

Participant Handouts

*Builders of
Communities:*
**Stress Management
and the Bahá'í
Community**

An Assembly Development Module Workshop

Stress Management and the Bahá'í Community

OVERVIEW FOR PARTICIPANTS

Purpose

- ★ To identify practical steps to decrease stress and increase energy, vitality, and joy, both individually and in the community

This workshop focuses on sources of stress, the emotional and spiritual dynamics of stress, and attitudes and practices that individuals can use to reduce stress. It includes time for the Assembly to identify practical steps it can take to decrease stress and increase energy, vitality, and joy in the community.

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.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated Ridván, 1996, to the Bahá’ís of the World.

“. . . 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.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated Ridván, 1996, to the Bahá’ís of the World.

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

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated Ridván, 1990, to the Bahá’ís of the World.

“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

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

The Call to a New State of Mind, continued

“Change is an evolutionary process requiring patience with one’s self and others. . . .”

conceptions of social organization. . . . Even the Community of 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.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated Ridván, 1992, to the Bahá’ís of the World.

“But, O my brother, when a true seeker determines to take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must, before all else, cleanse and purify his heart, which is the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God, from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge. . . .”

Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Iqán*, p. 192.

“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, dated January 23, 1995, in *Prosperity of Humankind*, section III.

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

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated Ridván, 1990, to the Bahá’ís of the World.

“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.”

Letter from The Universal House of Justice, dated July 25, 1984, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice*, p. 634.

We are Created to be Happy

*“The sea of joy
yearneth to
attain your
presence. . . .”*

“Let not the happenings of the world sadden you. I swear by God! The sea of joy yearneth to attain your presence, for every good thing hath been created for you, and will, according to the needs of the times, be revealed unto you.”

*Bahá'u'lláh, in *Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 82.*

“O my servants! Sorrow not if, in these days and on this earthly plane, things contrary to your wishes have been ordained and manifested by God, for days of blissful joy, of heavenly delight, are assuredly in store for you. Worlds, holy and spiritually glorious, will be unveiled to your eyes. You are destined by Him, in this world and hereafter, to partake of their benefits, to share in their joys, and to obtain a portion of their sustaining grace. To each and every one of them you will, no doubt, attain.”

*Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 329.*

“If we are not happy and joyous at this season, for what other season shall we wait and for what other time shall we look?

“This is the time for growing; the season for joyous gathering! Take the cup of the Testament in thy hand; leap and dance with ecstasy in the triumphal procession of the Covenant! Lay your confidence in the everlasting bounty, turn to the presence of the generous God; ask assistance from the Kingdom of Abhá; seek confirmation from the Supreme World; turn thy vision to the horizon of eternal wealth; and pray for help from the Source of Mercy!”

*‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í World Faith*, p. 351.*

“. . . the believers [must] increasingly stand out as assured, oriented, and fundamentally happy beings, conforming to a standard which, in direct contrast to the ignoble and amoral attitudes of modern society, is the source of their honor, strength, and maturity.”

*The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 79.*

“The life of a Bahá’í will be characterized by truthfulness and decency; he will walk uprightly among his fellowmen, dependent upon none save God, yet linked by bonds of love and brotherhood with all mankind; he will . . . look upon his neighbors with a bright and friendly face, and be a beacon light and a haven for all those who would emulate his strength of character and assurance of soul.”

*The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 94.*

“A Bahá’í community which is consistent in its fundamental life-giving, life-sustaining activities will at its heart be serene and confident; it will resonate with spiritual dynamism, will exert irresistible influence, will set a new course in social evolution, enabling it to win the respect and eventually the allegiance of admirers and critics alike.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated Ridván, 1984, in *A Wider Horizon*, p. 27.

Assessment of Community Condition

Three barometers or indicators of community condition are: energy level, happiness, and perseverance

- **Energy level:**
 - ⇒ What is the general energy level of your community?
 - ⇒ Are the friends, for the most part, positive, active, and motivated, or are they listless and apathetic?
 - ⇒ If you were to give the energy level at your community’s events, such as a typical Feast, a number from one to ten, with ten being the highest, what would you give it?
 - ⇒ Do the friends in your community generally arise to do what needs doing or does the Assembly need to remind them to do things over and over again?
 - ⇒ Do the friends come away from community events energized or drained?

- **Happiness:**
 - ⇒ How happy are the friends in your community? (Do you know the friends in your community well enough to respond comfortably to this question?)
 - ⇒ When the friends talk about your community, do they tell positive stories?

- **Perseverance*:**
 - ⇒ How well is your community persevering in general?
 - ⇒ If things aren’t going well, do the friends tend to become inactive?
 - ⇒ Has Feast attendance been dropping or rising in your community?
 - ⇒ How many of the people who have become Bahá’ís in your community over the past five years are still active in Bahá’í community life?

***Perseverance:** the capacity to pursue an objective or undertaking in the face of discouragement or opposition

Sources of Stress

Stress results from the interaction between a person and his environment. It appears when there is a discrepancy between the demands made upon a person and his perceived ability to respond to these demands. Stress can result from both positive and negative events.

Stress from being human

List several common life events or situations that can produce stress.

- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____

Stress from being a Bahá'í

In addition to these common sources of stress, we also experience stress related to being Bahá'ís.

List several experiences related to being a Bahá'í that are potentially stressful.

- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____

Stress and the Assembly

Focus questions

- ★ In what ways may service on the Assembly be a cause of stress for its members?
- ★ What implications does the Universal House of Justice's letter to our National Assembly have to local Assemblies? How can sharing its concerns with those who elect them impact stress on the Assembly?
- ★ What changes in attitude or perception by Assembly members could reduce their stress?
- ★ What changes in your Assembly's procedures and functioning could reduce stress?

“. . . neither your Assembly nor the friends must burden themselves with feelings of failure at every disappointment, for such feelings are self-fulfilling and can easily cause stagnation in the expansion of the Cause. The tendency towards frustration, sometimes induced by a desire for instant gratification, must be resisted by an effort to gain deeper appreciation of the divine process.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 19, 1994, to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States.

“Do not despair. Your capacity to respond will match any challenge that may confront you in these troubled times; you have only to act on principle.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 19, 1994, to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States.

“Do as Shoghi Effendi advised you: ‘Banishing every vestige of secrecy, of undue reticence, of dictatorial aloofness, from their midst, they should radiantly and abundantly unfold to the eyes of the delegates, by whom they are elected, their plans, their hopes, and their cares. They should familiarize the delegates with the various matters that will have to be considered in the current year, and calmly and conscientiously study and weigh the opinions and judgments of the delegates.

“Even if the delegates find themselves unable to offer useful recommendations toward the resolution of particular issues, by your bringing them into your confidence, they will develop an appreciation, as would be impossible otherwise, of the serious matters confronting the Cause. With this understanding, they will be equipped to assist the community to respond effectively to your decisions, no matter how challenging these may turn out to be. Moreover, it will relieve you of any overwhelming sense of burden to know that such a responsible body of believers shares your innermost concerns. . . .”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 19, 1994, to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States.

“In times of disappointment, stress and anxiety, which we must inevitably encounter, we should remember the sufferings of our departed Master. Your work, your energy, your vigilance and care, your loving-kindness are assets that I greatly value and prize.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated July 9, 1926, in *Bahá'í Funds: Contributions and Administration*, p. 5.

Inevitability and Role of Tests

Focus questions

- ★ How do sources of stress relate to the Bahá'í concepts of tests and difficulties?
- ★ What benefits do tests and suffering confer on us?
- ★ What tests will Western believers face? What will be the results of these tests?

“The mind and spirit of man advance when he is tried by suffering. The more the ground is ploughed the better the seed will grow, the better the harvest will be. Just as the plough furrows the earth deeply, purifying it of weeds and thistles, so suffering and tribulation free man from the petty affairs of this worldly life until he arrives at a state of complete detachment. His attitude in this world will be that of divine happiness. Man is, so to speak, unripe: the heat of the fire of suffering will mature him.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 178.

“Tests are benefits from God, for which we should thank Him. Grief and sorrow do not come to us by chance, they are sent to us by the Divine Mercy for our own perfecting.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, pp. 50-51.

“Men who suffer not, attain no perfection. The plant most pruned by the gardeners is that one which, when the summer comes, will have the most beautiful blossoms and the most abundant fruit.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 51.

“And yet, how often we seem to forget the clear and repeated warnings of our beloved Master, who, in particular during the concluding years of His mission on earth, laid stress on the ‘severe mental tests’ that would inevitably sweep over His loved ones of the West – tests that would purge, purify and prepare them for their noble mission in life.”

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, page 50.

“I swear by My life! Nothing save that which profiteth them can befall My loved ones. To this testifieth the Pen of God, the Most Powerful, the All-Glorious, the Best Beloved.”

Bahá'u'lláh, in *Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 82.

“In these days of stress and peril, every effort expended, every victory achieved, every sacrifice made, will be rewarded a hundredfold.”

Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day*, p. 91.

“May they [the highly esteemed American believers] be granted the celestial strength to pass, over and over again, the mental tests which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá promised He would send to them to purify them, thus enabling them to achieve their divinely conferred potential as a force for change in the world.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 19, 1994, to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States.

Spiritual and Emotional Dynamics

Focus question

- ★ What are the choices these passages highlight that are ours to make as individuals?

“Joy gives us wings! In times of joy our strength is more vital, our intellect keener, and our understanding less clouded. We seem better able to cope with the world and to find our sphere of usefulness. But when sadness visits us we become weak, our strength leaves us, our comprehension is dim and our intelligence veiled. The actualities of life seem to elude our grasp, the eyes of our spirits fail to discover the sacred mysteries, and we become even as dead beings.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, pp. 109-10.

“O God! Refresh and gladden my spirit. Purify my heart. Illumine my powers. I lay all my affairs in Thy hand. Thou art my Guide and my Refuge. I will no longer be sorrowful and grieved; I will be a happy and joyful being. O God! I will no longer be full of anxiety, nor will I let trouble harass me. I will not dwell on the unpleasant things of life.

“O God! Thou art more friend to me than I am to myself. I dedicate myself to Thee, O Lord.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers*, p. 152.

“Verily the most necessary thing is contentment under all circumstances; by this one is preserved from morbid conditions and from lassitude. Yield not to grief and sorrow: they cause the greatest misery. Jealousy consumeth the body and anger doth burn the liver: avoid these two as you would a lion.”

Bahá’u’lláh, in *Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, p. 460 #1020.

Attitudes and Practices that Affect Stress

Focus questions

- ★ What are examples of acts of physical care of the body? How do these affect stress levels? What happens if these are neglected?
- ★ What spiritual practices reduce stress or increase one's energy level and ability to deal with stress? How or why do they have this effect? What happens when these are neglected?
- ★ What could be added, removed, or changed about the home environment to create a soothing atmosphere that relaxes and rejuvenates?

Physical Care

“A man living with his thoughts in this Kingdom knows perpetual joy. The ills all flesh is heir to do not pass him by, but they only touch the surface of his life, the depths are calm and serene.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 110.

“ . . . in every aspect of life, purity and holiness, cleanliness and refinement, exalt the human condition and further the development of man’s inner reality. Even in the physical realm, cleanliness will conduce to spirituality, as the Holy Writings clearly state. And although bodily cleanliness is a physical thing, it hath, nevertheless, a powerful influence on the life of the spirit.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, pp. 146-47.

“ . . . you should not neglect your health, but consider it the means which enables you to serve. It – the body – is like a horse which carries the personality and spirit, and as such should be well cared for so it can do its work! You should certainly safeguard your nerves, and force yourself to take time, and not only for prayer and meditation, but for real rest and relaxation.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated November 23, 1947, in Spiritual Foundations, #56.

“ . . . there are very few people who can get along without eight hours sleep. If you are not one of those, you should protect your health by sleeping enough. The Guardian himself finds that it impairs his working capacity if he does not try and get a minimum of seven or eight hours.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated September 15, 1951, in Lights of Guidance, 1996 ed., p. 292, #990.

Spiritual Practices

“A wondrous melody is wings for the spirit, and maketh the soul to tremble for joy.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 147.

“Peace of mind is gained by the centering of the spiritual consciousness on the Prophet of God; therefore you should study

Attitudes and Practices that Affect Stress, continued

Spiritual Practices, continued

the spiritual Teachings, and receive the Water of Life from the Holy Utterances. Then by translating these high ideals into action, your entire character will be changed, and your mind will not only find peace, but your entire being will find joy and enthusiasm.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated October 15, 1952, in *Lights of Guidance*, 1996 ed., p. 112, # 381.

“Remembrance of Me is a healing medicine to the souls and a light to the hearts of men.”

Bahá’u’lláh, in *Spiritual Foundations*, p. 4, #11.

“If the Bahá’ís throughout the world do not face . . . tests with the aid of a prayerful attitude and constant engagement in service, they are likely to be submerged in the ocean of bewilderment, confusion, and remorse, wasting away the short days of their lives and leaving this world with empty hands.”

The Universal House of Justice, letter dated Bahá 154, to the Iranian believers throughout the world.

“Service is the magnet which draws the divine confirmations. Thus, when a person is active, they are blessed by the Holy Spirit. When they are inactive, the Holy Spirit cannot find a repository in their being, and thus they are deprived of its healing and quickening rays.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated July 12, 1952, in *Lights of Guidance*, 1996 ed., p. 118, #405.

“An individual must center his whole heart and mind on service to the Cause in accordance with the high standards set by Bahá’u’lláh. When this is done, the hosts of the Supreme Concourse will come to the assistance of the individual, and every difficulty and trial will gradually be overcome.”

Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated October 6, 1954, in *Lights of Guidance*, 1996 ed., p. 118, #406.

“When the friends do not endeavor to spread the message, they fail to remember God befittingly, and will not witness the tokens of assistance and confirmation from the Abhá Kingdom nor comprehend the divine mysteries.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *The Individual and Teaching*, p. 10.

“And be ye not like those who forget God, and whom He hath therefore caused to forget their own selves.”

Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 178.

Attitudes and Practices that Affect Stress, continued

Spiritual Practices, continued

“The more we search for ourselves, the less likely we are to find ourselves; and the more we search for God, and to serve our fellow-men, the more profoundly will we become acquainted with ourselves, and the more inwardly assured. This is one of the great spiritual laws of life.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, February 18, 1954, in *Lights of Guidance*, 1996 ed., p. 115, #391.

“All the sufferings that she [Bahíyyih Khánúm] had endured during her life and that had left their traces upon her feeble form, had not in the least affected her spirit of joy and hopefulness. She liked to see the people happy, and exerted all her efforts to make it easy for them to realize it.

“How badly we need such souls in the world at present when it seems so full of sorrows and discouragements! Every one is suffering and no person to give them courage and brighten their hearts.

“Shoghi Effendi hopes that the friends will follow her example and become a source of inspiration to the world at large, giving hope to the depressed and joy to the disconsolate.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in *Bahíyyih Khánúm*, pp. 90-91.

“Be thou neither grieved nor despondent over what hath come to pass. This trouble overtook thee as thou didst walk the path of God, wherefore it should bring thee joy.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 238.

“Be not grieved if thy circumstances become exacting, and problems press upon thee from all sides. Verily, thy Lord changeth grief into joy, hardship into comfort, and affliction into absolute ease.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *The Divine Art of Living*, p. 90.

“To engage in some profession is highly commendable, for when occupied with work one is less likely to dwell on the unpleasant aspects of life.”

Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 175.

“The true worshipper, while praying, should endeavor not so much to ask God to fulfill his wishes and desires, but rather to adjust these and make them conform to the Divine Will. Only through such an attitude can one derive that feeling of

Attitudes and Practices that Affect Stress, continued

Spiritual Practices, continued

inner peace and contentment which the power of prayer alone can confer.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated October 26, 1938, in *Spiritual Foundations*, #47.

“One night I was so hemmed in by My anxieties that I had no other recourse than to recite and repeat over and over again a prayer of the Báb which I had in My possession, the recital of which greatly calmed Me.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *God Passes By*, pp. 275-76.

“The greatest bestowal in the world of existence is a tranquil heart, and it is impossible for man to obtain a tranquil heart save through the good pleasure of the Lord. That is, man may so adorn the temple of his being with lofty attributes and philanthropic deeds as to be pleasing at the Threshold of the Almighty. This is the only Path and there is no other Path. My point is this: Let all your thoughts, your ideals, your aims and purposes revolve day and night around one common object – that is to live in accord with the good pleasure of the Lord. Then all the doors of felicity will be opened before your faces, you will become successful in all your undertakings, and you will be confirmed in all your accomplishments.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Star of the West*, Vol. 16, p. 401.

“When our thoughts are filled with the bitterness of this world, let us turn our eyes to the sweetness of God’s compassion and He will send us heavenly calm! If we are imprisoned in the material world, our spirit can soar into the Heavens and we shall be free indeed!

“. . . You see all round you proofs of the inadequacy of material things – how joy, comfort, peace and consolation are not to be found in the transitory things of the world. Is it not then foolishness to refuse to seek these treasures where they may be found? The doors of the spiritual Kingdom are open to all, and without is absolute darkness.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, pp. 110-11.

Stress Busters

Create a list of stress busters for individuals. Your list should include a variety of choices you could make in the following:

- ★ your attitudes, perceptions, and ways of viewing situations
- ★ your behaviors and habits
- ★ your environment

Create a list of stress busters

- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____

Stress Factor 1

The Assembly, the Community, and Stress

Questions for this group

- ★ How do the number of changes and frequency of changes impact stress levels?
- ★ How does the number of change efforts being implemented at the same time affect the success of making lasting changes?
- ★ What implications do these points have for how the Assembly guides and directs the community?

For all groups

- ★ What practical steps can Assemblies take to decrease stress and increase energy, vitality, and joy in the community?

Implementing Change

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

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated Ridván, 1990, to the Bahá'ís of the World.

“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.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, July 25, 1984, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice*, p. 634.

To help you answer the questions at the left, take a moment to consider your own life and elements of your daily routine:

- ★ Do you bathe in the morning or evening?
- ★ Do you eat or skip breakfast?
- ★ What are your routines at work?
- ★ Do you eat your lunch at the same place every day?
- ★ When do you run errands?
- ★ Do you eat dinner with other family members?
- ★ Do you watch television for a certain period every night?
- ★ Are you in bed by a specific time?
- ★ Do you sleep on the right or left side of the bed?

Imagine changing each of these routines all at the same time.

- ★How would you feel?
- ★How many changes would become established?

How long would it be before you would feel overwhelmed and give up trying to make any form of change?

Stress Factor 2

The Assembly, the Community, and Stress

Questions for this group

- ★ How does it feel to try to take part in events which don't fit your needs or schedule?
- ★ What happens when a portion of the Bahá'í community feels its needs and interests are not considered?
- ★ What implications do these points have to how the Assembly plans activities for the community?
- ★ How does event planning change as the community grows from 15 - 100?

For all groups

- ★ What practical steps can Assemblies take to decrease stress and increase energy, vitality, and joy in the community?

Meeting a Diversity of Needs and Interests

“A unity in diversity of actions is called for, a condition in which different individuals will concentrate on different activities . . . because each person cannot do everything and all persons cannot do the same thing. This understanding is important to the maturity which, by the many demands made upon it, the community is being forced to attain.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated Ridván, 1990, to the Bahá'ís of the World.

To answer the questions at left, first identify 5-10 types of diversity in addition to racial and cultural diversity that are present in Bahá'í communities:

Next, imagine the following situations:

- ★ An Assembly has planned a proclamation activity which is well-suited for people who are single or married without children, but extremely difficult for members of the community who have children.
- ★ An Assembly has planned activities for families but ignored the needs of single believers.
- ★ A diabetic friend comes to Feasts and Holy days but never finds refreshments that are safe for him or her to eat.

Stress Factor 3

The Assembly, the Community, and Stress

Questions for this group

- ★ How does it feel to have the focus be on a challenging goal with no recognition of efforts being made to work toward achieving the goal?
- ★ How is receiving expressions of institutional appreciation different from receiving individual appreciation? Why is institutional appreciation meaningful?
- ★ What implications do these points have to how the Assembly communicates with the community?
- ★ What are ways an Assembly could show appreciation of efforts?

For all groups

- ★ What practical steps can Assemblies take to decrease stress and increase energy, vitality and joy in the community?

Expressing Appreciation and Encouragement

“... [There exists in the American community] the tendency of the friends to criticize each other at the slightest provocation, whereas the Teachings call upon them to encourage each other.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 19, 1994, to a National Spiritual Assembly.

To help you answer the questions at the left, consider your own responses to the following situations:

- 1. You are working very hard on a challenging goal (losing weight, a sales quota, etc.). So far, there are no visible fruits of your efforts. You are starting to feel discouraged and wondering if your goal is even achievable.**

Consider the following two comments:

- ★ “I remind you that the goal is X, and there’s still a long way to go.”
- ★ “I can see that you are really working very hard at X. Keep up the good work, and the desired results will surely follow!”

What effect would each of these statements have on your stress level? What effect would each have on the amount of energy and enthusiasm you have available to commit to your goal?

- 2. You are part of a community which is actively teaching; but your friends, neighbors, co-workers, and relatives simply are not responding.**

What effect would it have on you and your community if your Assembly said at Feast, “The Assembly realizes that many of you are teaching the Faith and that those you are teaching simply are not attracted to the Faith at this time. And we just want to say thank you for the efforts you are making. We love you all, and we deeply appreciate whatever you are doing to further Bahá’u’lláh’s Cause. Keep up the good work!”

Stress Factor 4

The Assembly, the Community, and Stress

Questions for this group

- ★ How does a pattern of criticism at the slightest provocation affect stress levels?
- ★ Does it matter whether our grievances are justified or unjustified? Why?
- ★ Who benefits if grievances are set aside?
- ★ What implications do these points have to how the Assembly can help believers learn to let go of the past and build a unified community?

For all groups

- ★ What practical steps can Assemblies take to decrease stress and increase energy, vitality, and joy in the community?

Learning to Let Go of Grievances

“. . . [There exists in the American community] the tendency of the friends to criticize each other at the slightest provocation, whereas the Teachings call upon them to encourage each other. . . . the friends must be helped through your example and through loving counsel to refrain from such a pattern of criticism, which stunts the growth and development of the community.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 19, 1994, to a National Spiritual Assembly.

“All should be ready and willing to set aside every personal sense of grievance – justified or unjustified – for the good of the Cause. . . .”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated May 13, 1945, in The Bahá'í Life, p. 12.

To help you answer the questions at left:

Consider a box presented as a gift. If the gift is not accepted, to whom does it belong? If offense is not “taken” by the recipient of a critical comment, what happens to it?

Consider also the dynamics of the following situation: In Asia, monkeys are caught by making little bamboo boxes with bars just wide enough for the monkey to slip its hand in and grab onto a banana that has been placed there. When the monkey tries to remove its hand while clutching the banana, it finds that it can't get through the bars. If the monkey would just let go of the banana, it could easily pull its hand out the box and get away. But it won't let go of the banana.

- ★ How are grudges that are held on to for years like “bananas”?
- ★ How does holding on to “bananas” affect stress and energy levels?
- ★ How much energy is available for handling life's other stresses and challenges if we are holding on to “bananas”?
- ★ How might holding on to “bananas” relate to our choice to “no longer be sorrowful and grieved” or “dwell on the unpleasant things of life”?

Additional Quotations from the Facilitator’s Guide

From “Introduction”

“The quality of freedom and of its expression – indeed, the very capacity to maintain freedom in a society – undoubtedly depends on the knowledge and training of individuals and on their abilities to cope with the challenges of life with equanimity.”

The Universal House of Justice, December 29, 1988, in *Rights and Responsibilities: The Complementary Roles of the Individual and Institutions*, p. 22.

“In a world becoming daily more divided by factionalism and group interests, the Bahá’í community must be distinguished by the concord and harmony of its relationships. The coming of age of the human race must be foreshadowed by the mature, responsible understanding of human problems and the wise administration of their affairs by these same Bahá’í communities. The practice and development of such Bahá’í characteristics are the responsibility alike of individual Bahá’ís and the administrative institutions, although the greatest opportunity to foster their growth rests with the Local Spiritual Assemblies.”

The Universal House of Justice, Naw-Ruz, 1974, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986*, p. 264.

From “Health and Well-being in Bahá’í Community Life”

“The first [requisite] calls for a vitality of the faith of each believer that is expressed through personal initiative and constancy in teaching the Cause to others, and through conscientious, individual effort to provide energy and resources to upbuild the community, to uphold the authority of its institutions, and to support local and regional plans and teaching projects.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, December 31, 1995, to the Bahá’ís of the world.

From “Causes of Stress”

“We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us. . . . Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other. . . .”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, February 17, 1933, in *Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. 1, p. 84.

“The Bahá’ís are part of the world. They too feel the great pressures which are brought to bear upon all people today, whoever and wherever they may be.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, July 19, 1956, in *Unlocking the Power of Action*, #11.

“It is often difficult for us to do things because they are so very different from what we are used to, not because the thing itself is particularly difficult.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, March 16, 1949, in *The Bahá’í Life*, p. 16.

Additional Quotations from the Facilitator’s Guide, continued

“Perhaps the greatest test Bahá’ís are ever subjected to is from each other. . .”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, February 18, 1945, in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 602, #2037.

From “The Inevitability and Role of Tests”

“He will never deal unjustly with any one, neither will He task a soul beyond its power.”

Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 106.

“My calamity is My providence, outwardly it is fire and vengeance, but inwardly it is light and mercy.”

Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, p. 15, #51.

From “Dynamics of Stress”

“Does not ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wish us, as He looks down upon us with loving expectation from His glorious Station, to obliterate as much as possible all traces of censure, of conflicting discussions, of cooling remarks, of petty unnecessary observations that impede the onward march of the Cause, that damp the zeal of the firm believer and detract from the sublimity of the Bahá’í Cause in the eyes of the inquirer?”

Shoghi Effendi, in *Bahá’í Administration*, p. 19.

From “Attitudes and Practices that Individuals can Use to Reduce Stress”

“What but remembrance of Thee can give delight to my soul or gladness to my heart?”

Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 195.

“The healer of all thine ills is remembrance of Me, forget it not.”

Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, p. 33, #32.

“I beseech Thee, by Thy name through which Thou turnest restlessness into tranquillity, fear into confidence, weakness into strength, and abasement into glory, that Thou of Thy grace wilt aid me . . .”

Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 213.

“Be still, and know that I am God.”

Psalms 46:10.

From “The Assembly, the Community, and Stress”

“The appearance of a united, firmly based and self-sustaining community . . . requires a level of internal interaction between the Assembly and the body of the believers based on a commonly recognized commitment to service, and in which a sense of partnership based on appreciation of each other’s distinctive sphere of action is fully recognized and unfailingly upheld, and no semblance of a dichotomy between the two appears.”

The Universal House of Justice, letter dated May 19, 1994, in *Rights and Responsibilities: The Complementary Roles of the Individual and Institutions*, p. 40.