal House of Justice regarding punctuality? How can the Assembly start Feast on time and also make arrangements for late-comers that preserve the reverent atmosphere of the devotional portion?

Preparation of and for Feast

Preparation of Feast

List specific aspects or elements of preparation of Feast. Place a mark beside those elements that your Assembly handles directly.

Preparation for Feast

List ways in which individuals can prepare themselves for Feast.

Sample Check Sheet of Questions for Feast Hosts

The Spiritual Assembly is delighted that you have agreed to host the Nineteen Day Feast and make arrangements for the devotional and/or social portions. A spirit of loving hospitality, joyful fellowship, and reverence can be created in many ways, and we are certain that the Feast you prepare will refresh the spirits and bind together the hearts of our community. The following questions may be helpful to you as you make your plans.

- ★ What prayers and passages will you select for the devotional portion?
[Appropriate passages include those of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Writings from other sacred Scriptures.]
- ★ Who will you ask in advance to read, sing, or chant?
- ★ How will you incorporate music or other arts?
- ★ How will you prepare the environment and welcome the friends?
- ★ What simple refreshments will enhance the spirit of the Feast?
- ★ What activities during the social portion will gladden and unify the friends?
- ★ What arrangements for young children may need to be made?
- ★ What help will you need to host the Feast?

We encourage you to use your creativity to plan Feast in such a way that all the ages and cultures that make up our community feel warmly included. Thank you in advance for your services to our community!

*“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*

Room for Variety

“Even though the observance of the Feast requires strict adherence to the threefold aspects in the sequence in which they have been defined, there is much room for variety in the total experience. For example, music may be introduced at various stages, including the devotional portion; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recommends that eloquent, uplifting talks be given; originality and variety in expressions of hospitality are possible; the quality and range of the consultation are critical to the spirit of the occasion. The effects of different cultures in all these respects are welcome factors which can lend the Feast a salutary* diversity, representative of the unique characteristics of the various societies in which it is held, and therefore conducive to the upliftment and enjoyment of its participants.”

The Universal House of Justice, August 27, 1989, in *A Wider Horizon: Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice 1983-1992*, p. 67.

Ideas for enhancing the Feast:

As you listen to groups suggest a variety of ways that Feast could be celebrated, write down ideas that you feel would be “conducive” to your own “upliftment and enjoyment.”

* **Salutary:** beneficial, healthy

Possibilities: Children, Youth, and Adults Enjoying Feast Together

Focus questions

- ★ What should children be able to expect from the experience of Feast?
- ★ What should be expected of children at Feast?
- ★ Who is responsible for the behavior of children at Feast?
- ★ How can children and youth be more fully incorporated into Feast?
- ★ What changes or additions to current ways of celebrating the Feast might make this experience more meaningful and enjoyable to younger members of the community?

“. . . the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behavior. . . . This calls for the integration of the component elements – adults, youth and children – in spiritual, social, educational and administrative activities. . . . It involves the practice of collective worship of God.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1996.

“The Nineteen Day Feast . . . is an institution of which all the people of Bahá are members.”

The Universal House of Justice, August 27, 1989, in *A Wider Horizon, Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1983-1992*, p. 66; also in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 9.14.

“Since children of Bahá'í parents are considered to be Bahá'ís, they are to be encouraged to attend all Feasts, there to share the reading of the Writings and prayers and be bathed in the spirit of the community. It is the hope of the House of Justice that every Feast will be a feast of love when the children will give and receive the tangible affection of the community and its individual members.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, November 22, 1984, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 9.26; also in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 30, #65.

“Our children need to be nurtured spiritually and to be integrated into the life of the Cause. They should not be left to drift in a world so laden with moral dangers. In the current state of society, children face a cruel fate. Millions and millions in country after country are dislocated socially. Children find themselves alienated by parents and other adults whether they live in conditions of wealth or poverty. . . .

“. . . although providing spiritual and academic education for children is essential, this represents only a part of what must go into developing their characters and shaping their personalities. The necessity exists, too, for individuals and the institutions at all levels, which is to say the community as a whole, to show a proper attitude towards children and to take a general interest in their welfare. Such an attitude should be far removed from that of a rapidly declining order.

“Children are the most precious treasure a community can possess, for in them are the promise and guarantee of the future.

Possibilities: Children, Youth, and Adults Enjoying Feast Together, continued

“An atmosphere needs to be maintained in which children feel that they belong to the community and share in its purpose.”

They bear the seeds of the character of future society which is largely shaped by what the adults constituting the community do or fail to do with respect to children. They are a trust no community can neglect with impunity. **An all-embracing love of children, the manner of treating them, the quality of the attention shown them, the spirit of adult behaviour toward them – these are all among the vital aspects of the requisite attitude. Love demands discipline, the courage to accustom children to hardship, not to indulge their whims or leave them entirely to their own devices. An atmosphere needs to be maintained in which children feel that they belong to the community and share in its purpose. They must lovingly but insistently be guided to live up to the Bahá’í standards. . . .”**

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 2000.

“. . . the House of Justice has instructed us to say that children should be trained to understand the spiritual significance of the gatherings of the followers of the Blessed Beauty, and to appreciate the honour and bounty of being able to take part in them, whatever their outward form may be. It is realized that some Bahá’í observances are lengthy and it is difficult for very small children to remain quiet for so long. In such cases one or the other of the parents may have to miss part of the meeting in order to care for the child. The Spiritual Assembly can also perhaps help the parents by providing for a children’s observance, suited to their capacities, in a separate room during part of the community’s observance. Attendance at the whole of the adult celebration thus becomes a sign of growing maturity and a distinction to be earned by good behavior.

“In any case, the House of Justice points out that parents are responsible for their children and should make them behave when they attend Bahá’í meetings. If children persist in creating a disturbance they should be taken out of the meeting. This is not merely necessary to ensure the properly dignified conduct of Bahá’í meetings but is an aspect of the training of children in courtesy, consideration for others, reverence, and obedience to their parents.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, October 14, 1982, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 9.27-9.28; also in *Stirring of the Spirit*, pp. 29-30, #63.

Possibilities: Children, Youth, and Adults Enjoying Feast Together, continued

“... junior youth . . . represent a special group with special needs. . . .”

“Among the young ones in the community are those known as junior youth, who fall between the ages of, say, 12 and 15. They represent a special group with special needs as they are somewhat in between childhood and youth when many changes are occurring within them. Creative attention must be devoted to involving them in programmes of activity that will engage their interests, mold their capacities for teaching and service, and involve them in social interaction with older youth.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 2000.

“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.”

The Universal House of Justice, March 27, 1968, in *Lights of Guidance* (5th ed.), p. 243, #809.

“Paralleling the growth of his inner life through prayer, meditation, service, and study of the teachings, Bahá'í youth have the opportunity to learn in practice the very functioning of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Through taking part in conferences and summer schools as well as Nineteen Day Feasts, and in service on committees, they can develop the wonderful skill of Bahá'í consultation, thus tracing new paths of human corporate action.”

The Universal House of Justice, June 10, 1966, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986*, p. 95.

“Bahá'í youth between the ages of 15 and 21 may certainly take part in discussions, and should be encouraged to do so, but they may not vote on recommendations to the Assembly until they are 21.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, September 16, 1979, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 36, #83.

Possibilities: Incorporating the Arts into Feast

Focus questions

- ★ In what ways can the arts be incorporated into the
 - devotional portion of the Feast?
 - consultative portion of the Feast?
 - social portion of the Feast?
- ★ What suggestions for enhancing the celebration of Feast through use of the arts would you like your community to explore?

“Music is permitted during the spiritual part – or any part – of the Nineteen Day Feast.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, June 30, 1952, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 9.28; also in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 32, #71.

“With regard to your question concerning the use of music in the Nineteen Day Feasts, he wishes you to assure all the friends that he not only 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.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, April 1935, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 9.28; also in *Stirring of the Spirit*, pp. 30-31, #66.

“. . . songs whose words are the primary Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh or 'Abdu'l-Bahá are all quite fitting for the devotional portion of the Feast. Indeed, the Persian chants are such songs, out of a different tradition; they are a way of giving music to the holy Word, and each person who chants does it in a way which mirrors his feeling and expression of the Words he is uttering. As for songs whose words are poetic and the composition of persons other than the Figures of the Faith, these may be desirable but in their proper place, for, as you know, 'music is the language of the spirit.'

“Inasmuch as the spirit of our gathering is so much affected by the tone and quality of our worship, of our feeling and appreciation of the Word of God for this day, we would hope that you would encourage the most beautiful possible expression of the human spirits in your communities, through music among other modes of feeling.”

The Universal House of Justice, February 22, 1971, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 33, #75.

“Regarding your question about singing during the devotional portion of the Feast, you are correct in your suggestion that the lyrics in such music should be drawn from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The friends are welcome to use music containing non-scriptural lyrics to enrich and enliven other parts of their Feasts.

“You have also asked about the use of devotional movement or dance during the devotions of the Feast. Shoghi Effendi has pointed out in a letter dated 15 June 1935 written on his behalf:

Possibilities: Incorporating the Arts into Feast, continued

“It is perfectly acceptable for a prayer to be interpreted in the form of movement or dance.”

The important thing that should always be borne in mind is that with the exception of certain specific obligatory prayers Bahá'u'lláh has given us no strict or special ruling in matters of worship whether in the Temple or elsewhere. Prayer is essentially a communion between man and God, and as such transcends all ritualistic forms and formulae.

“It is perfectly acceptable for a prayer to be interpreted in the form of movement or dance. As you know, in many parts of the world there are certain tribal and traditional dances which are performed in glorification of God. Just as a composer can create a piece of music as a result of inspiration by some passage in the Writings, so can a person perform a reverential dance, which is another form of art, to interpret a passage from a prayer or from the Writings. However to avoid that such expressions of prayer become gradually ritualized, it is preferable that they not be accompanied by reading the words of the prayers.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, March 16, 1994.

Possibilities: Uniting Hearts through Hospitality and Fellowship

Focus questions

- ★ What elements or activities could be used to create a welcoming environment?
- ★ In what ways can hospitality be shown? Which of these are dependent on economic circumstances?
- ★ What activities might draw believers together in closer bonds?
- ★ What suggestions for enhancing the celebration of Feast would you like your community to consider?

“... the Feast is rooted in hospitality, with all its implications of friendliness, courtesy, service, generosity and conviviality*. The very idea of hospitality as the sustaining spirit of so significant an institution introduces a revolutionary new attitude to the conduct of human affairs at all levels, an attitude which is critical to that world unity which the Central Figures of our Faith laboured so long and suffered so much cruelty to bring into being. It is in this divine festival that the foundation is laid for the realization of so unprecedented a reality.”

The Universal House of Justice, August 27, 1989, in *A Wider Horizon: Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice 1983-1992*, p. 70; also in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 9.16.

“Verily, it is enjoined upon you to offer a feast, once in every month, though only water be served; for God hath purposed to bind hearts together, albeit through both earthly and heavenly means.”

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 40.

“In every cycle and dispensation, the feast hath been favoured and loved, and the spreading of a table for the lovers of God hath been considered a praiseworthy act. This is especially the case today, in this dispensation beyond compare, this most generous of ages, when it is highly acclaimed, for it is truly accounted among such gatherings as are held to worship and glorify God. Here the holy verses, the heavenly odes and laudations are intoned, and the heart is quickened, and carried away from itself.

“The primary intent is to kindle these stirrings of the spirit, but at the same time it follows quite naturally that those present should partake of food, so that the world of the body may mirror the spirit’s world, and flesh take on the qualities of soul; and just as the spiritual delights are here in profusion, so too the material delights.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, pp. 90-91.

“Let the beloved of God gather together and associate most lovingly and spiritually and happily with one another, conducting themselves with the greatest courtesy and self-restraint. Let them read the holy verses, as well as essays which are of benefit, and the letters of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá; encourage and inspire one another to love each and all; chant

* **Convivial:**
festive; befitting a feast

Possibilities: Uniting Hearts through Hospitality and Fellowship, continued

“The host, with complete self-effacement, showing kindness to all, must be a comfort to each one, and serve the friends with his own hands.”

the prayers with serenity and joy; give eloquent talks, and praise the matchless Lord.

“The host, with complete self-effacement, showing kindness to all, must be a comfort to each one, and serve the friends with his own hands.

“If the Feast is befittingly held, in the manner described, then this supper will verily be the Lord’s Supper, for its fruits will be the very fruits of that Supper, and its influence the same.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 7, #2.

“. . . it is important that Local Assemblies share with the local friends stories of successes achieved by some of them, descriptions of effective presentations found useful by them, examples of various ways that a Bahá’í subject could be introduced to inquirers, or illustrations of methods which would enable the believer to relate the needs of society to our teachings. Such information and suggestions could be offered to the friends at Nineteen Day Feasts, through a local newsletter or by any other means open to each Local Assembly.”

The Universal House of Justice, March 3, 1977, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 7.17.

“Regarding changing the order of the Feast, it is clear from Shoghi Effendi’s instructions that the Nineteen Day Feast programme should start with the spiritual part, and not with the social part, which includes refreshments, or breaking bread together. . . . However, if it is found that some sort of association among the friends or the serving of food and refreshments will be helpful, if this takes place at the outset, there is no objection to this practice provided it is clear that it is not part of the Feast.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, January 23, 1985, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 9.21-9.22; also in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 17, #27.

“We can understand the desire of some of the friends to provide a warm welcome at the Feasts to newly declared believers and particularly youth, and we see no objection to the Assembly giving a reception before the actual Feast to achieve this purpose. As the Feast is frequently held in the evening, the Assembly might consider it desirable to arrange for the believers to have a light evening meal together before the Feast is held or it could, for example, arrange for social activities of an appropriate kind while

Possibilities: Uniting Hearts through Hospitality and Fellowship, continued

‘... the Assembly might consider it desirable to arrange for the believers to have a light evening meal together before the Feast. . . .’

the friends are gathering prior to the actual commencement of the Nineteen Day Feast. This should not, however, take the place of the social part of the Feast itself.”

The Universal House of Justice, memorandum dated January 21, 1973, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 9.22; also in *Stirring of the Spirit*, pp. 37-38, #88.

Possibilities: Incorporating Cultural Diversity into Feast

Focus questions

- ★ What cultural norms and standards do we bring with us about the following:
 - Appropriate ways to express reverence
 - Appropriate ways to express joy
 - Appropriate styles of dress for a sacred gathering
 - Appropriate music for worship
 - Appropriate length and form of community worship
- ★ What elements help you feel you are entering into a sacred time or space?
- ★ What changes could be made to your local celebration of Feast to incorporate cultural diversity while upholding Bahá'í standards?

“Bahá'ís . . . are subject to all the pressures and standards of the prevalent culture of the society in which they live, and can only too easily be unconsciously influenced in their behavior by the accepted norms of that culture. One of our challenging tasks as Bahá'ís, however, is to establish, through our personal conduct and through the pattern of life in our communities and institutions, those cultural standards which Bahá'u'lláh wishes us to uphold.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, August, 18, 1996.

“Hold you the Nineteen Day Feasts with utmost dignity.”

‘Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p.11, #16.

“Problems arise when there are disagreements among the friends as to what is dignified and reverent. The Universal House of Justice is reluctant to specify such matters in detail and urges the believers not to make an issue of them. If a believer is seriously worried about a particular case he may refer it to his National Spiritual Assembly and should abide by the Assembly's decision.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, October 19, 1975.

“Dignity and reverence befitting the occasion should obviously characterize observances of Bahá'í Holy Days by the friends, but this does not mean that cultural traditions which do not contravene Bahá'í principles may not, and cannot, find expression in the local observances and meetings of the friends.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, August 1, 1983, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 39, #92.

“ . . . Assemblies will want to be watchful that the incorporation of such [cultural] elements does not lead to a degeneration of the Feast as a uniquely Bahá'í institution and, particularly, that no objectionable customs and practices begin to creep into its observance.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, August 28, 1989, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 6.

“In applying instructions about Nineteen Day Feasts, as well as other matters of administration, to indigenous believers it is important that the process of weaning them away from the old

Possibilities: Incorporating Cultural Diversity into Feast, continued

“The Nineteen Day Feasts and other official gatherings of the friends should be conducted in whatever is the conventional local language.”

forms should be accomplished gradually so as not to destroy their spirit, and your Assembly should not be too rigid in these matters.”

The Universal House of Justice, April 3, 1970, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 38, #89.

“The institutions of the Faith should be careful not to press the friends to arbitrarily discard those local traditions which are harmless and often colourful characteristics of particular peoples and tribes. Were a new Bahá’í suddenly to cease following the customs of his people, it is possible that they might misunderstand the true nature of the Bahá’í Faith, and the Bahá’ís could be regarded as having turned against the traditions of the land.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, October 25, 1987, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 40, #95.

“The Nineteen Day Feasts and other official gatherings of the friends should be conducted in whatever is the conventional local language. This does not mean, of course, that at such gatherings some of the readings could not be in the language of the immigrants, or that, if these friends so wish, some classes and conferences may not be held and conducted in their own language for their benefit. The essential thing is, as stated above, to promote the integration of the immigrants into the community and avoid feelings of estrangement or disunity on account of language.”

The Universal House of Justice, November 10, 1982, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 9.24-9.25; also in *Stirring of the Spirit*, pp. 38-39, #90.

“The Local Spiritual Assembly of ____ is correct in its decision to conduct the Nineteen Day Feasts in Spanish and to not translate the proceedings in Persian, especially in view of the fact that some of the Spanish friends are becoming alienated from the community. Although the Iranian believers should make every effort to attend the Nineteen Day Feasts, they should not expect such meetings to be conducted in Persian. They should try to learn Spanish, particularly if they are planning to make their home in Spain. There is no objection, however, to Persian friends if they so wish having special meetings for fellowship and deepening conducted in Persian.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, February 6, 1983, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 9.25; also in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 39, #91.

Personal Reflection and Action Planning

Remembering ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s promise that “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,” take a few moments to reflect on what you can do to help this happen.

**What I can do
to prepare
myself before
going to
Feast . . .**

**What I can do
during the
Feast . . .**