



best decision for everyone. As we look at the method of consultation in more detail, it will be seen how necessary all these qualities are.

### The Method

Before starting the consultation the group will begin with prayers. This is to invoke the help of God and to promote a spiritual and positive frame of mind, for “True consultation is spiritual conference in the attitude and atmosphere of love.” If the self can be put aside, each person will be able to act as a channel for the wisdom of God.

During the consultation, if no way forward can be found, additional prayers will be said to produce a deeper unity and to resolve the difficulties.

The first step of Bahá’í consultation is to establish the facts. This should not be too difficult if approached with an open mind. Information can then be viewed objectively and facts will not be ignored simply because they do not fit a particular viewpoint.

At this stage it may be necessary to consult with individuals who have special knowledge of the matter or even to set up a working party to look into it and report back. It is a matter of routine that a local Bahá’í Assembly will consult with the local Bahá’ís at the regular community meeting (known as the Feast). Here they will share their plans and ideas and ask for the community’s thoughts on these before the Assembly meets to consult further on the matter. The Feast is also a time when new suggestions or ideas can be offered to the Assembly.

The second step for the consultation is to decide on the principles to be applied to the situation, which will include deciding on the goal or goals of the consultation and the considerations which need to be taken into account.

### Contributing to the Discussion

Bahá’í consultation calls for unity of purpose, not unity of opinion, for: “The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions.”

It is important to note that it is the opinions which clash and not the people! Everyone should express his or her opinion with the conviction that it will contribute in some way to the discussion. No-one should be too shy to offer an idea. Even if it is not adopted, it may inspire a better idea in someone else. Each person should speak frankly, but with courtesy and moderation. After a point of view has been stated, it should not need to be repeated: “They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one’s views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden.”

All opinions must be listened to with respect and judged fairly. Any kind of conflict will only obscure the truth and make proper consultation impossible. The elected chairperson has the duty to ensure that everyone participates, that each opinion is listened to carefully and courteously and considered on its

merits and that no-one dominates or diverts the discussion.

Each idea must be offered to the group as a gift: it should not be identified in anyone's mind with the person who first suggested it. This means that the idea can be changed and developed, or even rejected, without anyone feeling hurt. If the participants are adopting the right approach, they will be able to see the best course of action to be taken, whatever their own original opinions might have been. It sometimes happens in Bahá'í consultation that a person will change his or her mind completely during the course of the consultation and even argue against an idea which he or she originally suggested!

### Making a Decision

If the consultation has gone successfully through the preceding steps, making a decision will probably prove to be the easiest part. It is likely also that it will be a unanimous decision. But if efforts to reach unanimity are not successful, a majority decision will have to be adopted. Most importantly, each member should respect the consulting body enough to carry out its decision confidently - even if he or she did not vote in favour of it.

This unity brings immense benefits. If a decision is not supported, it will never be certain whether it was wrong in itself or whether it failed because of lack of support or even because people were working against it.

When a decision is carried out wholeheartedly, however, it soon becomes apparent if the decision was a mistake and it can quickly be altered. This same whole-hearted support also means that the benefits of a correct decision will be felt immediately.

### The Power of Unity

This method of consultation is used throughout the Bahá'í world at every level. Decisions are based on justice and the members of the Bahá'í elected bodies are trusted and respected as impartial servants working for the good of all. Individual Bahá'ís feel that their opinions are taken into account and they support the decisions. Using this system, much can be achieved in a short space of time. This method of consultation will produce great results as it becomes more widespread throughout the world. Bahá'u'lláh said:

“No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation.”

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