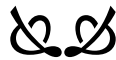


# **Facilitation Guide**

## **The Individual and the Local Spiritual Assembly**

**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, 1996, message to the Bahá'ís of the World*

“The appearance of a united, firmly based and self-sustaining community . . . requires a level of internal interaction between the Assembly and the body of the believers based on a commonly recognized commitment to service, and in which a sense of partnership based on appreciation of each other’s distinctive sphere of action is fully recognized and unfailingly upheld, and no semblance of a dichotomy between the two appears. In such a community leadership is that expression of service by which the Spiritual Assembly invites and encourages the use of the manifold talents and abilities with which the community is endowed, and stimulates and guides the diverse elements of the community towards goals and strategies by which the effects of a coherent force for progress can be realized.

“The maintenance of a climate of love and unity depends largely upon the feeling among the individuals composing the community that the Assembly is a part of themselves, that their cooperative interactions with that divinely ordained body allow them a fair latitude for initiative and that the quality of their relationships with both the institution and their fellow believers encourages a spirit of enterprise invigorated by an awareness of the revolutionizing purpose of Bahá'u'lláh’s Revelation, by a consciousness of the high privilege of their being associated with efforts to realize that purpose, and by a consequent, ever-present sense of joy.”

*The Universal House of Justice, letter dated May 19, 1994  
to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States*



# The Individual and the Local Spiritual Assembly

## OVERVIEW FOR FACILITATORS

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### Purpose

- ★ Improving the way in which individual Bahá'ís, both elected and electors, relate to the Assembly

This module is targeted to individuals, rather than Assemblies. Its objective is improving the way in which individual Bahá'ís, both elected and electors, relate to the Assembly. Its focus is on acquiring a vision of the relationship intended by Bahá'u'lláh between individuals and Assemblies and on identifying ways in which individuals can personally support the growth and maturation of Assemblies.

### What you will find inside your Facilitation Guide:

- ★ **Frontispiece with key quotations.** A one-page sheet containing quotations from letters of the Universal House of Justice which provide the foundation of the modules. (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 workshop report form and evaluation forms after the session. (pp. 5-8)
- ★ **Highlights of this module.** A two-page listing of the module objectives, an agenda outline with times of each segment of the module, and a listing of materials needed. (p. 9-10)
- ★ **Facilitator's instructions for segments of this module.** A series of pages that provide the purpose and instructions for each section of the module. (pp. 11-27)
- ★ **Description of the Office of Assembly Development.** A two-page overview of the vision and mission of this office and the services it can provide. (unnumbered pages near 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 form for Assemblies to complete and return two months after participating. (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

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*“ ... 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](mailto: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 five hours in length with the majority averaging about four 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

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## 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.
- ★ 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. Feel free to duplicate the handouts on colored paper and interleaf them in the Facilitation Guide if this would make facilitation easier for you.
- ★ 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 segments have demonstrations, practice these once or twice beforehand.

## Guidance for Facilitators, continued

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

**During the Session**

### 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.)
  - If you have Assembly members from several communities attending a session, you may wish to have them work

## Guidance for Facilitators, continued

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### Closing the Session

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 The Individual and the Local Spiritual Assembly

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## **Objectives:**

### **Participants will**

- ★ Explore aspects of “a new state of mind”
- ★ Acquire a vision of the relationship intended by Bahá’u’lláh between individuals and Assemblies
- ★ Identify ways in which they can personally support the growth and maturation of Assemblies

## **Agenda outline:** (Total time: 3 hours)

- ★ **Introduction** (15 minutes), p. 11  
An opportunity to introduce the Assembly development program, 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”** (20 minutes), pp. 12-13  
A guided discussion to help participants grasp some of the implications of moving toward “a new state of mind.”
- ★ **A vision of partnership** (30 minutes), p. 14  
Small group discussion leading participants to two objectives: to appreciate the need for cooperation, harmony, and mutual trust between individuals and Assemblies, and to perceive the role of the individual in building such a relationship.
- ★ **Helping Assemblies in the process of maturation** (25 minutes), pp. 15-16  
Small group discussion to identify specific behaviors and attitudes through which individuals can support the maturation of Assemblies.
- ★ **Turning to the Assembly** (55 minutes) ), pp. 17-19  
An activity to provide greater clarity about when matters should be referred to an Assembly.
- ★ **Sculpture activity** (25 minutes), p. 26  
An arts activity to consolidate and express what has been learned about the mutually supportive relationship between individuals and Assemblies.
- ★ **Closing** (10 minutes), p. 27  
A choice of two activities which give participants the opportunity to either share what they have learned from the class and to express new commitments to the process of working in partnership with Assemblies or to reflect silently and write down 1-2 specific ways they will offer support and assistance to their local Assembly when they return home.

## Highlights, continued

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*Extension sessions for use if more time is available*

- ★ *Sharing critical thought with Assemblies in a positive way* (40 minutes), pp. 20-21  
*An activity to help participants learn appropriate methods and channels for the expression of constructive criticism.*
- ★ *The “But what if . . .” game* (time varies depending on format used), pp. 22-25  
*A collection of four game formats which provide answers to frequently asked questions about how individuals should handle concerns they have about Assemblies during the process of maturation.*

Times given above are minimums. Module material which appears in italics in the Facilitation Guide is provided to supplement and extend the sessions if more time is available. If less time is available you may skip whatever section(s) seems to be less relevant to the needs of the group. You may also choose to direct participants to focus only on quotes in their handouts that are bolded as these are the most vital. Focusing on bolded quotes may also aid participants who are slower readers.

**Materials needed**

- ★ Sheets of blank paper for each participant
- ★ Flipchart easel and pad
- ★ Transparent adhesive tape
- ★ A variety of highlighters
- ★ Each working group of 4-5 people will need the following:
  - a set of slips which list situations which may or should be taken to an Assembly
  - a sheet of stiff paper or cardboard
  - round toothpicks, marshmallows (preferably of different sizes or colors), and raisins
  - **OR** part of a set of Tinkertoys
- ★ *If using the “But What If . . .” game, you will need construction paper*
- ★ *Optional: A beautiful copy of the passage “A New State of Mind” to give as a gift to the participants (p. 25)*

**Note:** You will need to inform the sponsoring Assembly that Participant’s Handouts for each person should be ordered from the Bahá’í Distribution Service prior to the event.

# Introduction (15 minutes)

## Purpose

- ★ To introduce Assembly Development resources
- ★ To familiarize participants with the objectives of this module
- ★ To present an agenda outline of topics and activities
- ★ To determine what questions and issues participants have on this topic

## Activities:

### 1. Brief Devotions

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

### 2. Introduction

- ★ Give a brief introduction to the resources from the Office of Assembly Development (see the description of the Office of Assembly Development which is attached at the end of the Facilitator's Guide)
- ★ Highlight that the purpose of the modules 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.

### 3. Overview objectives (3-5 minutes)

- ★ Read aloud the objectives of this module and have them posted.

See page 9 of the Facilitation Guide for a list of the objectives. Make adjustments for any sections that are removed for timing considerations or optional extension sessions that are added.

### 4. Review agenda (3-5 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.

### 5. Invite questions (3-5 minutes)

- ★ Invite participants to share questions they have about the relationship between individuals and Assemblies.
- ★ Make a list of these and, at the end of class, check to make sure that all have been answered or that the questioner has been referred to information elsewhere.

# The Call to “a New State of Mind” (20 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, p. 3)
- ★ 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” quotes 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 take turns to read aloud the remaining quotations on the handout “The Call to a New State of Mind.” (Participant Handouts, pp. 3-4) 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 quotes are read.*

#### **Ask the group as a whole:**

- *How might “an expansion of thought” be stimulated? (paragraph 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 institutions, their authority, and “what is natural and appropriate in relationships”? (par. 6)*
- *Where do these assumptions and conceptions come from? (par. 6)*

## Call to “a New State of Mind” continued

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- *How do we remove “obscuring dust” and “clear the ground for new conceptions of social organization”? (par. 5)*
- *How comfortable is the process of “ever more rapid change”? (par.8)*
- *Is resisting or hiding from this “on-rushing” 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. Read passage, underline and share (10 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants to read the passage from the May 19, 1994 letter from the Universal House of Justice (Participant Handouts, p. 3) silently and underline or highlight what they feel are key words or phrases that have particular implications for the topic of the module.
- ★ Invite participants to share what they have underlined.

*A word in the  
Participant Handouts:*

**\*Canalize:**

to channel into a  
particular direction;  
provide an outlet  
for

## A Vision of Partnership (30 minutes)

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### Purpose

- ★ To appreciate the need for cooperation, harmony, and mutual trust between individuals and Assemblies
- ★ To perceive the role of the individual in building such a relationship

### Activities:

#### 1. Small group discussion of quotations (20 minutes)

- ★ Have small groups of 4-5 read through the quotations on the handout “A Vision of Partnership” (Participant Handouts, pp. 5-7) and answer the following focus questions:
  - How are individuals and institutions intended to interact?
  - What happens when individual initiative occurs in partnership with institutions?
  - What individual actions can bring forth these “profound possibilities”?

#### 2. Groups report back to full group (10 minutes)

- ★ Have a member of each group form a panel at the front of the room which will convey the answers to each question.

#### Option for very large groups:

- ★ *Have a separate panel for each question. Have each panel formed from a member of each of the small groups.*

# Helping Assemblies in the Process of Maturation (25 minutes)

## Purpose

- ★ To identify specific behaviors and attitudes through which individuals can support the maturation of Assemblies

## Activities:

### 1. Small group discussion of quotations (15 minutes)

- ★ Have the same small groups read through the quotations on the handout “Helping Assemblies in the Process of Maturation” (Participant Handouts, pp. 8-9) and answer the following focus questions:
  - How is immaturity of Assemblies different from imperfection?
  - What are specific ways that individuals can help Assemblies in their process of maturation?
- ★ Have each group appoint a spokesperson to report results of their discussion back to the full group.

### 2. Groups report back on results (10 minutes)

- ★ As groups report back their results, make a list on the board or flip chart of specific ways that individuals can help Assemblies in their process of maturation. Ask groups to only report elements that have not previously been mentioned.
- ★ If it is not raised, mention that love plays a central role in the friends’ relation to their Assembly. Comment that cherishing, praying for, nurturing, and taking delight in the rise of the Assembly to influence and honor go far beyond merely obeying it. Comment on how different this attitude is from the relationship most Americans have to the institutions that touch their lives.
- ★ Mention that the Writings call on us to “**support and sustain**” our institutions. Comment that the dictionary defines “**sustain**” as:
  - to support, hold, or bear up from below
  - to supply with the necessities of life
  - to provide for
  - to support by aid and approval
  - to uphold as valid, just, or correct
  - to confirm
- ★ If these elements have not been mentioned on the groups’ list, suggest that we can sustain Assemblies by:

## Helping Assemblies in the Process of Maturation, continued

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- giving them our prayers and funds
- carrying out their plans
- providing them with human resources, both by developing ourselves and by enrolling others

**Optional: A short break could be taken at this point, or, if no break is taken, we suggest that you have participants stand and stretch.**



## Turning to the Assembly (55 minutes)

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### Purpose

- ★ To provide greater clarity about when matters should be referred to an Assembly

### Activities:

#### 1. Prepare materials in advance

- ★ Make one photocopy per group of possible issues to bring before the Local Spiritual Assembly (Facilitator's Guide, p. 19). Cut the twelve items into separate slips. Have a full bundle of 12 slips ready for each group.

#### 2. Setting up the activity (3-5 minutes)

- ★ Share the following statements:

“. . . he feels that you should turn to your Local Assembly, in the strictest confidence, and seek their aid and advice. These bodies have the sacred obligation to help, advise, protect and guide the believers in every way within their power when appealed to – indeed they were established just for the purpose of keeping order and unity and obedience to the law of God amongst the believers.

“You should go to them as a child would to its parents . . .” (from letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated September 28, 1941, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 16)

“It is incumbent upon every one not to take any step without consulting the Spiritual Assembly, and they must assuredly obey with heart and soul its bidding and be submissive unto it, that things may be properly ordered and well arranged. Otherwise every person will act independently and after his own judgment, will follow his own desire, and do harm to the Cause.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in Bahá’í Administration, p. 21)

- ★ Mention that it is sometimes difficult to know what concerns should be taken to the Assembly, and the words “**any step**” can have different meanings to different believers.

#### 3. Small group discussion of quotes and chart (20 minutes)

- ★ Have small groups turn to the handout “Turning to the Assembly,” (Participant Handouts, pp. 10-11) with its list of situations.
- ★ Ask the groups, using principles found in the quotations, to place each situation in either the category of items that should be taken to the Assembly for consultation or the category of items that we may choose, but are not required, to bring to the Assembly by putting a checkmark in the appropriate column.

## Turning to the Assembly, continued

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- ★ While the groups are working, write the two categories “Should be taken to the Assembly for consultation” and “May be taken to the Assembly for consultation” on the board or flip chart.
- 4. Groups report back** (30 minutes)
- ★ Give each group a bundle of twelve situation slips.
  - ★ Ask a member of one group to tape the first situation slip on the flipchart in the column the group decided it belonged. Ask if other groups placed this item in the same column. If not, have a different group tape their slip in the other column. Have all groups explain what guiding principles lead to their decision.
  - ★ Repeat this process with the remaining eleven situation slips, asking a different group to start the process each time.

# Situation Slips for “Turning to the Assembly” (pp.16-17)

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**1. Decisions in one’s personal life**

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**2. Whether or where to go pioneering**

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**3. How to handle a problem of disunity**

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**4. Decisions in one’s professional life**

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**5. Family difficulties**

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**6. Publication of a book or pamphlet about the Faith**

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**7. Concern about wrong-doing on the part of a believer**

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**8. An idea for approaching a prominent person about the Faith**

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**9. Representing the Faith in some capacity to another group**

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**10. Deciding who to marry**

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**11. Using the media**

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**12. A legal action mentioning the Faith in some context**

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## *Optional Extension Session One: Sharing Critical Thought with Assemblies in a Positive Way* (40 minutes)

### **Purpose**

- ★ To learn appropriate methods and channels for the expression of constructive criticism

### **Activities:**

#### **1. Setting up the activity**

- ★ Comment that since the institutions are in their infancy and since conflict and contention are “categorically forbidden” in the Most Holy Book, the question sometimes arises, “Does this mean that individuals may not express critical thought?” The Universal House of Justice addressed this concern in its letter of December 29, 1988, to the American Bahá’í community (often know as the “Individual Rights and Freedoms” letter) by saying,

“Absolutely not. How can there be the candor called for in consultation if there is no critical thought? How is the individual to exercise his responsibilities to the Cause, if he is not allowed the freedom to express his views? Has Shoghi Effendi not stated that ‘at the very root of the Cause lies the principle of the undoubted right of the individual to self-expression, his freedom to declare his conscience and set forth his views?’” (paragraph 31)

- ★ Comment that later, in a letter dated July 2, 1996, the Universal House of Justice commented on the methods and channels for the expression of criticism, especially criticism about the functioning of Bahá’í institutions. They enclosed “A Brief Compilation on Criticism,” a collection of excerpts from letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to individual believers (Participant Handouts, pp. 12-14).

#### **2. Small group discussion of quotes** (20 minutes)

- ★ Give the small groups a copy of the two page compilation “A Brief Compilation on Criticism” (Participant Handouts, pp. 12-14). Ask each group to read the quotations, discuss principles guiding when and how to express criticism, and make up a list of criticism do’s and don’ts.
- ★ Have groups select a representative to share their list with the rest of the participants.

#### **3. Groups share lists** (20 minutes)

- ★ Have small groups share their lists with the larger group.

## *Sharing Critical Thought with Assemblies in a Positive Way*, continued

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### **4. Reading of principles**

- ★ Read through, as a group, the listing of principles at the end of the July 2, 1996, letter which the House of Justice said “can be clearly derived” from the Guardian’s guidance (Participant Handouts, p. 15).

## Optional Extension Session Two: *The “But What if . . .” Game* (time varies depending on the format selected)

### Purpose

- ★ To provide answers to frequently asked questions about how individuals should handle concerns they have during the process of maturation

### 1. Prepare materials in advance

- ★ Take a photocopy of the quotations on the “But what if . . .” quotes (Facilitator’s Guide, pp. 24-25) and cut up questions and answers, placing the questions on one side of a piece of construction paper or index card and the answers to each question on the reverse of the card. These cards can be used in a variety of ways, depending on available time and number of participants.

### 2. Select one of the following activity options:

#### ★ Individual self-test at learning stations

Individuals draw a card and try to answer the question. They can then turn the card over, read a quotation from the Writings, and compare this to their answer.

#### ★ Small group work

The group draws a card and consults together to answer the question. They can then turn the card over, read a quotation from the Writings, and compare this to their answer.

#### ★ Game show panel

- Select 3-4 believers to be a panel, sitting at the front of the class.
- Have a game show host select a card and pose the question. The panel has 2-3 minutes to consult and give their answer.
- The game show host will then read the quotation on the back of the card. The host (or the audience, by their applause) will determine if the panel’s answer is substantially correct.
- Complement the panel on their consultative wisdom to the extent possible.

#### ★ Competitive game show teams

- Select two teams of 3-4 believers and seat them at the front of the class.
- Have a game show host select a card and pose the question to each team in turn. The team has 2-3 minutes to consult and give their answer.

## *The “But What if. . .” Game*, continued

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- The game show host will then read the quotation on the back of the card. The host (or the audience, by their applause) will determine if the team’s answer is substantially correct.
- Keep track of the total number of correct answers of each team. Complement both teams on their consultative wisdom to the extent possible.

**1. But what if some members of an Assembly are not very deepened or mature? How can the Assembly’s guidance be trusted?**

1. “. . . there is a distinction of fundamental importance which should be always remembered in this connection, and this is between the spiritual assembly as an institution, and the persons who comprise it. These are by no means supposed to be perfect, nor can they be considered as being inherently superior to the rest of their fellow believers. . . . The existence of elections is a sufficient indication that assembly members, though forming part of an institution that is divine and perfect, are nevertheless themselves imperfect. But this does not necessarily imply that their judgment is defective. For as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has repeatedly emphasized Bahá’í assemblies are under the guidance and protection of God. . . . the institution of the spiritual assembly should under no circumstances be identified with, or be estimated merely through, the personal qualifications of the members that compose it.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated November 15, 1935, in *The Local Spiritual Assembly*, pp. 9, 10.

**2. But what if the Assembly is not performing its duties satisfactorily?**

2. “The believers have the right to vote for whoever they please. If they do not like their Assembly’s acts, they must, for the sake of the unity of the Faith, abide by its decisions. The individual has the right to make suggestions, to protest, but he has no rights over the Assembly; his force is his vote. If one of the friends is dissatisfied over the local situation he should nevertheless cooperate with his Spiritual Assembly and do all he can to help it. He can pray for it, he can show through his own deeds a noble Bahá’í example. The system is perfect, but if the instruments are imperfect we must still uphold the system, knowing God will watch over and protect His Cause, and that such conditions are only temporary and will pass away as the Cause grows and the Bahá’ís mature.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated November 14, 1948, in *Fostering the Development of Bahá’í Communities*, #6.

**3. But what if the Assembly makes a mistake?**

3. “The Assembly may make a mistake, but, as the Master pointed out, if the Community does not abide by its decisions, or the individual Bahá’í, the result is worse, as it undermines the very institution which must be strengthened in order to uphold the principles and laws of the Faith. He tells us God will right the wrongs done. We must have confidence in this and obey our Assemblies.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in *The Local Spiritual Assembly*, p. 27.



## Questions and Answers for the “But what if. . .” Game (continued)

### 4. But what if you sincerely think the Assembly has made a wrong decision?

4. “If we disapprove of their decisions we must be careful to avoid discussing such matters with other believers who have no authority to put them right. We must put our views frankly before the Assembly itself and only in the case of not getting a satisfactory reply appeal to the National Assembly . . .”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated March 4, 1925, in *Fostering the Development of Bahá’í Communities*, #4.

“As you know, you are free to request the Assembly to reconsider its decision. However, you may wish to weigh this course of action against the reaction it could produce, and which may cause you further stress. In some cases, it is preferable if one accepts humbly the view of the Assembly in a spirit of sacrifice, and without further dispute. Then, any wrong decision will eventually be set right. When the believers act submissively and in a spirit of self-effacement it attracts the good pleasure of God, which in itself serves as a consolation to their hearts.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated September 12, 1988, in *Issues Concerning Community Functioning*, section 1.2.5.

### 5. But what if a problem concerns two people and the other person doesn’t want to bring it to the Assembly?

5. “Any person can refer a matter to the Assembly for consultation whether the other person wishes to or not. In matters which affect the Cause the Assembly should, if it deems it necessary, intervene even if both sides do not want it to, because the whole purpose of the Assemblies is to protect the Faith, the Communities, and the individual Bahá’í as well.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in *The Local Spiritual Assembly*, p. 25.

## Sculpture Activity (25 minutes)

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### Purpose

- ★ To consolidate and express what has been learned about the mutually supportive relationship between individuals and Assemblies

### Activity:

#### 1. Small group sculpture making (15 minutes)

- ★ Supply each small group with the following materials:
  - a sheet of stiff paper or cardboard
  - round toothpicks
  - marshmallows (preferably of different sizes or colors)
  - raisins
  - *this activity can also be done with sets of Tinkertoys instead of the above*
- ★ Each group will make a sculpture which demonstrates their understanding of the interactive relationship between the Spiritual Assembly and the believers.

#### 2. Groups share sculpture with other participants (5-15 minutes, depending on number of groups)

- ★ Have groups share their sculpture and explain its meaning to the whole group.

## Closing (10 minutes)

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### Purpose

- ★ To make individual plans to translate learning into behaviors
- ★ To call to mind the “profound possibilities” that “reside in the will of the individual”

### Activities:

#### 1. Review of initial questions (3-5 minutes)

- ★ Check to see that all questions raised at the beginning have been answered or that the questioner has been referred elsewhere.

#### Optional closing activity:

- ★ *Open mike sharing (time varies)*

*You may choose to have an “open mike” period to give participants the opportunity to share what they have learned from the class and to express new commitments to the process of working in partnership with Assemblies.*

#### 2. Individual journal writing (5 minutes)

- ★ Allow time for individuals to write down 1-2 specific ways they will offer support and assistance to their local Assembly in future. Have visible the list of behaviors and attitudes which participants identified earlier.

#### 3. Read final quote

- ★ End by re-reading this quote on the “profound possibilities” that “reside in the will of the individual” (from Participant Handouts p. 7):

“A Bahá’í community which is consistent in its fundamental life-giving, life-sustaining activities will at its heart be serene and confident; it will resonate with spiritual dynamism, will exert irresistible influence, will set a new course in social evolution, enabling it to win the respect and eventually the allegiance of admirers and critics alike. These profound possibilities reside in the will of the individual to take initiative, to act in accordance with the guidance offered by Bahá’í institutions, and to maintain such action regardless of the myriad distractions posed by the disintegration of a society adrift in a sea of materialism.” (The Universal House of Justice, Ridván, 1984, in *A Wider Horizon*, p. 27.)

#### Optional:

- ★ *Give each participant a gift of a beautiful card or calligraphy rendition of the quotation on the following page.*

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

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