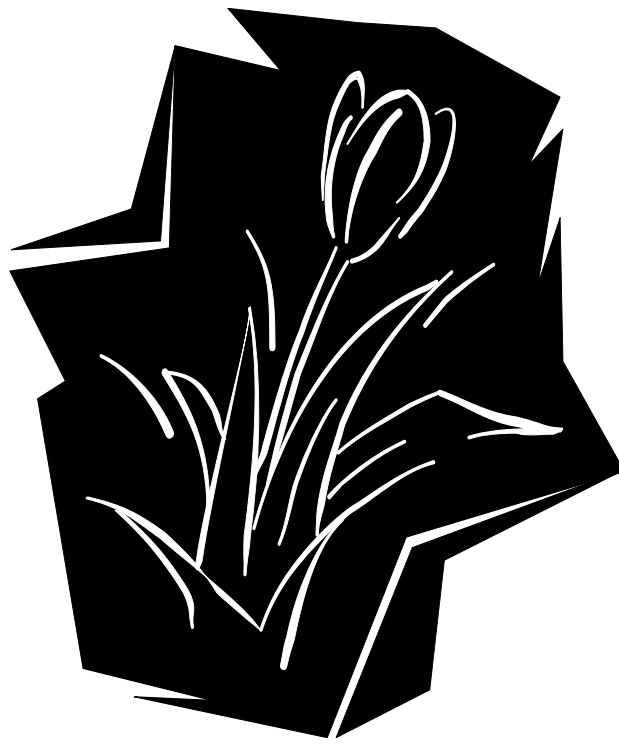


Workshop

Devotional Meetings



Whensoever 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.

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Selections ... `Abdu'l-Baha, Page: 94)

Workshop

Devotional Meetings

Section 1

In the Bahá'í community the friends meet frequently, for various reasons: to pray, to study about the Faith, to commemorate special occasions, to consult about the affairs of the community, to make plans and projects and consultation meetings about how to improve such plans and activities, etc. Often the friends get together purely for the joy of being together, to demonstrate their love and harmony and enjoy one another's company.

It is important to remember that Bahá'í meetings are spiritual in nature and for this reason are endowed with spiritual strength.

The Universal House of Justice, in its Ridvan message of 153 made a special call to the Bahá'ís of the world concerning the importance of holding regular devotional meetings as an essential aspect of community spiritual life.

- 1. ...the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behaviour: those patterns by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly are manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth. This calls for the integration of the component elements - -- adults, youth and children -- in spiritual, social, educational and administrative activities; and their engagement in local plans of teaching and development. It implies a collective will and sense of purpose to perpetuate the Spiritual Assembly through annual elections. It involves the practice of collective worship of God. Hence, it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Baha'i centres, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers.**

The Universal House of Justice, Ridvan Message 153

Devotional meetings have a special power and significance in Bahá'í community life. There are a large number of passages from the Holy Writings that clarify the importance of these meetings. Following are a few of these:

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

“Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Baha”, sec. 55, pp. 93-94

2. **“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.**

Bahá’u’lláh, Bahá’í Meetings, page 3

3. **By the righteousness of God! Whosoever openeth his lips in this Day and maketh mention of the name of his Lord, the hosts of Divine inspiration shall descend upon him from the heaven of My name, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. On him shall also descend the Concourse on high, each bearing aloft a chalice of pure light.”**

Bahá’u’lláh, Gleanings, page 280

4. **Once in ever week, gather ye the steadfast friends together in a meeting place, and there let them engage in praising and glorifying the Lord”.**

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Bahá’í Meetings, page 6

1. What distinguishes a Bahá’í meetings from other meetings?

2. What is essential to the spiritual life of a community?

3. How frequently is it advisable to hold devotional meetings?

4. Even though you are a member of a Bahá’í community is it sufficient to only hold devotional meetings with your family.

5. Close your eyes and meditate upon the following words of Bahá’u’lláh **“On him shall also descend the Concourse on high, each bearing aloft a chalice of pure light”** What imagine comes to your mind.

Section 2

Even though there are few participants, the holding of spiritual meetings bring uncountable blessings to the homes of the believers.

- 5. 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 Abdul-Baha Abbas", vol. 2 (Chicago: Baha'i Publishing Society, 1915), p. 553)

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Consultation, Page: 99)

- 6. We hear that thou hast in mind to embellish thy 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 shouldst thou bring this about, that house of earth will become a house of heaven, and that fabric of stone a congress of the spirit.**

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Selections ... `Abdu'l-Baha, Page: 94)

Reading from the Holy Writings in the gatherings is a source of immense happiness and has been deemed indispensable for the progress of the Cause. Bahá'u'lláh has ordained the following:

- 7. "...It behoveth 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."**

Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'i Meetings

- 8. 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 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 Abdul-Baha Abbas", vol. 3 (Chicago: Baha'i Publishing Society, 1916, p. 690)

1. What will be the result if a meeting has been organized with the purpose of promoting unity and concord.

2. "Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that a house where the friends meet from time to time with the purpose of glorify God will become "a house of heaven, and that fabric of stone a congress of the spirit". What imagines come to your mind reading this?

3. What influence does the Word of God have on our hearts, does it only have this influence on the hearts of Bahá'í's?

4. "Abdu'l-Bahá uses the examples of "the roots of trees" and "a regiment of an army" to illustrate the importance of perseverance in the holding of meetings. Explain.

Section 3

9. **"..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.**

The friends should concentrate all of their thoughts and words on spiritual concerns and the progress of the Cause. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

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

"Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Baha", sec. 54, p. 93

Devotional Meetings are doors to true understanding and happiness of the heart.

**11. ...”the impulse to prayer is a natural one, springing from man's love to God.”
(Abdu'l-Baha: Prayer, Meditation, Page: 236)**

1. How can we illuminate our cities with the light of reality, and transform our country into a veritable paradise?

2. Considering that the impulse to pray is natural, discuss with the person next to you how to break down barriers that may prevent you from inviting someone from outside the Bahá'í community to attend a Devotional Meetings. Share your results with the group.

The Mashriq'ul-Adhkár

A Story written by Peter Newton based on an actual occurrence

The Nineteen Day Feast had arrived at the consultative part, and the friends were discussing their dawn prayer meetings. Someone suggested to cancel them since no one had been attending. Jane raised her hand and the coordinator gave her the floor. She walked to the front of the room with a face brimming with joy, "I have excellent news from the World Centre!" Everyone was quiet and listened with anticipation. "Anyone

who is interested in having our own Bahá'í Temple, raise your hands.” Immediately everyone raised their hands with excitement, and everyone was talking one to another. “Excellent!” said Jane. “Do you know what is the word for Bahá'í Temples”

The friends looked at each other with expressions of doubt and a few lowered their hands. “Mashriq'u'l-Adhkár” came a voice from the back of the room. “And do you know the meaning of the word, Mashriq'u'l-Adhkár” Jane asked. “the Dawning-place of the Praise of God” came the answer. “Correct” affirmed Jane. “So what does this tell us about the purpose of these temples?” “What is to happen there?” asked Jane. The friends were quiet, until one woman broke the silence and said, “They are called as such, so people will go to the Temple at dawn to pray to God, to sing His praises and read the Holy Scriptures.”

“Perfect”, replied Jane, and with a look of mischief in her eyes added, “If our community had it's own Temple, who would be available to go for dawn prayers, even if it were only once during the week?” This time the hands took some time to raise and when they did it seemed they were raised more out of a sense of obligation than enthusiasm. A moment passed and the same voice from the back of the room spoke: “When I was a young girl in Iran, we held devotional meetings very early in the mornings at the Bahá'í Centre, and we called it the Mashriq'ul-Adhkár, the dawning-place of the Praise of God.” “Exactly” said Jane. “Now the good news is: The Universal House of Justice is calling all the Bahá'í communities of the world to establish their Mashriq'ul-Adhkár, ... in the spiritual sense, in preparation for the not so far future when we will be called upon to establish it physically. It seems as if they want us to establish the habit, the tradition, of collectively praising God, so that when the buildings are erected, they will not be empty, however they will become real dawning places for the praise of God.

A man stood up and said: “Friends, The Universal House of Justice is the infallible guide for the entire world and obeying it is equal to obeying Bahá'u'lláh himself. If Jane can show me where the Universal House of Justice calls us to hold such meetings, I for one will have no more doubts and will do whatever I can to assist.

In response, Jane pulled out a copy of the 153 Ridvan Message and read in a clear voice the following words: “**..the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level,... involves the practice of collective worship of God. Hence, it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Baha'i centres, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers.**” (The Universal House of Justice, Ridvan Message 153, to the Baha'is of the world.)

Having said this, Jane sat down, and the coordinator opened the topic of devotional meetings again, to the consultation. At the end of the Nineteen Day Feast they decided to not eliminate the devotional meetings rather to strengthen them and transform them into a instrument of teaching and proclamation.

Section 4

Preparation for hosting a Spiritual Meeting

So that the meeting will have increased effect on your guests it is important to prepare it with care and special attention.

Following are some suggestions that could assist in this important task.

Music: Soft music in the background helps to create an atmosphere of devotion. Some friends leave the music playing quietly in the background during the reading of the Holy Writings.

After the prayers, the friends could sing some songs with a spiritual theme together. It is best if someone arranges this before time. This also assists in the creation of a harmonious and happy environment. For example the group could sing: Alláh'u'ábha.

12. “The art of music is divine and effective. It is the food of the soul and spirit.

Through the power and charm of music the spirit of man is uplifted.”

(Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Page: 52)

Atmosphere

Create a spiritual atmosphere where everyone can sit and perceive the divine fragrances is also one of the objectives of the meetings. To create this atmosphere it is important that the place is clean, decorated, and has suitable seating for everyone.

Readings

Those who will be reading scripture or prayers should have previous access to them. Guests could read first, friends of different ages, also readings in different languages. A devotional meeting may have a theme, for example healing, world peace, etc, the readings and prayers could be selected accordingly. You may want to make copies of the readings and prayers for those who would like to take a copy home with them.

Invitations

Personally invite or give out invitation cards or letters, ask other members of the community to assist in this, announce the meeting at the 19 Day Feast and other appropriate meetings.

The Host

Use your five senses of, sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste, to create a spiritual atmosphere. Don't forget the touch of happiness.

Sight:

Decorate with plants, flowers, photos, candles, objects of art, something that is sacred, etc.

Smell

Use perfume or flowers to keep the area smelling fresh, open the windows, boil water with cloves and cinnamon and orange peel in it, let the aroma fill the air, etc.

Touch

Greet the friends with a handshake or a sincere embrace. Prepare a comfortable place for seating. Make sure the temperature of the room is agreeable.

Hearing

Have pleasant music playing in the background, include spiritually inspired music, or music with the sounds of nature are excellent.

Taste

Whether you serve, water, tea, coffee, juice or a full banquet, it all helps to create an atmosphere of welcome and friendship.

1. If you had the opportunity to organize a devotional meeting in the Local Centre or a home, what are some of the different elements you would be concerned about to assist in creating a spiritual atmosphere.

2. Why is it important to have music at the meetings, and what can be done in communities where no one plays a musical instrument or doesn't seem to be musically inclined?

3. With another member in your group, plan a Devotional Meeting to be celebrated during the next Bahá'í month. It should include elements to create a spiritual atmosphere.
