

Participant Handouts

Conflict Resolution Part 1: Conflict and the Individual

An Assembly Development Module Workshop

Overview for Participants

Conflict Resolution Part 1: Conflict and the Individual

Purpose

- ★ 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.”

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.

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 individual participants

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

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

The Call to a New State of Mind

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

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

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

“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, Ridván message to the Bahá’ís of the world, 1989.

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

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

“The burgeoning influence of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation seemed . . . to have assumed the character of an onrushing wind blowing through the archaic structure of the old order, felling mighty pillars and clearing the ground for new conceptions of social organization. . . . Even the Community of the Most Great Name itself is experiencing the rigorous effects of this quickening wind as it ventilates the modes of thought of us all, renewing, clarifying, and amplifying our perspectives as to the purpose of the Order of Bahá’u’lláh in the wake of humanity’s suffering and turmoil.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván message to the Bahá’ís of the world, 1992.

“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.

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

“Present-day conceptions of what is natural and appropriate in relationships – among human beings themselves, between human

The Call to a New State of Mind, continued

“Change is an evolutionary process. . . .”

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

“Movement in this direction has barely begun.”

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

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

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

The Writings on Conflict and Contention

“Ye have been forbidden in the Book of God to engage in contention and conflict. . . .”

“Whether in the form of the adversarial structure of civil government, the advocacy principle informing most of civil law, a glorification of the struggle between classes and other social groups, or the competitive spirit dominating so much of modern life, conflict is accepted as the mainspring of human interaction.”

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

“Ye have been forbidden in the Book of God to engage in contention and conflict, to strike another, or to commit similar acts whereby hearts and souls may be saddened.”

Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, pp. 72-73.

“Conflict and contention are categorically forbidden in His Book. This is a decree of God in this Most Great Revelation. It is divinely preserved from annulment and is invested by Him with the splendour of His confirmation. Verily He is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.”

Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 221.

“O ye beloved of the Lord! In this sacred Dispensation, conflict and contention are in no wise permitted. Every aggressor deprives himself of God’s grace.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Will and Testament*, p. 13.

“Do not quarrel with anybody, and shun every form of dispute.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 210.

“From the beginning of human history down to this time the world of humanity has not enjoyed a day of absolute rest and relaxation from conflict and strife.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 266.

“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.”

Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 163-64.

The Writings on Conflict and Contention, continued

“Say: O people! Sow not the seeds of discord among men, and refrain from contending with your neighbor.”

Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 303-304.

“We exhorted all men, and particularly this people, through Our wise counsels and loving admonitions, and forbade them to engage in sedition, quarrels, disputes and conflict. As a result of this, and by the grace of God, waywardness and folly were changed into piety and understanding, and weapons converted into instruments of peace.”

Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 22.

“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. 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. Moreover We beseech Him to graciously enable those who surround Me to observe that which My Pen of Glory hath enjoined upon them.”

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 120-21.

Definitions of Words used to Describe Forbidden Behavior

The following are definitions of words used in the Writings to describe forbidden behavior

Contention

- 1) a struggling together in opposition; strife
- 2) a striving in rivalry; competition, contest
- 3) strife in debate; dispute, controversy

Quarrel

- 1) to disagree angrily; squabble
- 2) to dispute angrily; wrangle
- 3) to make a complaint; find fault

Dispute

- 1) debate or controversy
- 2) quarrel

Strife

- 1) vigorous or bitter conflict, discord, or antagonism
- 2) a quarrel, struggle or clash
- 3) competition or rivalry

Discord

- 1) lack of concord or harmony; disagreement
- 2) difference of opinion
- 3) strife; dispute; war

Malice

- 1) desire to inflict injury or suffering on another, especially when based on deep-seated meanness
- 2) evil intent on the part of a person who commits a wrongful act injurious to others

Sedition

- 1) incitement of public disorder or rebellion against a government
- 2) any action, especially in speech or writing, promoting such disorder or rebellion

Dissension

- 1) strong disagreement; discord; a contention or quarrel

The Outcome of Conflict

“A clash of feelings is likely to obscure the truth, while a difference of opinion facilitates the discovery of truth.”

“If two souls quarrel and contend about a question of the divine questions, differing and disputing, both are wrong.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, p. 56.

“. . . dissension - even with the Devil - is the way to bitter loss. This is why, in our illumined age, God teacheth that conflicts and disputes are not allowable, not even with Satan himself.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 275.

“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 Ugli Orange Exercise: Dr. Roland

**Role for
Dr. Roland**
(Only read your
role)

You are Dr. Roland. You work as a research scientist for a pharmaceutical firm. The firm is under contract with the government to do research on methods of combating enemy uses of chemical and biological warfare.

Recently several World War II experimental nerve gas bombs were moved from the mainland to a small island just off the U.S. coast in the Pacific. In the process of transporting them two of the bombs developed a leak. The leak is presently controlled but government scientists believe that the gas can only be contained for two weeks at the most. They know of no method of preventing the gas from getting into the atmosphere and spreading to other islands, and very likely to the West Coast as well. If this occurs, it is likely that thousands of people will incur serious brain damage or die.

You've developed a synthetic vapor which will neutralize the nerve gas if it is injected into the bomb chamber before the gas leaks out. The vapor is made with a chemical taken from the rind of the Ugli orange, a very rare fruit. Unfortunately, only 4,000 of these oranges were produced this season.

You have been informed that Mr. Cardoza, a fruit exporter in South America, is in possession of 3,000 Ugli oranges. The chemicals from the rinds of this number of oranges would be sufficient to neutralize the gas if the serum is developed and injected efficiently. You have also been informed that the rinds of these oranges are in good condition.

You have just been informed that Dr. Jones is also urgently seeking purchase of Ugli oranges and is aware of Mr. Cardoza's possession of the 3,000 available. Dr. Jones works for a firm with which your firm is highly competitive. There is a great deal of industrial espionage in the pharmaceutical industry. Over the years, your firm and Dr. Jones's firm have sued each other for violations of industrial espionage laws and infringement of patent rights several times. Litigation on two suits is still in process.

The Federal government has asked your firm for assistance. You've been authorized by your firm to approach Mr. Cardoza to purchase the 3,000 Ugli oranges. You have been told he will sell them to the highest bidder. Your firm has authorized you to bid as high as \$250,000 to obtain the rind of the oranges.

Before approaching Mr. Cardoza, you have decided to talk to Dr. Jones to influence him so that he will not prevent you from purchasing the oranges.

The Ugli Orange Exercise: Dr. Jones

**Role for
Dr. Jones**
(Only read your
role)

You are Dr. Jones, a biological research scientist employed by a pharmaceutical firm. You have recently developed a synthetic chemical useful for curing and preventing the dreaded disease of Rudosen. Rudosen is a disease contracted by pregnant women. If not caught in the first six weeks of pregnancy, the disease causes serious brain, eye, and ear damage to the unborn child. Recently, there has been an outbreak of Rudosen in your state and several thousand women have contracted the disease.

Research with volunteer patients has shown that your recently developed synthetic serum cures Rudosen in its early stages. Unfortunately, the serum is made from the juice of the Ugli orange, which is a very rare fruit. Only a small quantity (approximately 4,000) of these oranges was produced last season. No additional Ugli oranges will be available until next season, which will be too late to cure the present Rudosen victims.

You've demonstrated that your synthetic serum is in no way harmful to pregnant women, and there are no side effects. The Food and Drug Administration has approved the production and distribution of the serum as a cure for Rudosen. Unfortunately, the present outbreak was unexpected, and your firm had not planned on having the serum available for six months. Your firm holds the patent on the synthetic serum, and it is expected to be a highly profitable product when it is generally available to the public.

You have been informed that Mr. Cardoza, a South American fruit exporter, is in possession of 3,000 Ugli oranges. If you could obtain the juice of all 3,000, you would be able to both cure the present victims and provide sufficient inoculation for the remaining pregnant women in the state.

You have just been informed that Dr. Roland is also urgently seeking Ugli oranges and is also aware of Mr. Cardoza's possession of the 3,000 available. Dr. Roland is employed by a competitor pharmaceutical firm. There is a great deal of industrial espionage in the pharmaceutical industry. Over the past several years, Dr. Roland's firm and your firm have sued each other for infringement of patent rights and espionage law violations several times.

You've been authorized by your firm to approach Mr. Cardoza to purchase the 3,000 Ugli oranges. You have been told he will sell them to the highest bidder. Your firm has authorized you to bid as high as \$250,000 to obtain the juice of the 3,000 available oranges.

Before approaching Mr. Cardoza, you have decided to talk with Dr. Roland to influence him so that he will not prevent you from purchasing the oranges.

Establishing New Patterns of Personal and Social Behavior

“Inspired by the spirit of Bahá’u’lláh’s Teachings, we are called on to make the Bahá’í community a haven of harmony and love. . . .”

“O contending peoples and kindreds of the earth! Set your faces towards unity, and let the radiance of its light shine upon you. Gather ye together, and for the sake of God resolve to root out whatever is the source of contention amongst you. Then will the effulgence of the world's great Luminary envelop the whole earth, and its inhabitants become the citizens of one city, and the occupants of one and the same throne. This wronged One hath, ever since the early days of His life, cherished none other desire but this, and will continue to entertain no wish except this wish.”

Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 217.

“Strive day and night that animosity and contention may pass away from the hearts of men. . . .”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 291.

“Only through the dawning consciousness that they constitute a single people will the inhabitants of the planet be enabled to turn away from the patterns of conflict that have dominated social organization in the past and begin to learn the ways of collaboration and conciliation.”

The Bahá’í International Community’s Office of Public Information, January 23, 1955, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, section I.

“The Bahá’í community is an association of individuals who have voluntarily come together, on recognizing Bahá’u’lláh’s claim to be the Manifestation of God for this age, to establish certain patterns of personal and social behavior and to build the institutions that are to promote these patterns.”

Letter written behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 2, 1996, in *Rights and Responsibilities: The Complementary Roles of the Individual and Institutions*, p. 55.

“Inspired by the spirit of Bahá’u’lláh’s Teachings, we are called on to make the Bahá’í community a haven of harmony and love, in contrast to the distress, contention and strife of the surrounding society.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, April 13, 1994 to an individual.

“Wherever a Bahá’í community exists, whether large or small, let it be distinguished for its abiding sense of security and faith, its high standard of rectitude, its complete freedom from all forms of

Establishing New Patterns of Personal and Social Behavior, continued

“For Bahá’í community life implies a consciousness of group solidarity strong enough to enable every individual believer to give up what is essentially personal for the sake of the common weal.”

prejudice, the spirit of love among its members and for the closely knit fabric of its social life.”

The Universal House of Justice, August 1968, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986*, p. 137.

“For Bahá’í community life implies a consciousness of group solidarity strong enough to enable every individual believer to give up what is essentially personal for the sake of the common weal.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, May 31, 1934, in *The National Spiritual Assembly*, p. 58.

“Do not allow difference of opinion, or diversity of thought to separate you from your fellow-men, or to be the cause of dispute, hatred and strife in your hearts.

“Rather, search diligently for the truth and make all men your friends.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Paris Talks*, p. 53.

“Where love, respect and courtesy are genuinely and mutually expressed, estrangement finds no accommodation and problems become soluble challenges.”

The Universal House of Justice, May 19, 1994, in *Rights and Responsibilities: The Complementary Roles of the Individual and Institutions*, p. 35.

“Strive to attain a station of absolute love one toward another. By the absence of love, enmity* increases. By the exercise of love, love strengthens and enmities* dwindle away.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 9.

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“God desires unity and love; He commands harmony and fellowship. Enmity* is human disobedience; God Himself is love.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 300.

* **Enmity**: a feeling or condition of hostility; hatred; ill will; animosity; antagonism

“I swear this by the beauty of the Lord: whensoever I hear good of the friends, my heart filleth up with joy; but whensoever I find even a hint that they are on bad terms one with another, I am overwhelmed by grief. Such is the condition of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Then judge from this where your duty lieth.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 231.

The Call to New Behaviors and Attitudes

Using the quotations on the previous pages, list who is responsible for doing what

Both humanity as a whole and the Bahá'í community in particular are called to new behaviors and attitudes. Using the quotations on the previous pages, list who is responsible for doing what.

Everyone

Bahá'ís

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Resolving Conflict - What Bahá'ís Should and Should Not Do

Quotations for Group 1

“Indeed, at this time of transition, when the institutions identified with that Order are taking shape, disappointments and frustrations are unavoidable, the actions of the individual Bahá'ís and local and national institutions fall far short of the ideal to be achieved, and souls are tested in the process. **But rather than give up the struggle and turn away from the community, a steadfast Bahá'í makes ever greater effort to master and apply the principles that have been clearly stated in the Bahá'í writings for resolving problems and forging success.**”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, October 27, 1997, to an individual.

“... the Guardian feels the best course of action in this matter is to ask both of the believers concerned to forgive and forget the entire matter.

“He does not want the friends to form the habit of taking up a kind of Bahá'í litigation* against each other. Their duties to humanity are too sacred and urgent in these days, when the Cause is struggling to spread and assert its independence, for them to spend their precious time, and his precious time, in this way. Ask them, therefore, to unite, forget the past, and serve as never before.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, July 22, 1947, in *The Compilation of Compilations vol. II*, p. 9, #1287.

“Let not your heart be offended with anyone. If some one commits an error and wrong toward you, you must instantly forgive him. Do not complain of others. Refrain from reprimanding them, and if you wish to give admonition or advice, let it be offered in such a way that it will not burden the hearer. Turn all your thoughts toward bringing joy to hearts. Beware! Beware! lest ye offend any heart.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 453.

“You ask in your letter for guidance on the implications of the prohibition on backbiting and more specifically whether, in moments of anger or depression, the believer is permitted to turn to his friends to unburden his soul and discuss his problem in human relations. Normally, it is possible to describe the situation surrounding a problem and seek help and advice in resolving it, without necessarily mentioning names. The individual believer

* **Litigation:** lawsuit

Resolving Conflict - What Bahá'ís Should and Should Not Do, continued

Quotations for Group 1, continued

should seek to do this, whether he is consulting a friend, Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í, or whether the friend is consulting him. . . .

“You also ask what one should do to ‘handle depression and anger with someone’ one feels ‘very positively about’. **The Universal House of Justice suggests that you call to mind the admonitions found in our Writings on the need to overlook the shortcomings of others, to forgive and conceal their misdeeds, not to expose their bad qualities, but to search for and affirm their praiseworthy ones, and endeavour to be always forbearing, patient, and merciful.** Such passages as the following extract from one of the letters written on behalf of the beloved Guardian by his secretary will also be helpful:

‘Each of us is responsible for one life only, and that is our own. Each of us is immeasurably far from being “perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect” and the task of perfecting our own life and character is one that requires all our attention, our will-power and energy. . . . On no subject are the Bahá'í teachings more emphatic than on the necessity to abstain from fault-finding and backbiting, while being ever eager to discover and root out our own faults and overcome our own failings.’”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, September 23, 1975, in *Lights of Guidance* (5th ed.), pp. 90-91, #311.

“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 *Lights of Guidance* (5th ed.), p. 343, #1150.

Resolving Conflict - What Bahá'ís Should and Should Not Do, continued

Quotations for Group 2

“... it is clear that one cannot call oneself a Bahá'í and sever oneself from the community; nor can one help resolve the problems in the Bahá'í community by withdrawing from it.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, February 28, 1997, to a National Assembly.

“The worldwide undertakings on which the Cause of God is embarked are far too significant, the need of the peoples of the world for the Message of Bahá'u'lláh far too urgent, the perils facing mankind far too grave, the progress of events far too swift, to permit His followers to squander their time and efforts in fruitless contention. Now, if ever, is the time for love among the friends, for unity of understanding and endeavor, for self-sacrifice and service by Bahá'ís in every part of the world.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 2, 1996, in *Rights and Responsibilities: The Complementary Roles of the Individual and Institutions*, pp. 55-56.

“Since you have turned to him for guidance, he will very frankly give you his opinion.

“He feels that the present inharmony prevailing amongst you . . . is very detrimental to the advancement of the Cause, and can only lead to disruption and the chilling of the interest of new believers. **You . . . should forget about your personal grievances, and unite for the protection of the Faith which he well knows you are all loyally devoted to and ready to sacrifice for.**

“Perhaps the greatest test Bahá'ís are ever subjected to is from each other; but for the sake of the Master they should be ever ready to overlook each other's mistakes, apologize for harsh words they have uttered, forgive and forget. He strongly recommends to you this course of action.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, December 18, 1945, in *The Compilation of Compilations vol. II*, p. 15, #1308.

“Be not the cause of grief, much less of discord and strife.”
Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 27.

“He urges you not to lose heart, and never to stop serving the Faith. No matter what the attitude of others may be, it cannot exonerate you from showing the right attitude; your

Resolving Conflict - What Bahá'ís Should and Should Not Do, continued

Quotations for Group 2

duty is to God, and you should rest assured in the end He will solve all these problems.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi , November 14, 1948, in *Issues Concerning Community Functioning*, p. 15.

“We must never dwell too much on the attitudes and feelings of our fellow-believers towards us. What is most important is to foster love and harmony and ignore any rebuffs we may receive; in this way the weaknesses of human nature and the peculiarity or attitude of any particular person is not magnified, but pales into insignificance in comparison with our joint service to the Faith we all love.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi , September 19, 1948, in *Lights of Guidance* (5th ed.), p. 116, #397.

“The Bahá'ís everywhere . . . have to sacrifice their personalities, to a certain extent, in order that the community life may grow and develop as a whole. These things are difficult – but we must realize that they will lead us to a very much greater, more perfect, way of life when the Faith is properly established. . . .”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi , October 26, 1943, in *The National Spiritual Assembly*, p. 35.

“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 *Lights of Guidance* (5th ed.), p. 343, #1150.

Resolving Conflict - What Bahá'ís Should and Should Not Do, continued

Quotations for Group 3

“The unity we are called upon to achieve in Bahá'í service is a harmony which is produced through active participation in the work of the Cause, not through withdrawal from activity, or resignation from Assemblies and Committees.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, December 25, 1983, in *Behold Me: Bahá'í Writings on Unity*, p. 88, #197.

“The Bahá'ís must learn to forget personalities and to overcome the desire – so natural in people – to take sides and fight about it.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, June 30, 1949, in *Lights of Guidance* (5th ed.), p. 247, #826.

“Revile* ye not one another. We, verily, have come to unite and weld together all that dwell on earth. . . . If anyone revile you, or trouble touch you, in the path of God, be patient, and put your trust in Him Who heareth, Who seeth.”

Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 24.

“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.”

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 315.

“You have been blessed by recognizing Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God: your responsibility therefore is to God, irrespective of the actions of your fellow-believers. If every devoted believer withdrew from the Cause as soon as he found the sins of his fellow-Bahá'ís unbearable, who would be left to serve Bahá'u'lláh?”

The Universal House of Justice, in *Toward Oneness*, p. 37, #78.

“. . . you have an inescapable responsibility before God to search your souls in order to identify the cause or causes of the differences, and then to arise with purity of motive, and with courage and perseverance to change hatred and separation into love and unity, division and discord into fellowship and harmony. This can easily be done if each one of you determines to subordinate* personal interests and feelings to the overall needs

* **Revile:** to address or speak of abusively
* **Subordinate:** to place in a lower order or rank; to make secondary

Resolving Conflict - What Bahá'ís Should and Should Not Do, continued

Quotations for Group 3, continued

of the Cause of God and its welfare, and to make the necessary effort to forget and forgive the past. . . .”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, August 30, 1982, in *Behold Me: Bahá'í Writings on Unity*, p. 98, # 221.

“. . . when Bahá'ís permit the dark forces of the world to enter into their own relationships within the Faith they gravely jeopardize its progress. . . . **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.**”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, May 13, 1945, in *Lights of Guidance* (5th ed.), p. 166, #548.

“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 *Lights of Guidance* (5th ed.), p. 343, #1150.

Guidance for Bahá'ís in Conflict

As groups report back, fill in your own list of what Bahá'ís in conflict should and should not do

What Bahá'ís should NOT do

What Bahá'ís should do

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Tests as a Means of Individual and Collective Growth

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?

“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.

“O SON OF MAN! My calamity is My providence, outwardly it is fire and vengeance, but inwardly it is light and mercy. Hasten thereunto that thou mayest become an eternal light and an immortal spirit. This is My command unto thee, do thou observe it.”

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

“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.

“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*, p. 50.

“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, May 19, 1994, to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States in *Rights and Responsibilities: The Complementary Roles of the Individual and Institutions*, p. 29.

“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 *The Compilation of Compilations vol. I*, p. 460, #1020.

Tests as a Means of Individual and Collective Growth, continued

“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.

Drawing on Spiritual Power to Resolve Conflict and Build Unity

“Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God . . . is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men.”

“The believers, to better understand their own internal condition, should realize that the forces of darkness in the world are so prevalent and strong that their morbid and turbulent influence is felt by all. They should therefore consciously strive to be more loving, more united, more dedicated and prayerful than ever before, in order to fight against the atmosphere of present day society which is unloving, disunited, careless of right and wrong, and heedless of God.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi , March 20, 1946, in *Lights of Guidance* (5th ed.), p. 405, #1346.

“. . . when divers shades of thought, temperament and character, are brought together under the power and influence of one central agency, the beauty and glory of human perfection will be revealed and made manifest. Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men. Verily, it is the penetrating power in all things, the mover of souls and the binder and regulator in the world of humanity.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 291-292.

“If the friends will forget all personal differences and open their hearts to a great love for each other for the sake of Bahá’u’lláh, they will find that their powers are vastly increased; they will attract the heart of the public, and will witness a rapid growth of the Holy Faith. . . .”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi , October 26, 1943, in *The Compilation of Compilations vol. II*, p. 11, #1296.

“They whose hearts are warmed by the energizing influence of God’s creative love cherish His creatures for His sake, and recognize in every human face a sign of His reflected glory.”

Shoghi Effendi , *World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 198.

“. . . We Bahá’ís can always, with the aid of Bahá’u’lláh, Who, is ever ready to strengthen and assist us, turn our stumbling blocks into stepping stones, and utilize the often violent forces released by sincere but perhaps misguided friends, as a positive stream of power by turning them into productive channels instead of destructive ones.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi , June 30, 1949, in *Lights of Guidance* (5th ed.), pp. 603-4.

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

“... when . . . a man shows love and humility towards another man for the sake of God, it is as if he has loved God and humbled himself before Him. This will cause the bounties and blessings of God to descend upon him and he will be rewarded for his deeds.”

“One of the outstanding counsels of Bahá’u’lláh in this Tablet [Lawh-i-Laylatu’l-Quds] concerns the manner in which two individuals should act towards each other. The spiritual principle upon which Bahá’u’lláh’s advice is based constitutes one of the fundamental verities governing the creation of man. He states that nothing in this world can harm a man of insight. His integrity and exalted station will never be affected by whatever may befall him in this life. For when such a man shows love and humility towards another man for the sake of God, it is as if he has loved God and humbled himself before Him. This will cause the bounties and blessings of God to descend upon him and he will be rewarded for his deeds. If the other individual, however, reacts in the opposite way and treats his fellow man with contempt and pride, such an action will never affect the man whom he has despised, but will be regarded as showing hatred and arrogance towards God, and for this he will receive his punishment.

“In one of His Tablets Bahá’u’lláh states that in this Dispensation God has condemned those who create sedition and show malice towards people. Should a person be inclined to harm another, it is as if he has arisen against God to harm Him.

“This teaching of Bahá’u’lláh throws a new light upon, and opens up an exciting approach to, human relationships. It confers upon the individual a great insight into the world of realities, enabling him to rid himself effectively of hatred, prejudice and many other vices often displayed by human beings in their association with one another. For example, a soul becomes offended when he is wrongly criticized and his actions denounced. In the normal course of events this can often lead to coolness, alienation, bitterness and even hatred between people. Unwarranted criticism and false accusations can place so much pressure upon the individual as to bring him to the point of utter destruction and complete breakdown. But when a person believes in the words of Bahá’u’lláh and sincerely follows this exalted teaching, his attitude towards his fellow man will completely change and he will become immune to this danger. For he knows that falsehood, enmity and malice can never affect him as long as he puts his trust in God, while the misdeeds of the offenders are directed towards God Who will punish them for their actions.

“When a person reaches this stage of maturity and discernment, he will neither be discouraged by undue criticism,

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

nor pleased with praise and glorification. It is always the ego which feels offended in the former case and gratified in the latter. The above-mentioned teaching of Bahá'u'lláh helps the individual to subdue his ego. The mere consciousness of the fact that one is acting against God in condemning and attacking his fellow man, is sufficient to deter him in the pursuit of such reprehensible behaviour. It also enables him to realize that as long as he turns to God, the forces of evil will never be able to harm him in any way.”

Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* vol. 2, pp. 189-190.

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“The sign of a knower and lover is this, that you will find him dry in the sea.”

‘**Abdu'l-Bahá**, *Memorials of the Faithful*, p. 11.

Drawing Strength from the Example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

“The energy we expend in enduring the intolerance of some individuals of our community is not lost. It is transformed into fortitude, steadfastness and magnanimity. The lives of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá are the best examples for this.”

“When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was sent to Akká, he experienced three kinds of persecution. Two kinds were easy to bear. When he arrived in Akká they placed chains upon his limbs and circlets of steel were locked around his ankles and knees. While the guards were doing this ‘Abdu’l-Bahá laughed and sang. . . . After a time the men who had been appointed to keep guard over me became as loving brothers and companions. They strove to lighten my imprisonment by acts of kindness. . . .

“In brief, this kind of persecution was easy to bear. There was a second form of persecution to which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was continually subjected at Akká. Spies and enemies were constantly informing the authorities that he was plotting against the government, that he was secretly instigating revolution and teaching principles in opposition to the Mohammedan religion. In consequence of these reports and statements ‘Abdu’l-Bahá underwent a great deal of restriction, difficulty and personal discomfort, but, Praise be to God! always in the utmost joy and exaltation. . . .

“But there was a third kind of persecution which brought ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sorrow and unhappiness, a persecution difficult to bear: the bitter words and criticisms of the friends. Where love was expected, hatred and jealousy was found; instead of friendship and kindness, envy and discord were manifested; instead of harmony there appeared dissension and ill-wishing; in place of assistance and appreciation, calumny, falsehood and slander. This is hard to bear.

“Now, Praise be to God! turn all your thoughts and devote all your powers to the Divine Covenant. . . . Follow ‘Abdu’l-Bahá! Let nothing hinder or defeat you.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Star of the West*, Vol. IV, No. 5, pp. 88, 89.

“The energy we expend in enduring the intolerance of some individuals of our community is not lost. It is transformed into fortitude, steadfastness and magnanimity. The lives of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá are the best examples for this.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, June 30, 1923, in *Lights of Guidance* (5th ed.), p. 604, #2048.

“Stanwood Cobb wrote that on one occasion He spoke of the need for loving patience in the face of aggravating behavior on

Drawing Strength from the Example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, continued

“...Bahá'ís must endure people even when they are unendurable!’ . . . ‘He ('Abdu'l Bahá) did not look at us solemnly as if appointing us to an arduous and difficult task. Rather, He beamed upon us delightfully, as if to suggest what a joy to us it would be to act in this way!’”

the part of others: ‘One might say, “Well, I will endure such-and-such a person so long as he is endurable.” *But Bahá'ís must endure people even when they are unendurable!*’ Stanwood Cobb pointed out that ‘He did not look at us solemnly as if appointing us to an arduous and difficult task. Rather, He beamed upon us delightfully, as if to suggest what a joy to us it would be to act in this way!’”

Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 28, #39.

“O ye friends of God! Show ye an endeavor that all the nations and communities of the world, even the enemies, put their trust, assurance and hope in you; that if a person falls into errors for a hundred-thousand times he may yet turn his face to you, hopeful that you will forgive his sins; for he must not become hopeless, neither grieved nor despondent. This is the conduct and the manner of the people of Bahá. This is the foundation of the most high pathway! Ye should conform your conduct and manners with the advices of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá.”

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in The Compilation of Compilations vol. I, p. 373, #786.

“In 1911 the Master spent a few quiet days in the French Alps, presumably to rest, before continuing to London. Here took place a remarkable encounter which illustrates the universality of His love, even towards those whose hearts ran hostile to Him and to His Father's Cause. Juliet Thompson tells us the following about this occasion which she herself witnessed:

“Monstrously sinned against, too great was He to claim the right to forgive. In His almost off-hand brushing aside of a cruelty, in the ineffable sweetness with which He ignored it, it was as though he said: Forgiveness belongs only to God.

“An example of this was His memorable meeting with the royal prince, Zillah Sultán, brother of the Sháh of Persia, Muhammad 'Alí Sháh. Not alone 'Abdu'l-Bahá, but a great number of His followers, band after band of Bahá'í martyrs, had suffered worse than death at the hands of these two princes. When the downfall of the Sháh, with that of the Sultán of Turkey, set 'Abdu'l-Bahá at liberty, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, beginning His journey through Europe, went first to Thonon-les-Bains, on the Lake of Geneva. The exiled Sháh was then somewhere in Europe; Zillah-

Drawing Strength from the Example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, continued

“Let neither enemy nor friends disturb your peace, destroy your happiness, prevent your accomplishment. Fix your soul upon God. Then persecution and slander will make you the more radiant.”

Sultán, also in exile with his two sons, had fled to Geneva. Thus 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the exonerated and free, and Zillah Sultán, the fugitive, were almost within a stone's throw of each other. In the suite of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a distinguished European who had visited Persia and there met Zillah Sultán. One day when the European was standing on the balustraded terrace of the hotel in Thonon and 'Abdu'l-Bahá was pacing to and fro at a little distance, Zillah Sultán approached the terrace. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was wearing, as always, the turban, the long white belted robe and long 'abá of Persia. His hair, according to the ancient custom of the Persian nobility, flowed to His shoulders. Zillah Sultán, after greeting the European, immediately asked:

“Who is that Persian nobleman?”

“‘Abdu'l-Bahá.’”

“Take me to Him.”

“In describing the scene later, the European said: ‘If you could have heard the wretch mumbling his miserable excuses!’ But 'Abdu'l-Bahá took the prince in His arms. ‘All that is of the past,’ He answered. ‘Never think of it again.’”

Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 41-2, #10.

“All who stand up in the cause of God will be persecuted and misunderstood. It has always been so; it will always be so. Let neither enemy nor friends disturb your peace, destroy your happiness, prevent your accomplishment. Fix your soul upon God. Then persecution and slander will make you the more radiant. The purposes of your enemies will be reflected upon themselves. They will be injured instead of you. . . . Let nothing defeat you. God is your helper. God is invincible. Be firm in the Heavenly Covenant. Pray for strength. It will be given you, no matter how difficult the conditions.”

‘Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Star of the West*, Vol. IV, No. 5, p. 88.

“. . . an unkind governor of 'Akká . . . attempted to destroy the livelihood of the honest and peace-loving Bahá'í shopkeepers by locking up their stores. However, when the plan was discovered, 'Abdu'l-Bahá asked those Bahá'ís not even to open their stores. Frustrated, the governor then received word that he was being deposed as governor and should be taken by the police to

Drawing Strength from the Example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, continued

“This wronged one hath in no wise borne nor doth he bear a grudge against any one; towards none doth he entertain any ill-feeling and uttereth no word save for the good of the world.”

Damascus. In fear, he went to his home to prepare for this unexpected journey. The Master heard the news and went to him, offering His services. The ex-governor was worried about his family, wishing that they might also go to Damascus. 'Abdu'l-Bahá assured him that they would be sent to him. The Master provided a reliable escort, mules and all that was needed for a comfortable trip. The escort on arrival in Damascus would accept neither money nor gift – he wished only to obey the instructions of the Master. The governor could, however, write a letter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and this he did immediately. It read, 'O 'Abdu'l-Bahá, I pray you pardon me. I did not understand, I did not know you. I have wrought you great evil. You have rewarded me with great good.'”

Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 74, #51.

“. . . the Master told Mrs. True about His friends. 'These are My friends, My friends. Some of them are My enemies, but they think I do not know it, because they appear friendly, and to them I am very kind, for one must love his enemies and do good to them.'”

Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 70, #45.

“This wronged one hath in no wise borne nor doth he bear a grudge against any one; towards none doth he entertain any ill-feeling and uttereth no word save for the good of the world.”

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 19.

“'Abdu'l-Bahá's magnanimity was felt not only by His friends (of course), but also by His ill-wishers. He knew 'malice toward none'. He sweetened the lives of all with whom He came in contact, returning good for evil. Who better than He could thus advise His friends: '. . . never be defeated by the malice of the people, by their aggression and their hate, no matter how intense. If others hurl their darts against you, offer them milk and honey in return; if they poison your lives, sweeten their souls; if they injure you, teach them how to be comforted; if they inflict a wound upon you, be a balm to their sores; if they sting you, hold to their lips a refreshing cup.'”

Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 72-73.

Drawing Strength from the Example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, continued

“As the community strives to build up a new pattern of life, based on the inculcation of new attitudes, habits and principles, it is inevitable that the friends will experience tests of all kinds. It is not, after all an easy process that we are engaged in. We must, however, be confident in our Lord, Who is ever watchful and vigilant, especially in relation to the Cause He so jealously guards, and never become discouraged. If there has been injustice or if certain individuals have acted with malign intent, rest assured that, with the passage of time and through the operation of God’s grace, all that has been hidden will ultimately be revealed. This is Bahá’u’lláh’s assurance to His faithful followers.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, October 27, 1997, to an individual.

Learning to Let Go of Past Hurts

“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”

“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.”

Shoghi Effendi, in *The Light of Divine Guidance*, Vol. 1, p. 155.

“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.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Vignettes from the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 40, #8.

“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.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 273.

“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.”

Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 316.

Assurances of Divine Confirmations

“ . . . if man lives up to these divine commandments, this world of earth shall be transformed into the world of heaven, and this material sphere shall be converted into a paradise of glory.”

“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, in *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 14.

“You have no excuse to bring before God if you fail to live according to His command, for you are informed of that which constitutes the good pleasure of God. You have heard His commandments and precepts. You must, therefore, be kind to all men; you must even treat your enemies as your friends. You must consider your evil-wishers as your well-wishers. Those who are not agreeable toward you must be regarded as those who are congenial and pleasant so that, perchance, this darkness of disagreement and conflict may disappear from amongst men and the light of the divine may shine forth. . . . Until man reaches this high station, the world of humanity shall not find rest, and eternal felicity shall not be attained. But if man lives up to these divine commandments, this world of earth shall be transformed into the world of heaven, and this material sphere shall be converted into a paradise of glory. It is my hope that you may become successful in this high calling so that like brilliant lamps you may cast light upon the world of humanity and quicken and stir the body of existence like unto a spirit of life. This is eternal glory. This is everlasting felicity. This is immortal life. This is heavenly attainment. This is being created in the image and likeness of God. And unto this I call you, praying to God to strengthen and bless you.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 470.

“If ye be truly united, if ye agree to promote that which is the essential purpose, and to show forth an all-unifying love, I swear by Him Who causeth the seed to split and the breeze to waft, so great a light will shine forth from your faces as to reach the highest heavens, the fame of your glory will be noised abroad, the evidences of your preeminence will spread throughout all regions, your power will penetrate the realities of all things, your aims and purposes will exert their influence upon the great and mighty

Assurances of Divine Confirmations, continued

nations, your spirits will encompass the whole world of being, and ye will discover yourselves to be kings in the dominions of the Kingdom, and attired with the glorious crowns of the invisible Realm, and become the marshals of the army of peace, and princes of the forces of light, and stars shining from the horizon of perfection, and brilliant lamps shedding their radiance upon men.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Citadel of Faith*, pp. 29-30.