Consultative Communication

What is Consultation and Why is it to be used?

“inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding.”(1)

It is a shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.(2)

Such matters should be determined through consultation, and whatever emergeth from the consultation of those chosen, that indeed is the command of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.(4)

The question of consultation is of the utmost importance, and is one of the most potent instruments conducive to the tranquillity and felicity of the people.(13)

consultation is one of the fundamental elements of the foundation of the Law of God.(17)

In this Cause consultation is of vital importance, but spiritual conference and not the mere voicing of personal views is intended.(21)

The purpose is to emphasize the statement that consultation must have for its object the investigation of truth. He who expresses an opinion should not voice it as correct and right but set it forth as a contribution to the consensus of opinion; for the light of reality becomes apparent when two opinions coincide. A spark is produced when flint and steel come together.(21)

It is better then to have the opinion of a wise, sagacious man; otherwise, contradiction and altercation, in which varied and divergent views are presented, will make it necessary for a judicial body to render decision upon the question. Even a majority opinion or consensus may be incorrect. A thousand people may hold to one view and be mistaken, whereas one sagacious person may be right. Therefore, true consultation is spiritual conference in the attitude and atmosphere of love. Members must love each other in the spirit of fellowship in order that good results may be forthcoming. Love and fellowship are the foundation.(21)

Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority, but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. Nothing short of the spirit of a true Baha’i can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand and fellowship, candour and courage on the other.(23)

The duties of those whom the friends have freely and conscientiously elected as their representatives are no less vital and binding than the obligations of those who have chosen them. Their function is not to dictate, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the friends whom they represent. They must regard themselves in no other light but that of chosen instruments for a more efficient and dignified presentation of the Cause of God.(24)

Consultation, frank and unfettered, is the bedrock of this unique Order.(27)

The principle of consultation, which constitutes one of the basic laws of the Administration, should be
applied to all Bahá’í activities which affect the collective interests of the Faith, for it is through cooperation and continual exchange of thoughts and views that the Cause can best safeguard and foster its interests. Individual initiative, personal ability and resourcefulness, though indispensable, are, unless supported and enriched by the collective experiences and wisdom of the group, utterly incapable of achieving such a tremendous task. (31)

It is important to realise that the spirit of Bahá’í consultation is very different from that current in the decision-making processes of non-Bahá’í bodies. (44)

**What are the prerequisites for Consultation?**

The prime requisites for them that take counsel together are purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrances, humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold. (9)

The first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members of the assembly. They must be wholly free from estrangement and must manifest in themselves the Unity of God, for they are the waves of one sea, the drops of one river, the stars of one heaven, the rays of one sun, the trees of one orchard, the flowers of one garden. Should harmony of thought and absolute unity be non-existent, that gathering shall be dispersed and that assembly be brought to naught. The second condition: They must when coming together turn their faces to the Kingdom on High and ask aid from the Realm of Glory. (10)

The first duty of the members is to effect their own unity and harmony, in order to obtain good results. If there be no unity, or the Committee becomes the cause of inharmony, undoubtedly, it is better that it does not exist. (22)

Every one of the friends should highly praise the other and each should regard himself as evanescent and as naught in the presence of others. (15)

**How are we to conduct Consultation?**

It is incumbent upon them to take counsel together and to have regard for the interests of the servants of God, for His sake, even as they regard their own interests, and to choose that which is meet and seemly. (6)

The members thereof must take counsel together in such wise that no occasion for ill-feeling or discord may arise. This can be attained when every member expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument. Should any one oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed. The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions. (9)

They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express
their views. 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.(10)

If they agree upon a subject, even though it be wrong, it is better than to disagree and be in the right, for
this difference will produce the demolition of the divine foundation. Though one of the parties may be in
the right and they disagree that will be the cause of a thousand wrongs, but if they agree and both parties
are in the wrong, as it is in unity the truth will be revealed and the wrong made right.(12)

The members who are consulting, however, should behave in the utmost love, harmony and sincerity
towards each other. The principle of consultation is one of the most fundamental elements of the divine
edifice. Even in their ordinary affairs the individual members of society should consult.(15)

Every one of the friends should highly praise the other and each should regard himself as evanescent and
as naught in the presence of others.(15)

Man should weigh his opinions with the utmost serenity, calmness and composure. Before expressing his
own views he should carefully consider the views already advanced by others. If he finds that a previously
expressed opinion is more true and worthy, he should accept it immediately and not willfully hold to an
opinion of his own. By this excellent method he endeavors to arrive at unity and truth. Opposition and
division are deplorable.(21)

Therefore, when the unity of the members of the Committee is established, their second duty is to read
the verses and communes, to be in a state of commemoration and mindfulness, that they may see each
other as if in the presence of God. (22)

They should never be led to suppose that they are the central ornaments of the body of the Cause,
intrinsically superior to others in capacity or merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles.
They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavour by their open-mindedness, their
high sense of justice and duty, their candour, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and
interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win not only the confidence and the genuine support
and respect of those whom they should serve, but also their esteem and real affection. They must at all
times avoid the spirit of exclusiveness, the atmosphere of secrecy, free themselves from a domineering
attitude, and banish all forms of prejudice and passion from their deliberations. They should, within the
limits of wise discretion, take the friends into their confidence, acquaint them with their plans, share with
them their problems and anxieties, and seek their advice and counsel. And when they are called upon to
arrive at a certain decision, they should, after dispassionate, anxious, and cordial consultation, turn to
God in prayer, and with earnestness and conviction and courage record their vote and abide by the voice
of the majority, which we are told by our Master to be the voice of truth, never to be challenged, and
always to be whole-heartedly enforced. To this voice the friends must heartily respond, and regard it as
the only means that can ensure the protection and advancement of the Cause.(24)

Not infrequently, nay oftentimes, the most lowly, untutored, and inexperienced among the friends will,
by the sheer inspiring force of selfless and ardent devotion, contribute a distinct and memorable share to
a highly involved discussion in any given assembly.(25)

But before the majority of the Assembly comes to a decision, it is not only the right but the sacred
obligation of every member to express freely and openly his views, without being afraid of displeasing or
alienating any of his fellow-members. In view of this important administrative principle of frank and
open consultation, the Guardian would advise you to give up the method of asking other members to
voice your opinion and suggestions. This indirect way of expressing your views to the Assembly not only
creates an atmosphere of secrecy which is most alien to the spirit of the Cause, but would also lead to
many misunderstandings and complications. The Assembly members must have the courage of their
convictions, but must also express whole-hearted and unqualified obedience to the well-considered
judgement and directions of the majority of their fellow-members. (32)
What is achieved through true Consultation?

Say: no man can attain his true station except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation. (2)

Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude. (3) inasmuch as it is and will always be a cause of awareness and of awakening and a source of good and well-being. (5)

Should they be graciously aided to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen Kingdom of Bahá shall be vouchsafed to them...(9)

Man must consult on all matters, whether major or minor, so that he may become cognizant of what is good. Consultation giveth him insight into things and enableth him to delve into questions which are unknown. The light of truth shineth from the faces of those who engage in consultation. Such consultation causeth the living waters to flow in the meadows of man's reality, the rays of ancient glory to shine upon him, and the tree of his being to be adorned with wondrous fruit.(14)

The purpose of consultation is to show that the views of several individuals are assuredly preferable to one man, even as the power of a number of men is of course greater than the power of one man. Thus consultation is acceptable in the presence of the Almighty, and hath been enjoined upon the believers, so that they may confer upon ordinary and personal matters, as well as on affairs which are general in nature and universal.(16)

Reference is given with the number of the quote in the Compilation on Consultation

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What is Consultation and Why is it to be used?

1. “It is important to realise that the spirit of Bahá’í consultation is very different from that current in the decision-making processes of non-Bahá’í bodies.”
   - What is unique and different?
   - How is it different?

2. “Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority, but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation.”
   - It is not through arbitrary power but loving consultation, note and comment the terms, arbitrary, power and loving.
   - How do they interplay and make a difference?

3. “for it is through cooperation and continual exchange of thoughts and views that the Cause can best safeguard and foster its interests.”
   - Why is cooperation and exchange of thought so important?

4. “The purpose is to emphasize the statement that consultation must have for its object the investigation of truth.”
   - What does that mean?
   - How does it effect ones personal participation in the consultation process?

5. “He who expresses an opinion should not voice it as correct and right but set it forth as a contribution to the consensus of opinion”
   - It’s not a mere expression of personal views, it is more, what?
   - What does this mean?
   - How does it affect you?

6. “A thousand people may hold to one view and be mistaken, whereas one sagacious person may be right. Therefore, true consultation is spiritual conference in the attitude and atmosphere of love.”
   - The most important thing is not to be right or arrive at the right choice, but to be united?

7. “For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.”
   - How do ones understanding increase/enhance through consultation?
   - What kind of understanding is intended?
   - What is meant by maturity in understanding?

8. “and is one of the most potent instruments conducive to the tranquillity and felicity of the people.”
   - How is consultation a potent instrument conducive to the tranquillity and felicity of the people?
What are the prerequisites for Consultation?

9. “The prime requisites for them that take counsel together are purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrances, humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold.”
   ○ Why and in what way are these requisites so important for consultation?

10. “The first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members of the assembly. … The second condition: They must when coming together turn their faces to the Kingdom on High and ask aid from the Realm of Glory.”
    ○ How do these two conditions interplay in the process of consultation?

11. “The first duty of the members is to effect their own unity and harmony, in order to obtain good results. If there be no unity, or the Committee becomes the cause of inharmony, undoubtedly, it is better that it does not exist.”
    ○ What is the role of unity in the process of consultation?
    ○ Why is unity so important during the consultation?

12. “Every one of the friends should highly praise the other and each should regard himself as evanescent and as naught in the presence of others.”
    ○ Why is praising the others necessary?
    ○ Where is the line between flattering, being false and praising others?

How are we to conduct Consultation?

13. “It is incumbent upon them to take counsel together and to have regard for the interests of the servants of God, for His sake, even as they regard their own interests, and to choose that which is meet and seemly.”
    ○ When consulting, what is to be our focus and why?
    ○ How would this work in practical terms?

14. “The members thereof must take counsel together in such wise that no occasion for ill-feeling or discord may arise. This can be attained when every member expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument. Should any one oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed. The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions.”
    ○ Why and how is one not to feel hurt if opposed?
    ○ Why does one fell hurt when opposed?
15. “They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views. 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.”

- What responsibility does one have when expressing one’s thoughts?
- How is that responsibility connected/balanced with the freedom to express one’s thoughts?

16. “If they agree upon a subject, even though it be wrong, it is better than to disagree and be in the right, for this difference will produce the demolition of the divine foundation.”

- Why is it better to agree even if one is right?
- How is this connected with the freedom to express our thoughts?

17. “Man should weigh his opinions with the utmost serenity, calmness and composure. Before expressing his own views he should carefully consider the views already advanced by others. If he finds that a previously expressed opinion is more true and worthy, he should accept it immediately and not willfully hold to an opinion of his own. By this excellent method he endeavors to arrive at unity and truth. Opposition and division are deplorable.”

- What is the mentality one should have when expressing thoughts during a consultation?
- What is the goal of the consultation and how does that relate to the above question?

What is achieved through true Consultation?

18. “Say: no man can attain his true station except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation.”

- Thoughts?

19. “Man must consult on all matters, whether major or minor, so that he may become cognizant of what is good. Consultation giveth him insight into things and enableth him to delve into questions which are unknown. The light of truth shineth from the faces of those who engage in consultation. Such consultation causeth the living waters to flow in the meadows of man’s reality, the rays of ancient glory to shine upon him, and the tree of his being to be adorned with wondrous fruit.”

- Why and how is consultation so necessary if the light of truth is to shine from our faces?