

Building Vibrant Local Living Communities From Cooperation to Competition

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Principles of Consultation

“Consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way and is the bestower of understanding.” (Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 168)

“Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude . . . The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.”
(Consultation: A Compilation, p. 1)

Freedom of Expression: Express your thoughts freely, without belittling the thoughts of others.

Objectivity: Carefully consider the views of others; do not willfully hold to your own opinion.

Contribution: Express your views as a contribution to the consensus of opinion; do not voice them as correct or right.

Detachment: A view once expressed belongs to the group; do not be offended if a conflicting view is expressed.

Decision Support: Support fully all decisions; do not criticize previous decisions.

A Fundamental Change of Consciousness

1. The time has come when those who preach the dogmas of materialism, whether of the east or the west, whether of capitalism or socialism, must give account of the moral stewardship they have presumed to exercise. Where is the "new world" promised by these ideologies? (Letters of The Universal House of Justice, 1985 Oct, The Promise of World Peace, p. 3)
2. In the perspective of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, the greatest danger of both the moral crisis and the inequities associated with globalization in its current form is an entrenched philosophical attitude that seeks to justify and excuse these failures. The overthrow of the twentieth century's totalitarian systems has not meant the end of ideology. On the contrary. There has not been a society in the history of the world, no matter how pragmatic, experimentalist and multi-form it may have been, that did not derive its thrust from some foundational interpretation of reality. Such a system of thought reigns today virtually unchallenged across the planet, under the nominal designation “Western civilization.” Philosophically and politically, it presents itself as a kind of liberal relativism; economically and socially, as capitalism – two value systems that have now so adjusted to each other and become so mutually reinforcing as to constitute virtually a single, comprehensive world view.

Appreciation of the benefits – in terms of the personal freedom, social prosperity and scientific progress enjoyed by a significant minority of the Earth's people – cannot withhold a thinking person from recognizing that the system is morally and

intellectually bankrupt. It has contributed its best to the advancement of civilization, as did all its predecessors, and, like them, is impotent to deal with the needs of a world never imagined by the eighteenth century prophets who conceived most of its component elements. Shoghi Effendi did not limit his attention to divine right monarchies, established churches or totalitarian ideologies when he posed the searching question: "Why should these, in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human institution?"

Bahá'u'lláh urges those who believe in Him to "see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others," to "know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor." Tragically, what Bahá'ís see in present-day society is unbridled exploitation of the masses of humanity by greed that excuses itself as the operation of "impersonal market forces." What meets their eyes everywhere is the destruction of moral foundations vital to humanity's future, through gross self-indulgence masquerading as "freedom of speech." What they find themselves struggling against daily is the pressure of a dogmatic materialism, claiming to be the voice of "science," that seeks systematically to exclude from intellectual life all impulses arising from the spiritual level of human consciousness.

And for a Bahá'í the ultimate issues are spiritual. The Cause is not a political party nor an ideology, much less an engine for political agitation against this or that social wrong. The process of transformation it has set in motion advances by inducing a fundamental change of consciousness, and the challenge it poses to everyone who would serve it is to free oneself from attachment to inherited assumptions and preferences that are irreconcilable with the Will of God for humanity's coming of age.... (*Century of Light*, pp. 135-136 – *TBA*, pp. 26-27).

3. "No, Bahá'u'lláh did not bring a complete system of economics to the world. "Profit-sharing is recommended as a solution to one form of economic problems. "There is nothing in the teachings against some kind of capitalism; its present form, though, would require adjustments to be made." (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, November 19, 1945: Bahá'í News, No. 210, August 1948, p. 3)(Compilations, Lights of Guidance, p. 550)
4. Governments and their partners must bear in mind that material equality is neither achievable nor desirable. Absolute equality is a chimera. At various points along the way, there will nevertheless be the necessity for the redistribution of some of the world's wealth. For, indeed, it is becoming increasingly obvious that unbridled capitalism does not provide the answer either. Some regulation and redistribution is necessary to promote material justice. In this regard, a tax on income is, in principle, one of the fairest and most equitable means. There must also be a role for the voluntary sharing of wealth -- both at an individual and an institutional level. Equal opportunities for economic advancement and progress, however, must be woven into the very fabric of the new order. Ultimately, the most important regulation on any economic system is the moral regulation that begins in the hearts and minds of people. (Baha'i International Community, 1995 Oct, Turning Point For All Nations)
5. ... The fundamentals of the whole economic condition are divine in nature and are associated with the world of the heart and spirit. This is fully explained in the Bahá'í teaching, and without knowledge of its principles no improvement in the economic

state can be realized. The Bahá'ís will bring about this improvement and betterment but not through sedition and appeal to physical force - not through warfare, but welfare. Hearts must be so cemented together, love must become so dominant that the rich shall most willingly extend assistance to the poor and take steps to establish these economic adjustments permanently. If it is accomplished in this way, it will be most praiseworthy because then it will be for the sake of God and in the pathway of His service. (ʿAbdu'l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 238-239)

6. ...By the statement 'the economic solution is divine in nature' is meant that religion alone can, in the last resort, bring in man's nature such a fundamental change as to enable him to adjust the economic relationships of society. It is only in this way that man can control the economic forces that threaten to disrupt the foundations of his existence, and thus assert his mastery over the forces of nature. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 550 – TBA, p. 196).
7. When that love is shining, it will permeate other hearts even as this electric light illumines its surroundings. When the love of God is established, everything else will be realized. This is the true foundation of all economics. Reflect upon it. Endeavor to become the cause of the attraction of souls rather than to enforce minds. Manifest true economics to the people. Show what love is, what kindness is, what true severance is and generosity. (ʿAbdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 239 – TBA, p. 196).

1. An ideology that reigns virtually unchallenged across the planet is _____
2. The House of Justice describes capitalism as _____
3. "Morally bankrupt" means _____
4. The free market system, as it currently operates, is characterized as _____
5. The reason that "unbridled capitalism" is a problem is _____
6. Five remedies for "unbridled capitalism" are _____
7. The purpose of these remedies is to promote _____
8. The Cause has set in motion a process of transformation that is _____ and advances by _____
9. The challenge to Baha'is is to _____
10. The most important regulation on any economic system is _____
11. The true foundation of all economics is _____
12. If religion is the only answer for lasting improvement in society, is it useless to try to bring about social change other than teaching the Faith? What does the Universal House of Justice ask us to do?

Practical Applications

1. If we all woke up tomorrow in a world where everyone's consciousness had been transformed to understand these principles, how would things be different? What would be happening? What would you see? Hear?
2. How can Baha'i-inspired enterprises avoid "unbridled capitalism"?
3. What steps can individuals take to influence their local communities to shift their consciousness to a more spiritual, more just and cooperative economy?
4. What unique contributions can Baha'is make to local community development?
5. How can Baha'is support each other's projects and enterprises?

Debrief on your group's consultation process

1. How well did your group follow the principles of consultation?
 2. What could have improved the process?
 3. Use the self-evaluation check list on the next page to rate how you did.
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Closing Reflections

(5 minutes with a partner)

1. What was meaningful for me? (a "gift" I am taking with me)
2. One thing I will do as a result of this workshop today. (a commitment I am making)

...The powers released by Bahá'u'lláh match the needs of the times. We may therefore be utterly confident that the new throb of energy now vibrating throughout the Cause will empower it to meet the oncoming challenges of assisting, as maturity and resources allow, the development of the social and economic life of peoples, of collaborating with the forces leading towards the establishment of order in the world, of influencing the exploitation and constructive uses of modern technology, and in all these ways enhancing the prestige and progress of the Faith and uplifting the conditions of the generality of mankind....

...Ultimately, the call to action is addressed to the individual friends, whether they be adult or youth, veteran or newly-enrolled. Let them step forth to take their places in the arena of service where their talents and skills, their specialized training, their material resources, their offers of time and energy and, above all, their dedication to Bahá'í principles, can be put to work in improving the lot of man. (Universal House of Justice, 1983 October 20, to the Bahá'ís of the world – *TBA*, p. 200).

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