

Facilitation Guide

Conflict Resolution Part 1: Conflict and the Individual

An Assembly Development Module Workshop



“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

“It is not enough to proclaim the Bahá’í message, essential as that is. It is not enough to expand the rolls of Bahá’í membership, vital as that is. Souls must be transformed, communities thereby consolidated, new models of life thus attained.”

The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon*,
Selected Letters 1983-1992, p. 64.



Conflict Resolution Part 1: Conflict and the Individual

OVERVIEW FOR FACILITATORS

Purpose

- ★ To gain a shared understanding of what Bahá'u'lláh has forbidden and why
- ★ To recognize what choices are open to Bahá'ís in conflict

This workshop is targeted to individuals, rather than Assemblies. Its objective is to provide a shared understanding of what attitudes and behaviors have been forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh and learn how to distinguish these from the healthy “clash of differing opinions.” It focuses on the role of individual choice and explores the new behaviors and attitudes Bahá'ís are called to display as they resolve their conflicts. It also provides an opportunity to let go of old hurts and grievances.

When facilitated with a group of 5-9 participants from the same Assembly, this workshop will require approximately 4 hours for the core material plus additional time for each optional extension. A larger or more diverse group will require extra time for group discussion and reporting back.

What you will find inside your Facilitation Guide:

- ★ **Frontispiece with key quotations.** A one-page sheet containing quotations from the Universal House of Justice which provide the foundation of the workshop. (p. 2)
- ★ **Overview for Facilitators.** The page you are reading. (p. 3)
- ★ **The Assembly Development Process.** A one-page description of the process of Assembly development, the role of these workshops within that process, and how to request an Assembly Development Representative to facilitate the workshops. (p. 4)
- ★ **Guidance for Facilitators.** A four-page collection of suggestions for preparation before the session, tips for facilitating during the session, ideas for closing the session, and guidance on what to do with the evaluation forms after the session. (pp. 5-8)
- ★ **Highlights of this workshop.** A three-page listing of the workshop objectives, an agenda outline with times of each segment of the workshop, and a listing of materials needed. (pp. 9-11)
- ★ **Facilitator's instructions for segments of this workshop.** A series of pages that provide the purpose and instructions for each section of the workshop. (pp. 12-37)
- ★ **Description of the Office of Assembly Development.** A two-page overview of the mission of this office and the services it can provide. (unnumbered pages at the end of the Facilitation Guide)
- ★ **Evaluation Forms.** A two-page evaluation form for the facilitator to complete and return to the Office of Assembly Development and a two-page evaluation form for the Assembly to complete two months after the workshop. (unnumbered pages at the end of the Facilitation Guide)

Note: You will also want to obtain a copy of the Participant Handouts

The Assembly Development Process

“...enabling Assemblies to rise to a ‘new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities’...”

The National Spiritual Assembly focuses its Assembly Development initiatives towards facilitating the development of “a new state of mind” on the part of Assembly members and the community, thereby enabling Assemblies to rise to the “new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities” envisioned by the Universal House of Justice.

The development process is designed to be furthered by presentation of a variety of module workshops, each module covering a distinct topic or function. Use of these workshops will help Assemblies to understand more clearly the spiritual nature of their institution, to improve their performance, and to attain an ever advancing level of maturity as the primary institutions of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. When used with the general community, the workshops will heighten appreciation for the station and responsibilities of local Assemblies and deepen the desire to support and assist these institutions in their growth process.

The National Spiritual Assembly highly recommends that each workshop be studied with a Bahá’í facilitator who resides outside the particular Bahá’í community, although these materials may be used by Assemblies on their own. A list of Bahá’ís who serve as facilitators, called Assembly Development Representatives, is available from the Office of Assembly Development of the Bahá’í National Center at (847) 733-3490 or by e-mail to OAD@usbnc.org.

Assemblies may choose to study these workshops as an institution, may invite other Assemblies in their area to study together, or may invite their community to join them in exploring the modules. Workshops may also be used at Bahá’í schools or Institutes. If they are used with both Assembly members and other community members, Assemblies are encouraged to set aside follow-up time at one of their future meetings to consider the impact and implications of what was learned on their collective functioning.

Workshops in this program range from two to four hours in length with the majority averaging just over three hours. They are, however, adaptable to different timing needs. Workshops are divided into separate segments which can be selectively deleted if timing needs require this. Optional supplemental materials are also included for use if more time is available.

Guidance for Facilitators

Before the Session

Personal preparation

- ★ Take time to prepare yourself spiritually and materially to facilitate this workshop. Meditate on your role in facilitating the friends' thoughtful study and consultation. It may also be helpful to reflect on key quotations about Bahá'í consultation and education.
- ★ Read through the workshop and its handouts in advance of the session and ponder the themes in them.
- ★ Pray for assistance. Feel confident that the Blessed Beauty will guide and confirm you as you endeavor to serve the Faith.

Preparation of the course and its materials

- ★ Become familiar with the workshop and its options and extensions.
- ★ The amount of time suggested for each segment of the workshop is a minimum only. If the number of participants in a workshop is large and many small groups will be reporting back, you will need to allow more time than the minimum to complete some segments.
- ★ If some of the participants are not proficient in English, consider ways to meet their needs. For instance, those who understand spoken English but do not read it easily could be paired with those who can read quotations aloud. These adjustments may affect the amount of time necessary to complete an activity or exercise.
- ★ Material which appears in italics is provided to supplement and extend the session if more time is available. Determine in advance how many expansions to the module, if any, are appropriate. Some factors to consider are available time, general level of experience and deepening of the participants, and local interest in a particular topic.
- ★ Have materials (such as a few extra handouts, art supplies, extra pens and pencils, small gift item) ready for each participant. It is wise to have slightly more of everything than you anticipate needing in case a larger than expected group of friends attend.
- ★ If the workshop segments you will be using require cards for games or exercises, prepare these beforehand. If workshop

Guidance for Facilitators, continued

segments have demonstrations, practice these once or twice beforehand.

- ★ Select devotional readings, prayers, and music you will want to use and make sure you have the equipment to play any music you might have.

Preparation of the meeting room

- ★ If possible, ask to see the meeting room in advance. Arrive early to set up. Adapt the room set-up to meet your needs, if possible.
- ★ Create an inviting atmosphere of beauty, dignity, and warmth to welcome participants. Possibilities include photographs of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, holy places or great teachers, heroines and heroes; framed quotations, decorating the walls with objects of beauty, tablecloths, arrangements of fresh or dried flowers, lighting, candles, music from diverse cultural backgrounds, bowls of potpourri or drops of rose oil, seating arrangements, and refreshments.

Creating and maintaining a spiritual environment

- ★ Warmly greet the participants. Be sure that the spirit of the Faith permeates the room. While conveying the content of the workshop is important, it is equally important that the style of interaction does not feel harsh, nervous, or rushed. Be a bringer of light to the hearts of the group.

Facilitating discussion

- ★ These workshops ask facilitators to raise several questions to the group for possible consultation. If one question fails to elicit much response, move on to another one.
- ★ Express appreciation for each participant’s contribution.
- ★ Be mindful of who has spoken and try to give everyone an opportunity to offer a first comment before giving time for individuals to offer second or third comments. Depending on the size of your group, you may want to go around the room, inviting each person to comment briefly in turn.
- ★ As groups are consulting on quotations and focus questions, go from group to group and listen in, without interrupting the consultative process. You may want to note comments or

During the Session

Guidance for Facilitators, continued

questions that arise and bring them up when the groups reassemble.

Using time

- ★ When small groups are asked to consult or work on an art project in a certain amount of time, give each group a “5-minute warning” when their time is nearly finished. This could be done either by going from group to group as a reminder or by ringing a small bell.
- ★ Be flexible and sensitive to the needs and understanding of the participants. If a particular question or point engages the group in lengthy but topic-related discussion, it may be preferable to allow participants to continue to pursue an area that intrigues them rather than to cut off discussion and move on to another point or exercise. Participants often experience exploring less material but in greater depth as more satisfying than a hurried look at many aspects of a topic.
- ★ You may choose to make the decision yourself about whether to let a group spend more time on one area and skip later exercises or activities. You may also choose to involve the group as a whole in the decision: “Since this topic is generating a lot of interest, do we want to 1) spend more time here and not explore a later topic, 2) extend the time of our session and not skip any segments, or 3) move on from this topic, go through all the following segments, and end at our original agreed-upon time?”

Dividing participants into small groups

- ★ Put stickers on participants name cards or leave cards with stickers at their place and have them group themselves according to sticker design.
- ★ Divide into groups by the month/season in which one’s birthday falls.
- ★ In theater/auditorium seating, form groups around where participants are sitting.
- ★ Create funny groupings and ask people to choose the group that best describes them (Example: people who love apples are group A; if your favorite color is blue, join group B; if Casablanca is your favorite movie, join group C.)

Guidance for Facilitators, continued

Closing the Session

- If you have Assembly members from several communities attending a session, you may wish to have them work together as an Assembly or work in groups composed of different Assemblies, depending on the exercise.
- If you have a combination of Assembly and community members attending, you may wish to mix the groups together for some exercises and separate Assembly members from community members for other exercises.

- ★ Provide verbal instructions on how to turn the evaluation forms in.
- ★ You may want to give a gift to each participant of a card with a beautifully lettered quotation that pertains to the workshop.
- ★ Encourage Assemblies that went through this workshop in a group larger than their own membership to have a follow-up period at an up-coming meeting to consult on what was learned and how it can be applied to their own functioning.
- ★ Suggest choosing a date and picking a topic for the next Assembly development workshop.

Please note: Have the participant evaluation forms turned in to you and return them with your evaluation form. Be sure to use the machine readable forms. Give participants their Bahá'í Locality Code and explain how to fill in the forms.

After the Session

- ★ Complete the workshop report form and mail it with the participant evaluations to:

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the
United States

Office of Assembly Development

1233 Central St.

Evanston, IL 60201

OAD@USBNC.ORG

fax. (847) 733-3486

phone (847) 733-3490

- ★ Send a follow up letter to the Assembly(ies) to thank them for participation and include a copy of their evaluation form to fill out two months after the workshop.

Thank you for serving the Cause by facilitating this Assembly development workshop!

Highlights of Conflict Resolution Part 1: Conflict and the Individual

Objectives:

Participants will:

- ★ explore aspects of “a new state of mind”
- ★ gain a shared understanding of what behaviors and attitudes are forbidden by Bahá’u’lláh and learn to distinguish these from the permissible “clash of differing opinions”
- ★ examine the new behaviors we are called to display
- ★ perceive the role of individual choice during conflicts
- ★ experience the importance and healing effect of letting go of old hurts

Agenda outline: (total time: 3 hours 45 minutes)

- ★ **Introduction** (10 minutes), p. 12
An opportunity to introduce the Assembly Development process, familiarize participants with the objectives of this module, and present an agenda outline of topics and activities.
- ★ **The call to “a new state of mind”** (15 minutes), pp. 13-15
A guided discussion to help participants grasp some of the implications of moving toward “a new state of mind.”
- ★ **The Writings on conflict and contention** (60 minutes), pp. 16-20
Individual and pairs activities that establish a shared understanding of what behaviors and attitudes are forbidden and foster a deeper appreciation of the damaging effects of conflict.
- ★ **Establishing new patterns of behavior** (30 minutes), pp. 23-25
Individual and group reflection on the new patterns called for in this day and the role that choice plays in this process.
- ★ **Choices open and closed to Bahá’ís in conflicts** (45 minutes), pp. 26-28
Small group examination of appropriate and inappropriate responses, followed by an artwork activity.
- ★ **Drawing strength from the example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá** (30 minutes), p. 32
Individual and pairs reflection on stories of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.
- ★ **Learning to let go of past hurts** (25 minutes), pp. 33-35
An opportunity to identify old grudges, grievances, and hurts and let them go.
- ★ **Closing** (10 minutes), p. 36
A brief review followed by inspirational quotations to provide assurance of divine confirmation for all efforts to resolve conflict by making appropriate choices

Highlights, continued

Extension sessions for use if more time is available

- ★ ***Further consideration of the call to “a new state of mind”*** (variable amount of time), pp. 13-14
A guided discussion examining existing assumptions and conceptions and the feelings evoked by the process of change.
- ★ ***The Ugli Orange*** (30 minutes), pp. 21-22
A role play to simulate the dynamics of an apparent win/lose situation and to help participants identify personal choices of collaboration or competition.
- ★ ***Memorization of the Writings*** (5 minutes), p. 28
Recitation in unison of a verse included in the Participant Handouts.
- ★ ***Tests as a Means of Individual and Collective Growth*** (15 minutes), p. 29
Individual reading and pairs consultation on the necessity and benefits of tests.
- ★ ***Drawing on Spiritual Power to Resolve Conflict and Build Unity*** (15 minutes), pp. 30-31
A review of the Writings and a science demonstration that highlight ways to draw on spiritual power and increase appreciation of the protection spiritual practices impart.

Times given above are minimums based on a group of 5-9 participants from the same Assembly. A larger or more diverse group will require extra time for group discussion and reporting back. Material which appears in italics is provided to supplement and extend the session if more time is available. If less time is available, you can skip whatever section seems to be less relevant to the needs of the group. You may also choose to direct participants to focus only on quotations in their handouts that are bolded, as these are the most vital. Focusing on bolded quotations may also aid participants who are slower readers.

Materials needed

- ★ Whiteboard, blackboard or flip chart and markers
- ★ A variety of highlighters

Highlights, continued

Materials needed, continued

- ★ Blank index cards, one per person
- ★ Crayons, colored pencils, markers, etc. for decorating cards
- ★ Yellow construction paper bananas and pens, one per person
- ★ A short, fat pillar candle in a fire-proof container large enough to catch falling, burning pieces of paper OR a container to hold torn up bananas
- ★ *Optional: A bowl of water and a can of baby talcum powder*
- ★ *Optional: A cassette player and tape of “Loving Hands,” by Jean Marks and Susan Engle, cued to “Isn’t It Wonderful?”*
- ★ *Optional: A beautiful card or calligraphy rendition of a passage by Shoghi Effendi to give as a gift to each participant*

Note: You will need to inform the sponsoring Assembly that Participant Handouts for each participant should be ordered directly from the Bahá’í Distribution Service prior to the workshop or downloaded from the administrative website www.usbnc.org.

Introduction and Objectives (10 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To introduce the Assembly development process
- ★ To familiarize participants with the objectives of this module
- ★ To present an agenda outline of topics and activities

Activities

1. Brief devotions

- ★ Open with brief devotions that you have selected or ask for a volunteer.

2. Introduction (1-2 minutes)

- ★ Give a brief introduction to the resources of the Office of Assembly Development and the Assembly Development Module Workshops (see the description of the Office of Assembly Development which is attached toward the end of the Facilitation Guide). Highlight that the purpose of the workshops in the Assembly development process is to facilitate the development of “a new state of mind” on the part of Assembly members and the community, thereby enabling Assemblies to rise to the “new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities” envisioned by the Universal House of Justice.
- ★ Note that a primary focus of this particular workshop is the choices open to individuals in conflict.

3. Overview of objectives (1 minute)

- ★ Read aloud the objectives of this workshop and have them posted.
- ★ See page 9 of the Facilitation Guide for a list of objectives. Make adjustments for any sections that are removed for timing considerations or optional extension sessions that are added.

4. Review agenda (3 minutes)

- ★ Go through the agenda for the session, writing an outline of topics to be covered on a whiteboard or previously prepared flip chart.
- ★ See pages 9-10 for an agenda. Make adjustments for any sections that are removed for timing considerations or optional extension sessions that are added. You may also need to make timing adjustments depending on the audience composition: a full Assembly vs. mixed groups of participants, experienced vs. newly-formed Assemblies, etc.

The Call to “A New State of Mind” (15 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To grasp some of the implications of moving toward “a new state of mind”

Activities:

1. Discussion of quotations (5-10 minutes)

- ★ Have a participant read aloud the first quotation on the handout “The Call to a New State of Mind” (Participant Handouts, pp. 3-4)
- ★ Invite participants to share thoughts and feelings about “a new state of mind” and the process of moving toward it.
- ★ Offer the thought that one implication is the need for all of us to listen to “old” quotations with “new” ears in order to find new insights in familiar quotations.
- ★ *You may also choose to share two other thoughts:*
 - *First, a new state of mind is not a one-time paradigm shift – a condition of once we “get it,” we will necessarily “have it” forever – as much as a continuing process of reorienting our minds from what is to the vision of what the possibilities are, as described in the Writings and Ridván messages.*
 - *Second, it is normal to slide back into “old” states of mind – especially, under stress – for quite a while. States of mind are habits, or default settings, which take conscious, deliberate effort and time to change.*

Optional extension: Further discussion of quotations

- ★ *Have participants read aloud the remaining quotations on “The call to a new state of mind.” The following questions can be asked in any order, and you have the option to ask them after the paragraph in question or after all quotations are read.*
- ★ *Ask the group as a whole:*
 - *How might “an expansion of thought” be stimulated? (par. 3)*
 - *What might fall into the category of “the obscuring dust of acquired knowledge”? (par. 5)*
 - *What are some of the assumptions and conceptions we have in general about conflict and “what is natural and appropriate in relationships”? (par. 6)*

Correlating handout:

- ★ “The Call to a New State of Mind” pp. 3-4

The Call to “a New State of Mind,” continued

- *Where do these assumptions and conceptions come from? (par. 6)*
- *How do we remove “obscuring dust” and “clear the ground for new conceptions of social organization”? (par. 5 & 6)*
- *Is resisting or hiding from this “onrushing” and “quickenning wind” an option for us? for humanity as a whole? (par. 4)*
- ★ *Ask for thoughts on the process of “experiencing the rigorous effects” of an “onrushing” and “quickenning wind” ventilating “the modes of thought of us all, renewing, clarifying, and amplifying our perspectives.” (par. 4)*
- ★ *Ask for one word descriptions of the feelings that being part of such a process evokes. Acknowledge as a normal part of the change process all the feelings, whether they express excitement or reservations.*

2. Sharing of FACT data (5 minutes)

- ★ Mention that data gathered as part of an interfaith survey in 2000 showed that all religious communities experience conflict. The data from FACT (Faith Communities Today) showed that 75% of congregations reported some level of conflict in the last five years.
- ★ Share the thought that this is not surprising in light of Bahá’u’lláh’s statement that:

“No two men can be found who may be said to be outwardly and inwardly united. The evidences of discord and malice are apparent everywhere, though all were made for harmony and union.” (*Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 163-64)
- ★ Make the following points:
 - Conflict is a common part of life in our culture at this stage of humanity’s development.
 - Conflict may even be more common in groups, like the Bahá’í community, which deliberately reach out to include ever more diversity within their ranks.

The Call to “a New State of Mind,” continued

- Bahá'ís are not distinguished by the absence of conflict in our community, but we can be distinguished by how we choose to resolve it.
 - Our choices about conflict resolution are an aspect of demonstrating a new state of mind and modeling a new way of life.
- ★ Close this segment by asking a participant to read aloud the second quotation on the handout:

“It is not enough to proclaim the Bahá'í message, essential as that is. It is not enough to expand the rolls of Bahá'í membership, vital as that is. Souls must be transformed, communities thereby consolidated, new models of life thus attained.”

The Writings on Conflict and Contention

(60 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To establish a shared understanding of what behaviors and attitudes are forbidden
- ★ To gain a deeper appreciation of the damaging effects of conflict

Materials needed:

- ★ Highlighters

Correlating handouts:

- ★ “The Writings on Conflict and Contention” pp. 5-6
- ★ “Definitions” p. 7
- ★ “The Outcome of Conflict” p. 8

Setting up the activities

- ★ Refer participants to the handout “The Writings on Conflict and Contention” (Participant Handout, pp. 5-6).
- ★ Explain that an exact understanding of what is meant by “conflict” may feel elusive. While conflict is forbidden by Bahá’u’lláh in many passages, the point is sometimes raised, “But isn’t conflict such as the clash of differing opinions not only a good thing but a necessary part of consultation?” Having a shared understanding of what we mean when we say “conflict” is a necessary starting point.
- ★ Share the thought that some of our views about conflict have been shaped by our culture. Ask a participant to read the first quotation on the handout.
- ★ Suggest that
 - We are culturally used to thinking of conflict and competition as major stimulants of creativity, especially in areas such as scientific or technological advances.
 - These attitudes may make it difficult to arrive at an appropriate understanding of what the Writings forbidding conflict mean.
 - We must begin from the perspective that Bahá’u’lláh would not forbid something that was valuable or necessary for human progress and well-being.
- ★ Mention that passages in the Writings forbidding conflict often use that word in combination with one or more words. Looking at these companion words may suggest an appropriate perspective.

Activities:

1. Individual reading of the Writings (5 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants to underline or highlight what is forbidden in each of the quotations.
- ★ Ask volunteers to share what they highlighted except the word “conflict” itself.

The Writings on Conflict and Contention,

continued

2. Pairs consultation (15 minutes)

- ★ Refer participants to the handout “Definitions” (Participant Handouts, p. 7), which gives definitions of words used in the Writings just read to describe forbidden behavior.
- ★ Ask participants, working in pairs or groups of three, to read through the definitions, looking for how the meanings of these words might help distinguish between attitudes and behaviors which are harmful and forbidden and those attitudes and behaviors which are permissible, such as having different opinions or disagreeing with respect and courtesy.
- ★ Ask each pair, using both the quotations and the definitions, to summarize in their own words the behaviors and attitudes that are forbidden in this Revelation in such a way that these can be distinguished from the “clash of differing opinions” from which the spark of truth emerges.

3. Pairs report back (10 minutes)

- ★ Ask each pair to share its summary.

4. Facilitator comments (5 minutes)

- ★ Note that the origin or root meaning of the word “conflict” means “a striking together.” When ideas strike together, new understandings emerge. When egos or wills strike together, particularly when there is a desire to dominate over another person, harmful dynamics are set in motion.
- ★ Clarify that for the rest of the workshop, when the word “conflict” is used, it refers to the harmful behaviors and attitudes just identified.

Note: If confusion still exists about the difference between conflict and the “clash of differing opinions,” feel free to share the following commentary from the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice: “It is important to note that truth emerges after the ‘clash’ of carefully articulated views (which may well be expressed with enthusiasm and vigour), not from the clash of feelings. A clash of feelings is likely to obscure the truth, while a difference of opinion facilitates the discovery of truth.” Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, *Issues Concerning Community Functioning*, p. 13.

The Writings on Conflict and Contention,

continued

Note to facilitators: If you plan to do the Ugli Orange role play extension (Facilitation Guide pp. 21-22), do it now. If not, it will be summarized and shared with participants below in activity # 6. Make sure that participants do not read ahead through the Ugli Orange activity handouts prior to the exercise and that then they only read their own role.

5. Reflection on the Writings (15 minutes)

- ★ Refer participants to the handout “The Outcome of Conflict” (Participant Handouts, p. 8). Ask a participant to read aloud the first two quotations.
- ★ Comment that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá uses very strong language in these passages. Most of us who find ourselves in conflicts genuinely believe we are somehow in the right and the other party is in the wrong. These passages make clear two important points:
 - even if our opponent in conflict is Satan himself, disputes, conflict, and dissension are not allowed, how much less when the other party is not Satan at all
 - when two souls argue, there is no “right” party
- ★ Ask participants to reflect on the question “How can both parties be wrong?”
- ★ Comment that social science research has begun to gather knowledge about the damage that conflict inflicts on the perceptions and thinking processes of those who are engaged in it.
- ★ Share that among the research findings is evidence that as emotions and egos become engaged, these changes, among others, occur:
 - perceptions distort
 - suspicion and distrust increase
 - memory becomes selective
 - evaluation skills deteriorate
 - the ability to view the other person as a partner in finding solutions rather than as “the problem” is impaired

The Writings on Conflict and Contention, continued

- ★ Refer back to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement that “bitter loss” is the outcome of engaging in conflict.
- ★ Invite brief responses to the question “What, in addition to their own thinking processes, is damaged or lost when individuals engage in conflict?” (Possible answers might include the relationship between the individuals, the unity of the community, energy that could be spent productively is diverted, solutions that potentially exist may not be discovered.)

6. Summary of role play (5 minutes)

- ★ If you did not do the optional extension role play earlier, summarize the “Ugli orange” activity and its usual outcome:
 - Two individuals are desperately negotiating for the entire, and limited, supply of a rare orange, both of them needing it for noble purposes and both suspicious of the motives of the other.
 - What neither realizes – and what usually doesn’t emerge during the conversation between them – is that one only needs the rind and one only needs the juice, so both can get their needs fully met without it being at the other’s expense.
 - The role play usually ends in a stalemate, with neither party getting what is needs.
- ★ Comment that this role play underscores how automatically we assume that when in conflict, only one party can “win.” It also demonstrates the various conflict dynamics, showing how quickly we adopt competitive approaches that cause the truth – and creative solutions – to remain hidden.

7. Summary comments (5 minutes)

- ★ Share the thought that our Faith forbids conflict, and science is beginning to show the wisdom behind this divine command.
- ★ Close this segment by reading aloud a portion of the last quotation on the handout “The Writings on Conflict and Contention” (Participant Handout, pp. 5-6):

“We have forbidden you dissension and conflict in My Books, and My Scriptures, and My Scrolls, and My

The Writings on Conflict and Contention, continued

Tablets, and have wished thereby naught else save your exaltation and advancement. Unto this testify the heavens and the stars thereof, and the sun and the radiance thereof, and the trees and the leaves thereof, and the seas and the waves thereof, and the earth and the treasures thereof. We pray God to assist His loved ones, and aid them in that which beseemeth them in this blest, this mighty, and wondrous station.” – Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 120-21.

- ★ Comment that the reason Bahá’u’lláh has forbidden conflict is to bring us to a “blest . . . mighty, and wondrous station” that leads to our “exaltation and advancement.”
- ★ Point out how, in beautifully poetic and poignant language, He focuses our attention and emphasizes the importance of these statements by calling on all the forces of nature to testify to the truth of His intention: “the heavens and the stars thereof, and the sun and the radiance thereof, and the trees and the leaves thereof, and the seas and the waves thereof, and the earth and the treasures thereof.”
- ★ Share the thought that even though understanding the dangers and harm of conflict and learning to behave in new and unfamiliar ways is challenging, clearly this prohibition is, in the sight of God, a precious gift to humanity.

Optional break: A short break could be taken at this point. If a break is not taken, it may be desirable to have participants stand and stretch in place.

Optional Extension Session One: *The Ugli Orange* (30 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To simulate the dynamics of an apparent win/lose situation
- ★ To identify personal choices of collaboration or competition

Correlating handouts:

- ★ “The Ugli Orange Exercise: Role for Dr. Roland” p. 9
- ★ “The Ugli Orange Exercise: Role for Dr. Jones” p. 10

Activities:

1. Pairs role play (15 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants to count off in “ones” and “twos.”
 - All the “ones” will play the role of Dr. Jones.
 - All the “twos” will play the role of Dr. Roland.
- ★ Ask “ones” and “twos” to find an opposite partner and pair up for the activity.
- ★ Refer participants to their handouts “The Ugli Orange Exercise – Role for Dr. Roland” and “The Ugli Orange Exercise – Role for Dr. Jones” (Participant Handouts, pp. 9-10). Ask each person to read silently **ONLY** his/her role description. Alternatively, if language difficulties may be a problem, have everyone playing Dr. Jones go to one part of the room and everyone playing Dr. Roland go to the other side. Have someone in the group read the description aloud, then have all participants return to their pairs.
- ★ When participants know their roles, ask each pair to talk to each other to solve the problem. Give this instruction just as it is stated, and allow only 5 minutes for the pair to talk.

2. Discussion of the role play (10 minutes)

- ★ After 5 minutes reconvene the whole group, whether pairs have solved the problem yet or not.
- ★ Ask how many pairs solved the problem. Of those pairs, ask how many of the solutions involved giving the rind to Dr. Roland and the juice to Dr. Jones.
- ★ Ask pairs that did not solve the problem for their thoughts on why the solution to share the oranges did not come up.
- ★ Ask for a show of hands of how many pairs felt they used principles of Bahá’í consultation while they were trying to solve the problem.

Optional:

- ★ Ask pairs the following questions:
 - What was the most difficult aspect in the interaction?
 - Did you have a strategy before or during the negotiation?

The Ugli Orange, continued

- ★ Ask participants to take a moment to think about what dynamics existed between them and their partner. Ask them to keep these in mind while we consider the damage of conflict.

3. Facilitator comment (2 minutes)

- ★ Before moving to the next segment, share the following thoughts:
 - The content of this role play could just as easily have been the best method of teaching the Faith or the best curriculum to use for Study Circles, as if only one point of view or approach is “right.”
 - This kind of conflict sometimes exists in the Bahá’í community because we all care so much about the Faith and its progress but have not yet gained the highest levels of maturity.
 - While we may all have good intentions and noble ends in mind, sometimes our choices about the process we will use to work together and make decisions ensures underachievement (at best) or failure (at worst) of our goals.

Establishing New Patterns of Personal and Social Behavior (30 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To examine the new behaviors Bahá'ís and humanity as a whole are called to establish
- ★ To perceive the element of choice in this process

Materials needed:

- ★ Flip chart and marker

Correlating handouts:

- ★ “Establishing New Patterns of Personal and Social Behavior” pp. 11-12
- ★ “The Call to New Behaviors and Attitudes” p. 13

Setting up the activities

- ★ Both humanity as a whole and the Bahá'í community in particular are called to turn away from old, habitual patterns of behavior and to adopt new ones.

Activities:

1. Individual review of the Writings (10 minutes)

- ★ Refer participants to the handouts “Establishing New Patterns of Personal and Social Behavior” (Participant Handouts, pp. 11-12) and “The Call to New Behaviors and Attitudes” (Participant Handouts, p. 13).
- ★ Divide participants into two groups. Ask both groups to read the quotations silently.
 - Group 1 should look for what humanity in general is called to do.
 - Group 2 should look for what the Bahá'í community in particular is called to do.
- ★ Ask individuals in both groups to
 - look for examples of new behaviors and attitudes mentioned in their quotations.
 - fill in the appropriate column of the table on page 13.
- ★ As participants work, prepare a flip chart page to be a larger version of the table on p. 13 in the handouts.

2. Group reflection (15 minutes)

- ★ Ask volunteers from each group to share the responsibilities and examples from their column of the table. Post these on the flip chart page of the table. It does not matter if some items are listed in both columns.
- ★ Point out that Bahá'ís are asked to do all that is addressed to humanity in general plus model new ways of life as a community.
- ★ Refer back to the quotation on the handout that mentioned “Gather ye together, and for the sake of God resolve to root out whatever is the source of contention amongst you” and share these comments:

Establishing New Patterns of Personal and Social Behavior, continued

- Gardeners know that simply cutting down a plant at its base is not enough, as the plant can grow back.
 - In order to ensure that a plant will not reappear later, it is necessary to root out the plant, digging down to remove its last traces. This is hard work.
 - Rooting out the sources of contention is also often hard work. The roots may run deep, and they may have spread out.
 - This thorough, permanent course of action, however, is the one that Bahá'u'lláh commands.
- ★ Invite comments about the strong language used by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the last two quotations.

3. Facilitator comments on choice (5 minutes)

- ★ Share the thought that implicit in the call to new patterns of behavior is the concept of choice.
- ★ Comment that whenever we have an interaction with another human being, we have a whole spectrum of responses from which to choose. For instance, when provoked, we can
- respond in kind
 - mentally write off the offender
 - see the face of God in the face before us
 - see an ill-wisher as a well-wisher
- ★ Note that over time our choices of how to respond tend to become habitual. Stimulus X almost automatically calls forth response Y. In describing our collective response to provocation the Universal House of Justice speaks of “. . . the present world, with its entrenched pattern of conflict. . . .” (*Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986*, p. 690.)
- ★ Share the thought that two interesting dynamics are inherent in this choice process.
- Under stress or when feeling threatened, we tend to perceive a narrower range of choices open to us than actually exists. “There wasn’t much I could do.”

Establishing New Patterns of Personal and Social Behavior, continued

- Habitual responses or “entrenched patterns” tend to create a sense of inevitability. “That’s just the way things go.”
- ★ Comment that science and religion both tell us that actually there is always a moment between feeling an impulse and deciding whether and how to act on that impulse. The whole range of possible choices, in that moment, is always ours. We may need to slow down, spot the moment, and use it productively; but it is always there.
- ★ Emphasize that our choices both provide resolution to the current conflict episode and lay the foundation – for better or worse – for the future of the relationship.
- ★ Close with these reassurances:
 - We always have choice.
 - We can always choose to be unconditionally constructive, meaning that, like ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, we live our lives unconditioned by what others do to us, with us, or in response to us.
 - Each conflict episode successfully resolved in a healthy way creates a more positive relationship between the participants.
 - Each conflict episode successfully resolved gives participants greater confidence in their ability to resolve productively conflicts that may occur in future.

Choices Open and Closed to Bahá'ís in Conflicts (45 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To examine appropriate and inappropriate responses to provocation

Materials needed:

- ★ Flip chart and markers
- ★ Blank index cards
- ★ Art materials for decoration
- ★ *Optional:*
Blackboard or whiteboard

Correlating handouts:

- ★ “Resolving Conflict – What Bahá'ís Should and Should Not Do” pp. 14-19
- ★ “Guidance for Bahá'ís in Conflict” p. 20

Setting up the activities

- ★ While the range of choices about how to respond to provocation is wide, the Writings remove some of these possibilities as permissible for Bahá'ís in conflict.

Activities:

1. Small group review of the Writings (15 minutes)

- ★ Divide participants into 3 groups.
- ★ Refer participants to the handouts “Resolving Conflict – What Bahá'ís Should and Should Not Do” (Participant Handouts, pp. 14-19) and “Guidance for Bahá'ís in Conflict” (Participant Handouts, p. 20).
- ★ Since the first handout has a large number of quotations, assign each group a portion of the passages to read. The first group should read the quotations on pp. 14-15, the second group should read pp. 16-17, and the third should read pp. 18-19. Suggest that slower readers focus on the bolded quotations.
- ★ Ask each group to read their portion of the quotations and compile lists of what choices are open to a believer in conflict and what choices are closed. These choices should then be entered on the handout “Guidance for Bahá'ís in Conflict.”
- ★ While participants work, prepare a flip chart page with two columns: “Should not do” and “Should do”

2. Groups report back (20 minutes)

- ★ Ask first for choices that Bahá'ís should NOT make. Add each item mentioned to the chart. Encourage participants to fill in items not already on their handout.
- ★ When all items have been added to this column, mention that social science research has validated the wisdom behind the guidance of not resigning or withdrawing from a group:
 - Diversity of thought and perceptions enriches a group and helps it come up with more creative solutions.
 - When asked to reduce their membership, groups nearly always choose to eliminate some of this diversity and become more homogenous.

Choices Open and Closed to Bahá'ís in Conflicts, continued

- The very diversity that leads to higher level functioning is not always comfortable or welcomed by the group.
- ★ While this research shows the benefit to the group of retaining diversity, the Writings also make clear that individuals benefit through spiritual growth and maturation when they chose not to withdraw or resign but instead work through difficulties in their relationships.
- ★ Ask groups for choices that the Writings say Bahá'ís can and should make. Add these to the chart. Encourage participants to fill in items not already on their handout.
- ★ Refer back to the following quotation on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, which is the last quotation of each set:

“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.”
- ★ Suggest that this is a very powerful insight: the difficulty in cultivating these new behaviors – and turning away from responses common in our culture – is not with the behavior themselves, but with their newness.
 - Ask participants to remember successfully learning a new skill or behavior – learning to tie their shoelaces, ride a bike, drive a car, etc.
 - Ask them to remember how, once they had practiced diligently, the behavior became second nature.
- ★ Mention also that we do not have many role models to demonstrate these behaviors and choices. We are fortunate to have the example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, which we will look at later.
- ★ Close this activity by reminding participants that the social science research about the effects of conflict on human functioning clearly shows that we function much better – perceptions, reasoning skills, emotional equilibrium, etc. – when we make the choice to NOT allow ourselves to become ensnared in escalating conflict.

Choices Open and Closed to Bahá'ís in Conflicts, continued

3. Artwork activity (10 minutes)

- ★ As a way to help remember the healthy choices the Writings contain, ask participants to
 - choose a short memory verse from the quotations just studied (their own group's or another group's)
 - write their choice on a blank index card
 - decorate their card
- ★ Invite participants to place their card in a prayer book or where they will see it often in times of need.

Optional extension: Memorization (5 minutes)

- ★ *Write out on a blackboard or whiteboard either of the following verses, which are both in the Participant Handouts.*
- ★ *Mention that when we feel wronged, hurt, or diminished by someone, we need an extremely compelling reason to set our grievance aside and move forward in a spirit of cooperation with the other party. Bahá'u'lláh gives us several reasons to do so: for our own happiness, for love of Him, and for the sake of His Cause.*
- ★ *Have participants recite the verse in unison. Remove 2-3 key words after each recitation, until the verse is memorized. Symbols may be placed above the words to aid in memorization.*

“We have forbidden you dissension and conflict in My Books, and My Scriptures, and My Scrolls, and My Tablets, and have wished thereby naught else save your exaltation and advancement.” (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 120.)

“If any differences arise amongst you, behold Me standing before your face, and overlook the faults of one another for My name's sake and as a token of your love for My manifest and resplendent Cause.” (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 315.)

Optional break: *A short break could be taken at this point. If a break is not taken, it may be desirable to have participants stand and stretch in place.*

Optional Extension Session Two: Tests as a Means of Individual and Collective Growth (15 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To reflect on the necessity and benefits of tests

Setting up the activities

- ★ Comment that conflict is often experienced as a test by individuals, communities, and Assemblies. While tests may be highly uncomfortable and challenging, they can also stimulate growth and transformation.

Activities:

1. Individual review of the Writings (5 minutes)

- ★ Refer participants to the handout “Tests as a Means of Individual and Collective Growth” (Participant Handouts, pp. 21-22).
- ★ Ask participants to read silently through the quotations, highlighting key phrases and concepts.

2. Pairs consultation (10 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants, working with a partner, to discuss the following focus questions:
 - What benefits do tests confer on the individual?
 - What benefits do tests confer on a community?
 - How should individuals meet the tests that come their way?

Correlating handout:

- ★ “Tests as a Means of Individual and Collective Growth” pp. 21-22

Purpose

- ★ To reflect on ways of drawing on spiritual power
- ★ To perceive the protection these practices impart

Prepare in advance

- ★ Have available a bowl of water and a can of baby talcum powder

Activities:

1. Group reading of Writings (10 minutes)

- ★ Ask volunteers to read aloud all but the last quotation on the handout “Drawing on Spiritual Power to Resolve Conflict” (Participant Handouts, pp. 23-25).
- ★ Ask listeners to underline specific actions mentioned that they can take.
- ★ Allow a few moments for personal reflection.

Optional:

- ★ *Invite comments on the fifth quotation, which mentions turning our “stumbling block into stepping stones.”*
 - *What are ways in which this could be done?*
 - *How would acting on this advice change one’s feelings about “stumbling blocks”?*

2. Science demonstration (5 minutes)

- ★ Refer back to the first quotation with its statement that “the forces of darkness in the world are so prevalent and strong that their morbid and turbulent influence is felt by all” and the consequent need to “fight against the atmosphere of present day society which is unloving, disunited, careless of right and wrong, and heedless of God.”
- ★ Share the thought that during dark times – in our personal lives, in the life of our community, or in the larger world – our reliance on God is a powerful form of protection.
- ★ Mention the example of ducks:
 - Ducks live in the water; but if their feathers get wet, they can drown.
 - To stay safe and dry, ducks continually cover their feathers with a special oil produced inside them.
 - This oil keeps the feathers dry, even when the ducks are constantly surrounded by water.

Materials needed:

- ★ A bowl of water
- ★ A can of baby talcum powder

Correlating handout:

- ★ “Drawing on Spiritual Power to Resolve Conflict” pp. 23-25

Drawing on Spiritual Power to Resolve Conflict and Build Unity, continued

- ★ Bring out the bowl of water and the can of talc. Sprinkle powder over the surface of the water to form a thin layer. Let each participant, one at a time, dip his or her fingers into the water, through the powder, and take them back out. Their fingers will remain dry.
- ★ Suggest that reliance on God and observance of the spiritual practices to which Bahá'u'lláh calls us are ways to “coat our feathers” so that we can both remain protected and also be positive forces for harmony and unity in the world.
- ★ Close by sharing the last quotation on the handout, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement that “The sign of a knower and lover is this, that you will find him dry in the sea.” (*Memorials of the Faithful*, p. 11)

Drawing Strength from the Example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (30 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To be reminded that we are not alone in being subjected to tests
- ★ To feel encouraged and inspired by our Exemplar

Activities:

1. Listening to stories (15 minutes)

- ★ Refer participants to the handout “Drawing Strength from the Example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá” (Participant Handouts, pp. 26-30).
- ★ Explain that this is a short collection of stories about the Master interspersed with guidance on facing tests and opposition.
- ★ Ask volunteers to take turns reading aloud all the passages on the handout.
- ★ Ask listeners to highlight passages they find particularly meaningful.

2. Individual and pairs reflection (15 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants to take a few minutes to re-read the handout silently and reflect on advice or examples that they feel would be most helpful to them.
- ★ Ask participants to choose a partner and then to share with their partner the passages they highlighted and advice or examples they found helpful.

Materials needed:

- ★ Highlighters

Correlating handout:

- ★ “Drawing Strength from the Example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá” pp. 26-30

Learning to Let Go of Past Hurts (25 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To identify old hurts and let go of them

Setting up the activity

- ★ Refer back to the following quotation on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, which was read by one of the groups reviewing choices in conflict (Participant Handouts, p. 19):

“All should be ready and willing to set aside every personal sense of grievance – justified or unjustified – for the good of the Cause, because the people will never embrace it until they see in its community life mirrored what is so conspicuously lacking in the world: love and unity.”
- ★ Comment that we tend to separate our grievances into two categories, justified and unjustified.
 - We all understand that unjustified grievances – hurts that resulted from misunderstandings or were inflicted unintentionally – should be set aside.
 - We tend to feel that justified grievances need to be apologized for and made right.
- ★ Suggest that the Guardian’s guidance in this quotation saves us the time and emotional energy of sorting through – and dwelling on – our grievances because it prescribes the same course of action for all of them: let them go.

Materials needed:

- ★ Yellow construction paper bananas and pens, one per person
- ★ Pencils or pens, one per person
- ★ A short, fat pillar candle in a fire-proof container large enough to catch falling, burning pieces of paper OR a container to hold torn up bananas

Activities:

1. Reflection on the dynamics of entrapment (5 minutes)

- ★ Share the dynamics of the following situation:
 - In some parts of the world 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.
- ★ Suggest that some of the elements that stand in the way of resolving conflicts and attaining a greater degree of unity in Bahá’í communities are really bananas that should be dropped:

Learning to Let Go of Past Hurts, continued

- People have been holding on to hurt feelings, grudges against others, or grievances about something that happened in the community for years.
 - Collecting and preserving these feelings and experiences creates barriers and ties up energy that could be more productively used elsewhere.
- ★ Refer participants to the handout “Learning to Let Go of Past Hurts” (Participant Handouts, p. 31).
 - ★ Ask a volunteer to read aloud the first quotation on the handout:

“The immediate past, with all its confused issues and unpleasant memories must be entirely forgotten, if the task that lies ahead is to be efficiently prosecuted. Personal animosities, suspicions, accusations, wounded pride, controversial issues must all be laid aside.”
 - ★ Ask participants, in light of this passage, to ponder two questions:
 - “Have I been holding on to bad feelings?”
 - “If so, how is this affecting the development of the community?”
 - ★ Suggest that it is time to make some of these bad feelings “bananas” and drop them, freeing everyone to achieve both greater personal happiness and greater community unity.

2. Letting go of bananas (20 minutes)

- ★ Hand out one yellow paper banana to each person.
- ★ Read the following words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addressed to His guests as He served them dinner on one occasion:

“If one of you has been wounded in heart by the words or deeds of another, during the past year, forgive him now; that in purity of heart and loving pardon, you may feast in happiness, and arise, renewed in spirit.” (*Vignettes from the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 40, #8.)
- ★ Encourage participants to take a few moments to ponder the following questions:

Learning to Let Go of Past Hurts, continued

- Whom may I have hurt?
 - How can I make amends?
 - Who has hurt me?
 - Can I make this hurt a “banana” and let it go?
- ★ Ask participants to write down a hurt or grievance they may have been carrying with them on their paper banana.
- ★ When all have finished, read the following passage from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:
- “Make haste to love! Make haste to trust! Make haste to give! To guidance come!
- “Come ye for harmony! To behold the Star of Day! Come here for kindness, for ease! Come here for amity and peace!
- “Come and cast down your weapons of wrath, till unity is won! Come and in the Lord’s true path each one help each one.” (*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 273.)
- ★ Invite each participant to come forward and burn (or tear up) his or her banana.
- ★ After all bananas have been released, read the following words of Bahá’u’lláh:
- “Please God, ye will regard this blessed night as the night of unity, will knit your souls together, and resolve to adorn yourselves with the ornament of a goodly and praise-worthy character.” (*Gleanings*, p. 316.)

Closing (10 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To review what has been learned
- ★ To provide assurance of divine confirmation for all efforts to resolve conflict by making appropriate choices

Activities:

1. Review of what has been learned (1 minute)

- ★ Give a quick summary of what has been learned:
 - We have looked at the damaging effects of conflict, coming to understand that all are harmed – parties to the conflict and the community alike – when the clash of ideas becomes a clash of egos.
 - We have looked at the guidance in the Writings and the example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and discovered different choices we can make.
 - We have gained confidence that conflicts resolved in a positive way position our community to have a healthier atmosphere and to demonstrate “new models of life.”
 - We have left behind old hurts and grievances from past conflicts.

2. Closing quotations (5 minutes)

- ★ Choose participants to read aloud one each of the closing quotations “Assurances of Divine Confirmations” (Participant Handouts, pp. 32-33)

Optional music or group singing

- ★ *Play the song “Isn’t It Wonderful?” from the “Loving Hands” cassette tape by Jean Marks and Susan Engle, which contains the thought “Let us all forget the past.”*

Optional:

- ★ *Give each participant a beautiful card or calligraphy version of a passage by Shoghi Effendi as a gift (an example suitable for photocopying onto attractive paper follows)*

Materials needed:

- ★ Cassette player and tape cued to song

Correlating handout:

- ★ “Assurances of Divine Confirmations” pp. 32-33

The all-conquering Spirit of Bahá'u'lláh cannot prove effective in this world of strife and turmoil, and cannot achieve its purpose for mankind, unless we, who are named after His Name, and who are the recipients of His Grace, endeavour, by our example, our daily life and our dealings with our fellow-men, to reveal that noble spirit of love and self-sacrifice of which the world stands in need at present.

Shoghi Effendi