

Meetings

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BAHA'I MEETINGS

THE NINETEEN DAY FEAST

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I. FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLAH

"The friends of God, one and all, are remembered by the Supreme Pen: The bounties of the Source of Bounty are at every moment visibly descending. It behooveth the friends in whatever land they be, to gather together in meetings, and therein to speak wisely and with eloquence, and to read the verses of God; for it is God's Words that kindle love's fire and set it ablaze."

(From a recently translated Tablet of Baha'u'llah to an individual believer)

"By My life and My Cause! Round about whatever dwelling the friends of God may enter, and from which their cry shall rise as they praise and glorify the Lord, shall circle the souls of true believers and all the favored angels. And should the door of the true eye be opened unto some, they shall witness the Supreme Concourse as it circleth and crieth: 'Blessed art thou, O house, for God hath made thee a resting-place for those He favoreth, and a lodging for those He holdeth dear, and a home for those in whom He hath placed His trust. Unto thee be His praise and His glory and His endless grace.'"

(From a recently translated Tablet of Baha'u'llah to an individual believer)

"Blessed is the house that hath attained unto My tender mercy, wherein My remembrance is celebrated, and is ennobled by the presence of My loved ones, who have proclaimed My praise, cleaved fast to the cord of My grace and been honored by chanting My verses. Verily they are the exalted servants whom God hath extolled in the Qayyumu'l-Asma' and other scriptures. Verily He is the All-Hearing, the Answerer, He Who perceiveth all things."

(From a recently translated Tablet of Baha'u'llah to an individual believer)

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"They who are the beloved of God, in whatever place they gather and whomsoever they may meet, must evince, in their attitude towards God, and in the manner of their celebration of His praise and glory, such humility and submissiveness that every atom of the dust beneath their feet may attest the depth of their devotion. The conversation carried by these holy souls should be informed with such power that these same atoms of dust will be thrilled by its influence. They should conduct themselves in such manner that the earth upon which they tread may never be allowed to address to them such words as these: 'I am to be preferred above you. For witness, how patient I am in bearing the burden which the husbandman layeth upon me. I am the instrument that continually imparteth unto all beings the blessings with which He Who is the Source of all grace hath entrusted me. Notwithstanding the honor conferred upon me, and the unnumbered evidences of my wealth--a wealth that supplieth the needs of all

creation--behold the measure of my humility, witness with what absolute submissiveness I allow myself to be trodden beneath the feet of men...."

(Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, pp. 7-8)

II. FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHA

"Praise be to God! that ye are gathered in one assembly like unto the stars of the Pleiades, are illumined with the light of the knowledge of God and through the outpouring of the cloud of the love of God, ye are the fresh flowers of the meadow and plain; ye are intimate and familiar with infinite unity and love. "Therefore, this meeting is blessed. But if it is firmly established and become constant, it will bring forth great results and most weighty developments will be attained. Consequently, persevere ye in renewing your meetings and display utmost magnanimity in firmness and steadfastness. When the root of the tree of the garden is well established and its protection is safeguarded, it will bring forth luscious fruits.

"Likewise, when the regiment of an army and the individuals of

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a cohort are united and related with ease, untold triumphs will be acquired. But if they come together one day and disperse another day, no fruits will be produced.

"Therefore, as ye have prepared an army of heaven and become the host of life, ye must continue to hold meetings, have spiritual communications, be firm in resolution, steadfast in purpose and be constant and persevering so that ye may win celestial conquests.

"I supplicate and entreat at the Threshold of God to assist and confirm you in firmness and steadfastness and cause you to guide the inhabitants of that region."

(Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 690)

"If thou seekest after the light of the Kingdom, hasten undoubtedly to the meetings of the believers, in order that the rays of truth may reflect in thy heart."

(Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Baha', p. 695)

"Hold meetings and read and chant the heavenly teachings, so that city may be illumined with the light of reality and that country become a veritable paradise by the strength of the Holy Spirit, for this cycle is the cycle of the Glorious Lord and the melody of oneness and solidarity of the world of mankind must reach the ears of the East and West."

(Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 631)

"Every meeting which is organized for the purpose of unity and concord will be conducive to changing strangers into friends, enemies into associates, and 'Abdu'l-Baha will be present in his heart and soul with that meeting."

(Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 553)

"One holy soul is better than one thousand other souls. If a few souls gather together in a beloved meeting with the feelings of the Kingdom, with the divine attractions, with pure hearts and with absolute purity and holiness, to consort

in spirit and fragrance, that gathering will have its effect upon all the world. The conditions, the words and the deeds of that gathering will lead a world to eternal happiness and will be an evidence of the favors of the Kingdom. The Holy Spirit will strengthen them and the hosts of

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the Supreme Concourse will render them victorious and the angels of Abha will come in succession."

(Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 508-509)

"The hearts of all the friends rejoiced, and in particular, the heart of 'Abdu'l-Baha, when we heard of thy rising up to serve the Cause of God, and that thou hast set apart one of the rooms in thy home for meetings of the lovers of God, so that from it may ascend to the Lord of Revelation the clamor of chanted prayers.

"By the life of God! The queens of the world, with all their castles, cannot boast of such a room, since from it shineth forth the light of lights."

(From a recently translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to an individual believer)

"We hear that you have in mind to embellish your house from time to time with a meeting of Baha'is, where some among them will engage in glorifying the all-glorious Lord.... Know that should you bring this about, that house of earth will become a house of Heaven, and that fabric of stone a congress of the spirit."

(From a recently translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to an individual believer)

"Whosoever a company of people shall gather in a meeting place, shall engage in glorifying God, and shall speak with one another of the mysteries of God, beyond any doubt the breathings of the Holy Spirit will blow gently over them, and each shall receive a share thereof."

(From a recently translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to an individual believer)

"Once in every week, gather ye the steadfast friends together in a meeting place, and there let them engage in praising and glorifying the Lord."

(From a recently translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to an individual believer)

"It befitteth the friends to hold a gathering, a meeting, where they shall glorify God and fix their hearts upon Him, and read and

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recite the holy writings of the Blessed Beauty--may my soul be the ransom of His lovers! The lights of the All-Glorious Realm, the rays of the Supreme Horizon, will be cast upon such bright assemblages, for these are none other than the Mashriqu'l-Adhkars, the Dawning-Points of God's Remembrance, which must, at the direction of the Most Exalted Pen, be established in every hamlet and city.... These spiritual gatherings must be held with the utmost purity and consecration, so that from the site itself, and its earth and the air about it, one will inhale the fragrant breathings of the Holy Spirit."

(From a recently translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to a group of individual believers)

"Thy letter was received. Thou hast written in regard to the Sunday meeting, saying that it is established in the utmost of love. Undoubtedly you must be firm in holding it, and on the day of meeting sing such anthem and melody in the glorification and praise of Baha'u'llah that you may cause a tumult in that city--so that everyone may hear the Call of God and may obtain a new spirit through the soul-refreshing zephyr which is being wafted from the rose garden of the Covenant."

(From a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to an individual believer)

"If it were possible that in every city a few of the awakened ones, when opportunity offered, could hold a meeting, and therein habitually present the proofs and arguments of God, this would do much to expand the consciousness of men; provided, however, that the discourse be kept to this one theme."

(From a recently translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to an individual believer)

"Ye have written as to the meetings of the friends, and how filled they are with peace and joy. Of course this is so; for wherever the spiritually-minded are gathered together, there in His beauty reigneth Baha'u'llah. Thus it is certain that such reunions will yield boundless happiness and peace.

"Today it behooveth one and all to forgo the mention of all else, and to disregard all things. Let their speaking, let their inner state

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be summed up thus: 'Keep all my words of prayer and praise confined to one refrain; make all my life but servitude to Thee.' That is, let them concentrate all their thoughts, all their words, on teaching the Cause of God and spreading the Faith of God, and inspiring all to characterize themselves with the characteristics of God; on loving mankind; on being pure and holy in all things, and spotless in their public and private life; on being upright and detached, and fervent, and afire. All is to be yielded up, save only the remembrance of God; all is to be dispraised, except His praise. Today, to this melody of the Company on high, the world will leap and dance: 'Glory be to my Lord, the All-Glorious!' But know ye this: save for this song of God, no song will stir the world; and save for this nightingale-cry of truth from the Garden of God, no melody will lure away the heart. 'Whence cometh this Singer Who speaketh the Beloved's name?' "

(From a recently translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to an individual believer)

"Verily, 'Abdu'l-Baha inhalet the fragrance of the love of God from every meeting place where the Word of God is uttered, and proofs and arguments set forth, that shed their rays across the world; and where they recount the tribulations of 'Abdu'l-Baha at the evil hands of those who have violated the Covenant of God.

"O handmaid of the Lord: Speak thou no word of politics; thy task concerneth the life of the soul, for this verily leadeth to man's joy in the world of God. Except to speak well of them, make thou no mention of the earth's kings, and the worldly governments thereof. Rather, confine thine utterance to spreading the blissful tidings of the Kingdom of God, and demonstrating the influence of the Word of God, and the holiness of the Cause of God. Tell thou of abiding joy

and spiritual delights, and godlike qualities, and of how the Sun of Truth hath risen above the earth's horizons; tell of the blowing of the spirit of life into the body of the world."

(From a recently translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to an individual believer)

"Rest you assured that the breathings of the Holy Spirit will loosen your tongue. Speak, therefore; speak out with great courage at every meeting. When you are about to begin your address, turn

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first to Baha'u'llah, and ask for the confirmations of the Holy Spirit, then open your lips and say whatever is suggested to your heart; this, however, with the utmost courage, dignity and conviction. It is my hope that from day to day your gatherings will grow and flourish, and that those who are seeking after truth will hearken therein to reasoned arguments and conclusive proofs. I am with you heart and soul at every meeting; be sure of this.

"Hold you the Nineteen Day Feasts with utmost dignity."

(From a recently translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to an individual believer)

"At these meetings, there should be no extraneous conversation whatever. Rather, the assemblage should confine itself to reading and reciting the Holy Words, and to the discussion of matters relating to the Cause of God, expounding, for example, conclusive proofs and arguments, and the Writings of the Best Beloved of mankind. Those who present themselves at these gatherings must first array themselves in spotless clothing, turn their faces toward the Kingdom of Abha, and then with lowliness and submissiveness enter in. During the readings they must maintain complete silence. Should anyone wish to speak, he should say his say in all humility, with exactitude and eloquence. Salutations be unto you, and praise."

(From a recently translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to an individual believer)

"All the meetings must be for teaching the Cause and spreading the message, and suffering the souls to enter into the Kingdom of Baha'u'llah. Look at me. All my thoughts are centered around the proclamation of the Kingdom.

"I have a lamp in my hand searching through the lands and seas to find souls who can become heralds of the Cause. Day and night I am engaged in this work. Any other deliberations in the meetings are futile and fruitless. Convey the message! Attract the hearts! Sow the seeds! Teach the Cause to those who do not know.

"I enter all meetings, all churches, so that the Cause may be spread. When the most important work is before our sight, we must let go the important one.

"If the meetings or Spiritual Assembly has any other occupation,

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the time is spent in futility. All the deliberations, all consultation, all the talks and addresses must revolve around one focal center and that is: Teach the Cause! Teach! Teach! Convey the message! Awaken the souls!

"Now is the time of laying the foundation. Now we must gather brick, stone, wood, iron and other building materials! This is not the time of decoration. We

must strive day and night and think and work. What can I say that may become effective? What can I do that may bring results? What can I write that may bring forth fruits?

"Nothing else will be useful today. The interests of such a glorious Cause will not advance without undivided attention. While we are carrying this load we cannot carry any other load!"

(Baha'i Scriptures, p. 502)

"Amongst other things is the holding of the meetings for teaching--so that blessed souls and the old ones from amongst the believers may gather together the youths of the love of God in schools of instruction and teach them all the divine proofs and irrefragable arguments, explain and elucidate the history of the Cause, and interpret also the prophecies and proofs which are recorded and are extant in the divine Books and Epistles regarding the Manifestation of the Promised One, so that the young ones may go in perfect knowledge in all these degrees."

(Baha'i Scriptures, p. 543)

"What a good gathering this is, worthy of thanksgiving; for a meeting of this kind is peerless. Every gathering is brought about through some material interest; it is either based upon political motives or commercial interests, or the dissemination of education, or the execution of some order or system; but this gathering of ours is for no other purpose save the Kingdom of God--hence it is matchless and peerless. The hearts have turned to God; the spirits are exalted through the glad tidings of God; the attentions are directed to God. What better meeting could be imagined than this?

"Such a gathering is fundamentally most important. But we must arise to discharge our duties for this purpose, for this is an assemblage the attention of which is directed toward the Kingdom of God. Therefore, all the individual members thereof must be in

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the utmost of love and fellowship, the utmost of humility and submissiveness, and the utmost state of attentiveness toward the Kingdom of God--thus may our meeting be an example of the meetings in the Supreme Kingdom."

(Star of the West, Vol. IV, No. 13, p. 1)

"Thou hast written concerning the meetings and gathering places of the believers of God. Such assemblies and gatherings will greatly aid the promotion of the Word and all the audience, whether friends or not, will become affected. But when the friends have the intention of entering into these meetings they must disengage the heart from all other reflections, ask the Inexhaustible Divine Confirmation, and with the utmost devotion and humility set their feet in the gathering place. Let them not introduce any topic in the meeting except the mentioning of the True One, neither must they confuse that merciful assembly with complex outside questions. They must... either commune or supplicate and pray to God, either read Tablets or give out advices and exhortations."

(Star of the West, Vol. II, No. 6, p. 5)

"You have written concerning the spiritual meetings. The foundation of the spiritual meetings must be the teaching and delivering of the Cause of God. In these meetings the believers and maidservants of the Merciful must proclaim the proofs and arguments and explain the signs of the appearance of the Beauty of Abha--May my life be a sacrifice to the beloved ones! Meanwhile they may read some Tablets and Communes, and at the end of the meetings, if they desire to sing with the utmost supplication and meekness, it is acceptable. But the fundamental principle of the establishment of spiritual meetings is for the sake of teaching and delivering the Truth so that those souls who are present may become informed of the Divine Evidences and Proofs."
(Star of the West, Vol. II, No. 6, p. 5)

"The believers of God must assemble and associate with each other in the utmost love, joy and fragrance. They must conduct themselves (in the meetings) with the greatest dignity and consideration, chant divine verses, peruse instructive articles, read the

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Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Baha, encourage and inspire each other with love for the whole human race, invoke God with perfect joy and fragrance, read the verses of glorification and praises of the Self-Subsistent Lord and deliver eloquent speeches."
(Star of the West, Vol. II, No. 6, p. 6)

III. FROM THE WRITINGS OF SHOGHI EFFENDI AND LETTERS WRITTEN ON HIS BEHALF

"They must undertake the arrangement of the regular meetings of the friends, the feasts and the anniversaries, as well as the special gatherings designed to serve and promote the social, intellectual and spiritual interests of their fellowmen."

(From a letter dated 12 March 1923 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Baha'is of America, Great Britain, Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy, Japan, and Australasia; Baha'i Administration, p. 38)

"With regard to the question that you had asked, Shoghi Effendi feels that as he has formerly said in Baha'i meetings it is quite proper for some of the friends to deliver talks, but their speeches must have a direct bearing on the teachings of Baha'u'llah and our dear Master. It is not absolutely necessary that in all the meetings only the writings and utterances of Baha'u'llah and the Master should be read, but when lectures and talks are given they must bear either directly or indirectly on the Cause."

(From a letter dated 10 February 1926 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"Regarding your question as to the advisability of holding Baha'i meetings at a time coinciding with church meetings; the Guardian would advise the friends to avoid such a coincidence, as otherwise many church people may feel offended, and this way lead to unnecessary and even harmful misunderstandings and developments which may injure the Cause and affect its prestige in

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the eyes of the public. The friends should, under all circumstances, be careful not to arouse unnecessarily any feelings of religious antagonism."

(From a letter dated 5 September 1936 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, quoted in Baha'i News, No. 111, October 1937, p. 1)

"Since you have found in the Baha'i Teachings the fulfillment of your highest aspirations and the realization of those ideals most dear to your heart, it is your paramount duty now to spare no effort for their study and their dissemination.

"To this end, the Guardian would recommend that, in addition to your studies of Baha'i writings, you closely associate with your fellow-Baha'is, and take part in various activities of your local group, so that you may not only acquire a theoretical knowledge of the Cause, but grow to become a loving, active and efficient member of the Community."

(From a letter dated 25 November 1938 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"In some places the Baha'is have held meetings for prayer, for people who desire to meet and pray. As we have such wonderful prayers and meditations in our writings, the reading of these with friends who are interested in and crave for this type of small meeting is often a step towards attracting them to the Faith. Perhaps you could start such an activity in your city."

(From a letter dated 4 February 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"We should try not to introduce any set patterns into our teaching methods; however, if this form of group meditation produces unity and a deeper understanding of the teachings, he sees no reason why it should be not used at least in the beginning of a teaching class--providing the people want to, like it, and fully understand it has nothing to do with the teachings of the Faith, but is a method which sometimes proves helpful."

(From a letter dated 30 July 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

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I. FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLAH

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

(From the Kitab-i-Aqdas #57, p. 40) [MOST RECENT AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION SUBSTITUTED FOR THE ORIGINAL IN COMPILATION]

II. FROM THE WRITINGS OF ABDU'L-BAHA

"O ye loyal servants of the Ancient Beauty: In every cycle and Dispensation, the Feast hath been favored and loved, and the spreading of a table for the lovers of God hath been considered a praiseworthy act. This is especially the case today, in this Dispensation beyond compare, this most generous of ages, when it is highly acclaimed, for it is truly accounted among such gatherings as are held to worship and glorify God. Here the holy verses, the heavenly odes

and laudations are intoned, and the heart is quickened, and carried away from itself.

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

"Happy are ye, to be observing this rule, with all its mystic meanings, thus keeping the friends of God alert and heedful, and bringing them peace of mind, and joy."

(From a recently translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to a group of individual believers)

"As to the Nineteen Day Feast, ye must give this your most

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careful attention, and firmly establish it. For this Feast bringeth bliss and unity and love to the lovers of God."

(From a recently translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to an individual believer)

"Thy letter hath been received. Thou didst write of the Nineteen Day festivity, and this rejoiced my heart. These gatherings cause the divine table to descend from Heaven, and draw down the confirmations of the All-Merciful. My hope is that the breathings of the Holy Spirit will be wafted over them, and that each one present shall, in great assemblies, with an eloquent tongue and a heart flooded with the love of God, set himself to acclaiming the rise of the Sun of Truth, the dawn of the Day-Star that lighteth all the world."

(From a recently translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to an individual believer)

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

(From a recently translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to an individual believer)

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

(From a recently translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to the Spiritual Assembly of Spokane, Washington, U.S.A.)

"I beg of God, out of His endless bounties, that many such gatherings will be held, and that the Nineteen Day festivity will also be observed, so that men and women believers will occupy

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themselves with making mention of God, and praising and glorifying Him, and

guiding the people aright."

(From a recently translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha)

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

(From a recently translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to an individual believer)

"You have asked as to the Feast in every Baha'i month. This Feast is held to foster comradeship and love, to call God to mind and supplicate Him with contrite hearts, and to encourage benevolent pursuits.

"That is, the friends should there dwell upon God and glorify Him, read the prayers and holy verses, and treat one another with the utmost affection and love."

(From a recently translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha)

"As to the Nineteen Day Feast, it rejoiceth mind and heart. If this Feast be held in the proper fashion, the friends will, once in nineteen days, find themselves spiritually restored, and endued with a power that is not of this world."

(From a recently translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to an individual believer)

"Thou hast written to his honor ... concerning the Feast.

"This Feast was established by His Highness the Bab, to occur once in nineteen days. Likewise, the Blessed Perfection (Baha'u'llah) hath commanded, encouraged and reiterated it. Therefore, it hath the utmost importance. Undoubtedly you must give the greatest attention to its establishment and raise it to the

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highest point of importance, so that it may become continual and constant. The believers of God must assemble and associate with each other in the utmost love, joy and fragrance. They must conduct themselves (in these Feasts) with the greatest dignity and consideration, chant divine verses, peruse instructive articles, read the Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Baha, encourage and inspire each other with love for the whole human race, invoke God with perfect joy and fragrance, sing the verses, glorifications and praises of the Self-subsistent Lord and deliver eloquent speeches. The owner of the house must personally serve the beloved ones. He must seek after the comfort of all and with the utmost humility he must show forth kindness to every one. If the Feast is arranged in this manner and in the way mentioned, that supper is the 'Lord's supper,' for the result is the same result and the effect is the same effect."

(Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 468-469)

"You must continue to keep the Nineteen Day Feast. It is very important; it is very good. But when you present yourselves in the meetings, before entering them, free yourselves from all that you have in your heart, free your thoughts

and your minds from all else save God, and speak to your heart. That all may make this a gathering of love, make it the cause of illumination, make it a gathering of attraction of the hearts, surround this gathering with the Lights of the Supreme Concourse so that you may be gathered together with the utmost love.

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

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

"Each one of you must think how to make happy and pleased the other members of your Assembly, and each one must consider all those who are present as better and greater than himself, and each one must consider himself less than the rest. Know their station as high, and think of your own station as low. Should you act and live

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according to these behests, know verily, of a certainty, that that Feast is the Heavenly Food. That Supper is the 'Lord's Supper!' I am the Servant of that gathering."

(Star of the West, Vol. IV, No. 7, p. 120)

"The Nineteen Day Feast was inaugurated by the Bab and ratified by Baha'u'llah, in His holy book, the Aqdas, so that people may gather together and outwardly show fellowship and love, that the divine mysteries may be disclosed. The object is concord, that through this fellowship hearts may become perfectly united, and reciprocity and mutual helpfulness be established. Because the members of the world of humanity are unable to exist without being banded together, cooperation and mutual helpfulness is the basis of human society. Without the realization of these two great principles no great movement is pressed forward....

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

"Every day great feasts and banquets are being spread with the object of material enjoyment and relish of food. People partake of certain delicacies and waters from various fountains, that they may have a good time. Balls and dances follow. All these are for the body, but this fellowship is of the enjoyment of God, for the partaking of spiritual food, for the elucidation of spiritual subjects, for the discussion and interpretation of the teachings and counsels of God. It is absolute spirituality.

"It is my hope that the Nineteen Day Feast may become firmly established and organized so that the holy realities which are behind this meeting may leave

behind all prejudices and conflict, and make their hearts as a treasury of love. Even if there is the slightest feeling between certain souls--a lack of love--it must be made to entirely disappear. There must be the utmost translucency and purity of intention.

"They must enjoy the love of God, acquire the power for the promotion of the happiness of mankind and the Word of God. With

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such high mention must this Feast become an established institution. When they gather in this meeting, all those present must turn their faces toward the Kingdom of Abha, and from their hearts supplicate, invoke and entreat toward the lofty throne, beg of God's forgiveness for all shortcomings, read the teachings and arise to His service.

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

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

"May your hearts be enlightened!

"May your faces become radiant!

"May your spirits be illumined!

"May your thoughts find wider range of vision!

"May your spiritual susceptibilities be increased!

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

"This is my hope."

(From a talk by 'Abdu'l-Baha given at a Nineteen Day Feast in London, England, 29 December 1912, quoted in Baha'i News, No. 33, July 1929, pp. 1-2)

III. FROM THE WRITINGS OF SHOGHI EFFENDI AND LETTERS WRITTEN ON HIS BEHALF

"Still other factors promoting the development of that Order and contributing to its consolidation have been the systematic institution of the Nineteen Day Feast, functioning in most Baha'i

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communities in East and West, with its threefold emphasis on the devotional, the administrative and the social aspects of Baha'i community life..."

(God Passes By, p. 342)

"Regarding the nature of the Nineteen Day Feasts, the Guardian feels that the excellent statement on their nature, function and purpose published in one of the recent issues of the News Letter is so comprehensive and faithful in its presentation that he does not find it necessary to restate and enlarge upon the

matter. He has no objection, however, if you feel the need to elaborate the thought expressed in that statement, stressing particularly the spiritual, administrative and social aspects of this vital Baha'i institution."

(From a letter dated 6 September 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

THE STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN THE ABOVE EXTRACT IS AS FOLLOWS:

"This institution, established by Baha'u'llah, has been described by the Guardian as the foundation of the new World Order. The National Spiritual Assembly understands that it is incumbent upon every believer, unless ill or absent from the city, to attend each of these Feasts.

"In a general letter issued to Local Spiritual Assemblies several years ago, it was pointed out that the Guardian instructs that the Nineteen Day Feast be held according to the following program: the first part, entirely spiritual in character, is devoted to readings from Baha'i Sacred Writings; the second part consists of general consultation on the affairs of the Cause, at which time the Local Spiritual Assembly reports its activities to the community, asks for suggestions and consultation, and also delivers messages received from the Guardian and the National Assembly. The third part is the material feast and social meeting of all the friends. Only voting believers are invited to attend the Nineteen Day Feasts, but young people of less than twenty-one years of age who are declared believers, especially when members of a Baha'i family, can also be present.

"These meetings may be regarded as the very heart of our

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Baha'i community life. When properly conducted, and attended by a Baha'i community which fully appreciates their importance, the Nineteen Day Feasts serve to renew and deepen our spirit of faith, increase our capacity for united action, remove misunderstandings and keep us fully informed of all important Baha'i activities, local, national and international in scope."

(Statement of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, Baha'i Procedure, Section One, Sheet 6)

"The main purpose of the Nineteen Day feasts is to enable individual believers to offer any suggestion to the local assembly which in its turn will pass it to the N.S.A. The local assembly is, therefore, the proper medium through which local Baha'i communities can communicate with the body of the national representatives. The Convention should be regarded as a temporary gathering, having certain specific functions to perform during a limited period of time. Its status is thus limited in time to the Convention sessions, the function of consultation at all other times being vested in the entire body of the believers through the local spiritual assemblies."

(From a letter dated 18 November 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

"As to your question concerning Baha'i feasts, Shoghi Effendi strongly feels that on such occasions the friends should emphasize both the spiritual and the administrative elements. For these are equally essential to the success of

every Baha'i festival. To maintain the right balance between them is, therefore, the duty and responsibility of every individual Baha'i or group. Until the believers learn to combine the two, there can be no hope of their gaining any real and permanent benefit from such religious celebrations. A good part of the feast must of course be devoted to the reading of the Holy Words. For it is through them that the friends can get the inspiration and the vision they need for the successful accomplishment of their work for the Cause." (From a letter dated 27 May 1934 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

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"In regard to the Nineteen Day feasts, Shoghi Effendi is of the opinion that the believers should be impressed with the importance of attending these gatherings which, in addition to their spiritual significance, constitute a vital medium for maintaining close and continued contact between the believers themselves, and also between them and the body of their elected representatives in the local community.

"No radical action, such as the expulsion of any believer from the community, should, however, be taken in case anyone fails to attend these feasts. It is for every individual believer to realize what the Cause requires from him in this matter. Any threat or menace can be of no avail, unless it is based on an appeal to individual conscience and responsibility."

(From a letter dated 22 December 1934 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"With regard to your question concerning the use of music in the Nineteen Day Feasts, he wishes you to assure all the friends that not only he approves of such a practice, but thinks it even advisable that the believers should make use, in their meetings, of hymns composed by Baha'is themselves, and also of such hymns, poems and chants as are based on the Holy Words."

(From a letter dated 7 April 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"With regard to your question concerning the Nineteen Day Feasts. These gatherings are no doubt of a special importance to the friends, as they have both a social and an administrative significance, and as such should be regularly attended by all confirmed believers. They should also be observed according to the Baha'i calendar every nineteen days."

(From a letter dated 12 April 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"Concerning the nature of the Nineteen Day feast. In the Aqdas, Baha'u'llah has clearly revealed the spiritual and social character of this institution. Its administrative significance, however, has been stressed by the Guardian in direct response to the growing needs of the Baha'i community in this formative period of the

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Baha'i Era for better training in the principles and practice of Baha'i

administration."

(From a letter dated 29 July 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

"Regarding the Nineteen Day Feast; in a previous letter to the N.S.A. the Guardian had made it clear that, although not a binding ordinance, this feast has been regarded by Baha'u'llah as highly desirable and meritorious. In the Aqdas He has specially emphasized its spiritual and devotional character, and also its social importance in the Baha'i community as a means for bringing about closer fellowship and unity among the believers. The administrative significance of this Feast has been stated by the Guardian in view of the increasing need among the friends for better training in the principles and methods of Baha'i Administration.

"The significance of the Nineteen Day Feast is thus threefold. It is a gathering of a devotional, social and administrative importance. When these three features are all combined, this feast can and will surely yield the best and the maximum of results. The friends, however, should be on their guard lest they overstress the significance of this institution created by Baha'u'llah. They should also take care not to underrate or minimize its importance."

(From a letter dated 2 October 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

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

(From a letter dated 30 November 1936 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"Your third question concerns the day on which the Feast

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should be held every month. The Guardian stated in reply that no special day has been fixed, but it would be preferable and most suitable if the gathering of the friends should be held on the first day of each month."

(From a recently translated letter dated 1 December 1936 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"The chief opportunity which the friends have for discussion on administrative questions is during the Nineteen Day feasts, at which time the members of the assembly can meet with the body of the believers and discuss in common the affairs of the Cause, and suggest new policies and methods. But even then no reference to individuals should be made."

(From a letter dated 27 March 1938 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"As to your question relative to the last Nineteen Day Feast, Shoghi Effendi

sees no objection if the friends choose to celebrate it on one of the intercalary days. They may also celebrate it during the month of fasting, provided they abstain from food."

(From a letter dated 2 August 1939 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"Now with reference to your last dear letter in which you had asked whether the believers have the right to openly express their criticism of any Assembly action or policy; it is not only the right, but the vital responsibility of every loyal and intelligent member of the Community to offer fully and frankly, but with due respect and consideration to the authority of the Assembly, any suggestion, recommendation or criticism he conscientiously feels he should in order to improve and remedy certain existing conditions or trends in his local community, and it is the duty of the Assembly also to give careful consideration to any such views submitted to them by any one of the believers. The best occasion chosen for this purpose is the Nineteen Day Feast which, besides its social and spiritual aspects, fulfills various administrative needs and requirements of the Community, chief among them being the need for open and

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constructive criticism and deliberation regarding the state of affairs within the local Baha'i Community.

"But again it should be stressed that all criticisms and discussions of a negative character which may result in undermining the authority of the Assembly as a body should be strictly avoided. For otherwise the order of the Cause itself will be endangered, and confusion and discord will reign in the Community."

(From a letter dated 13 December 1939 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"Regarding the time for the holding of the Nineteen Day Feasts and elections; the Guardian would advise your Assembly to urge the friends to hold such gatherings on the prescribed day before sunset. If impossible, then it is permissible to hold them on the preceding day."

(From a letter dated 24 December 1939 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

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

(From a letter dated 14 October 1941 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

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

(From a letter dated 5 March 1946 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"As regards your question concerning the 19 Day Feasts: this is really a matter of secondary importance, and should be decided by the Assembly; meetings which have been publicly advertised for a certain date cannot, obviously, be

cancelled. As to non-Baha'is attending: this should by all means be avoided, but if a nonbeliever comes to a 19 Day Feast, they should not be put out, as this might hurt their feelings."

(From a letter dated 21 September 1946 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

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"... Regarding your question: The Devotional part of the 19 Day Feast means the reading of Prayers by Baha'u'llah and the Master. If, after this, there is a period of reading the teachings, his (the Guardian's) writings may be included, but this does not form part of the devotional aspect of the meeting."

(From a letter dated 15 December 1947 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"Regarding the question you asked him about the Baha'i sacred writings: these should be regarded as the writings of the Bab, Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha and only these should be read during the purely devotional part of the Feast."

(From a letter dated 11 May 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand)

"During the devotional part of the 19 Day Feast any part of the writings of the Bab, Baha'u'llah and the Master can be read, also from the Bible and Qur'an, as these are all sacred scriptures. This part of the meeting need not be confined to prayers, though prayers can and should be read during it."

(From a letter dated 18 October 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"Attendance at 19 Day Feasts is not obligatory, but highly desirable, and effort should be made by the friends not to deprive themselves of this spiritual and communal rallying point once in every Baha'i month."

(From a letter dated 23 December 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"Each city will have its own Spiritual Assembly, not a number of district ones. Naturally, district 19 Day Feasts can be held where there are very many Baha'is in one city."

(From a letter dated 31 March 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"The question regarding the devotional part of the Feast has been obscured because once he used the term 'devotional' in its

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strict sense, which of course means prayer, and once loosely, in the sense in which the Baha'is usually understand it, and that is the meeting together and reading from the teachings which precedes the administrative--or consultative--aspect of the 19 Day Feast. The two statements in no way change the method of holding this part of the Feast which, in the East at any rate, is always opened with prayers and afterwards Tablets and excerpts from Baha'u'llah's, or the Master's or the Guardian's, writings may be read or, for

that matter, the Bible or Qur'an quoted."

(From a letter dated 11 April 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States)

"The Baha'is must learn to forget personalities and to overcome the desire--so natural in people--to take sides and fight about it. They must also learn to really make use of the great principle of consultation. There is a time set aside at the 19 Day Feasts for the community to express its views and make suggestions to its assembly; the assembly and the believers should look forward to this happy period of discussion, and neither fear it nor suppress it. Likewise the assembly members should fully consult, and in their decisions put the interests of the Cause first and not personalities, the will of the majority prevailing."

(From a letter dated 30 June 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria)

"The Naw-Ruz Feast should be held on March 21 before sunset and has nothing to do with the 19 Day Feast. The 19 Day Feast is administrative in function whereas the Naw-Ruz is our New Year, a Feast of hospitality and rejoicing."

(From a letter dated 5 July 1950 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States)

"The Guardian has never heard of any ruling by which a believer who does not attend three consecutive 19 Day Feasts can be deprived of his voting rights. He does not consider that such action

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is justifiable at all. The whole question is whether a person considers himself a Baha'i or not, and is willing to adhere to the principles of the Faith and accept the authority of the Guardian and the Administration--whether that individual is able, or always in a condition psychologically to attend Feasts and Baha'i meetings is an entirely different subject. If a person makes it quite clear that they do not wish to be considered an active member of the Baha'i Community and be affiliated with it and exert their voting right, then their name should be removed from the voting list; but if a person considers himself or herself a Baha'i, and for various reasons is not able to be active in the affairs of the Community, then they should certainly not be removed from our voting list, least of all at present, when the number of the Baha'i Community is so small."

(From a letter dated 2 March 1951 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria)

"Music is permitted during the spiritual part--or any part--of the 19 Day Feast."

(From a letter dated 30 June 1952 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States)

"Regarding the questions you raised in your letter:

"First, he feels that although in principle there is certainly no reason why excerpts from other Sacred Scriptures should not be read in the spiritual part

of our Feasts, that as this is particularly an occasion when Baha'is get together to deepen their own spiritual life, it is, generally speaking, advisable for them to read from their own holy Writings in the spiritual part of the Feast.

"The matter of where the Nineteen Day Feasts should be held is certainly one for the Spiritual Assembly to decide; but the Haziratu'l-Quds seems the logical place on most occasions. Until the friends have a place of worship..., this building will also be used for devotional meetings, as well as for administrative purposes.

"If, under some circumstances, some special Feast is offered in

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the home of one of the believers, with the approval of the Spiritual Assembly, there can be no objection; but, generally speaking, he feels it is better to use the Haziratu'l-Quds."

(From a letter dated 18 February 1954 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"The beloved Guardian has instructed me to write you concerning an action recently taken by your National Assembly, as published in your January-February Baha'i News, that non-Baha'is may attend 19 Day Feasts if 'the earnestness of their interest in the Faith' is vouched for by a declared believer.

"The Guardian wishes me to direct your attention to the fact that none of the institutions of the Faith nor its cardinal principles may be changed under any circumstances.

"The 19 Day Feast is an institution of the Cause, first established by the Bab, later confirmed by Baha'u'llah, and now made a prominent part of the administrative order of the Faith. These 19 Day Feasts are for the Baha'is, and the Baha'is exclusively, and no variation from this principle is permitted.

"Thus the Guardian feels you should rescind the action taken by your Assembly in opening the Feasts to 'near Baha'is,' as it is not consistent with the spirit of the administrative order for non-Baha'is or near Baha'is to attend the 19 Day Feasts, particularly the administrative portion of the Feast.

"The Guardian realizes the spirit which animated you in making the suggested proposal, in order that the teaching work might go forward more aggressively; but he feels in the long run it would be detrimental to the Faith, and therefore should be rescinded as indicated above."

(From a letter dated 28 May 1954 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria)

"The Writings of the Bab and Baha'u'llah can certainly be read any time at any place; likewise the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha are read freely during the spiritual part of the Feast. The Guardian has instructed that during the spiritual part of the Feast, his own writings should not be read. In other words, during the spiritual part of the Feast, readings should be confined to the Writings of the

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Bab, Baha'u'llah and to a lesser extent, of the Master; but during that part of

the Feast the Guardian's writings should not be read. During the period of administrative discussion of the Feast, then the Guardian's writings may be read. Of course, during the administrative part of the Feast there can be no objection to the reading of the Writings of the Bab, Baha'u'llah or 'Abdu'l-Baha."

(From a letter dated 27 April 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, published in the Australian Baha'i Bulletin and quoted in Baha'i News, No. 335, January 1959, p. 5)

"Instrumental music may be used at the Baha'i Feasts.

"There is no objection to showing appreciation by the clapping of hands.

"If an individual has a teaching appointment on the same evening as a 19 Day Feast, it is left to the individual to judge which is the most important."

(From a letter dated 20 August 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"It is inconceivable and wholly inadmissible that any Baha'is in a Community should be permitted to hold a Feast in their home and refuse admission to another believer; and your Assembly should write accordingly in very strong terms to the ... Assembly, pointing out that the Guardian is not only surprised to learn of this situation, but disapproves of it in the strongest terms.

"Any Baha'i may attend a Feast, a local Baha'i, a Baha'i from out of town, certainly an isolated Baha'i from the neighborhood."

(From a letter dated 27 May 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles)