The Nineteen Day Feast

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold…*

Once every nineteen days (a Bahá'í month), Bahá'ís gather in their respective localities for collective worship, to consult on issues of community life, and to have fellowship together. This local gathering is called the Nineteen Day Feast. The Feast was first established by the Báb. Bahá'u'lláh later ordained that the monthly Feast would continue to be observed during His Dispensation. 'Abdu'l-Bahá elaborated on the importance of the spiritual and devotional character of Feast, while Shoghi Effendi eventually added the consultative portion and confirmed the Feast as an institution of the Faith.

Continental Bahá'í House of Worship for Central America, near Panama City, Panama

OBJECTIVE: *A look to the horizon…*

Facilitator Review the following objective with the participants:

The objective of this study is to understand the fundamental verities or basic truths regarding the responsibility of involvement in, and the importance of, the Nineteen Day Feast.

THE STUDY PROCESS: *Attaining the water of life…*

Facilitator Review the following study process with the participants. Then study the numbered quotations that follow, one at a time as described below.

1. **READING:** *A drink from the cup of guidance…*
   - **A**. **Read the quotation** out loud in its entirety.
2. **CONFIRMING MEANING:** *A spray from the fountain of light…*
   To better understand certain words used in the quotation, take turns with the following:
   - **A**. Each participant **choose a word** from the quotation and **state it** for the whole group to hear. (Like a fun game – pick a word!) Then…
   - **B**. Read out loud the sentence that contains the **word** you selected, **while substituting for that word**, its given phrase, definition, or synonym from the boxes below the quotation.
   - **C**. Repeat A and B above until everyone is satisfied with their understanding of the words.
3. **FINDING VALUE:** *Mining the gems of truth…*
   - **A**. **Read the quotation** out loud again in its entirety.
   - **B**. Take turns **stating each basic fact or truth** you can find in the quotation about **the responsibility of being involved in, or the importance of, the Nineteen Day Feast**.

QUOTATIONS: *Within the meadows of Thy nearness...*

1. ...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 centre 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.

—`Abdu'l-Bahá

"The Nineteen Day Feast." In *The Compilation of Compilations: Prepared by the Universal House of Justice 1963-1990*, (Maryborough: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), vol. I, no. 934, p. 430.

attracts: draws in
bond: connecting force
centre: place, source, or origin
confirmation: spiritual strengthening through the validation and assurance
divine: God-inspired; holy; sacred
enlightenment: receiving of knowledge, insight, and spiritual illumination
friends: fellow Bahá'ís
Lord's supper: symbol of holy communion [the intimate sharing of thoughts and emotions with the Lord]; same as the Last Supper Jesus held with His disciples; "Make ye an effort in every meeting that the Lord's Supper may become realized and the heavenly food descend. This heavenly food is knowledge, understanding, faith, assurance, ⇗ love, affinity, kindness, purity of purpose, attraction of hearts and the union of souls." —`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1956, 1971 printing), pp. 408-09.
love: warm-hearted affection, compassion, and concern for the good of all, fostered by an unconditional, vulnerable willingness to be spiritually intimate
magnet: magnetic ore that strongly attracts iron
solidarity: union in opinion, purpose, interests, and standards
united: joined in harmony
unity: a heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony in human relations, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and strife

2. 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. **—`Abdu'l-Bahá**

"The Nineteen Day Feast." In *The Compilation of Compilations: Prepared by the Universal House of Justice 1963-1990*, (Maryborough: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), vol. I, no. 920, p. 425.

affection: moderate feelings of warmth, tenderness, and fondness
agreement: the condition of harmony in opinion, character, and action among people
bringer: cause of or conveyor
diffuseth: disperses or distributes widely or in every direction
fellowship: companionship, friendly ⇗ association, and mutual sharing
groundwork: foundation and support
joy: pleasure and delight
oneness: quality, state, or fact of the singleness and indivisibility
unity: a heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony in human relations, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and strife

3. …when you present yourselves in the meetings [Feasts], 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. **—`Abdu'l-Bahá**

"The Nineteen Day Feast." In *The Compilation of Compilations: Prepared by the Universal House of Justice 1963-1990*, (Maryborough: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), vol. I, no. 933, p. 429.

free: liberate from personal and external influences
heart: that aspect of human nature which becomes attracted, loves, and grows attached; *"…the human heart, which is the recipient of the light of God and the seat of the revelation of the All-Merciful…"* —Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1952, 1971 printing), XCIII, p. 186.
illumination: intellectual and spiritual insight, enlightenment, and knowledge
Lights: emanating spiritual knowledge and goodness
love: warm-hearted affection, compassion, and concern for the good of all, fostered by an unconditional, vulnerable willingness to be spiritually intimate

4. 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. **—`Abdu'l-Bahá**

Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), no. 50, p. 91.

affection: moderate feelings of warmth, tenderness, and fondness
benevolent: good, kind, or charitable
comradeship: intimate friendship and companionship
contrite: humble and sincerely repentant
dwell: keep the attention directed
foster: carefully promote the growth and development of
glorify: magnify in worship by giving glory to
pursuits: activities followed with zeal or steady interest
supplicate: humbly and earnestly pray to

5. 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. **—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi**

"The Nineteen Day Feast." In *The Compilation of Compilations: Prepared by the Universal House of Justice 1963-1990,* (Maryborough: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), vol. I, no. 940, p. 434.

administrative: connected to or relating to the management or directing of affairs [in its]
combined: brought together in close relationship
devotional: sacred and prayerful worship
features: distinct and outstanding parts or characteristics
maximum: greatest quantity or value attainable
results: outcomes, consequences, or conclusions
significance: importance or meaningfulness
social: involvement in fond, pleasant, and agreeable fellowship
threefold: of three parts
yield: give in return as a natural outcome

6. …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, fulfils various administrative needs and requirements of the Community, chief among them being the need for open and constructive criticism and deliberation regarding the state of affairs within the local Bahá'í 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.

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

"The Nineteen Day Feast." In *The Compilation of Compilations: Prepared by the Universal House of Justice 1963-1990,* (Maryborough: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), vol. I, no. 995, p. 452.

administrative: connected to or relating to the management or directing of affairs
Assembly: local Administrative Body of the Bahá'í community
authority: legitimate and rightful powers
conscientiously: with a sense of great care
constructive: helpful toward improvement or development
criticism(s): expression(s) of judgment or review after careful examination and evaluation
deliberation: consultation on, and careful consideration of options
discord: the absence of unity, producing active disagreement or conflict
frankly: with free, straightforward, open, and sincere expression
negative: hostile, withdrawn, or pessimistic
recommendations: something presented as worthy of acceptance or trial
respect: high and special regard
responsibility: morally accountable role
right: privilege to which one is entitled by authority
state of affairs: general conditions and circumstances
suggestions: desirable or possible proposals
undermining: destruction or weakening of the underlying support [for]

7. `Abdu'l-Bahá emphasized the importance of the spiritual and devotional character of these gatherings. Shoghi Effendi, besides further elaborating the devotional and social aspects of the Feast, has developed the administrative element of such gatherings and, in systematically instituting the Feast, has provided for a period of consultation on the affairs of the Bahá'í community, including the sharing of news and messages.

—written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Notes no. 82, p. 202.

administrative: connected to or relating to the management or directing of affairs
affairs: internal matters and personal concerns
consultation: "Therefore, true consultation is spiritual conference in the attitude and atmosphere of love."—`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), par. 31.2, pp. 72-73.

devotional: reverent and prayerful
elaborating: refining with care and detail
element: part or portion
emphasized: gave special attention to
instituting: establishing the practices, relationships, and administrative structures [for]
social: fond, pleasant, and agreeable fellowship

8. The 19-Day Feast is an institution of the Cause, first established by the Báb, later confirmed by Bahá'u'lláh, and now made a prominent part of the administrative order of the Faith. These 19-Day Feasts are for the Bahá'ís, and the Bahá'ís exclusively, and no variation from this principle is permitted.

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

The Light of Divine Guidance, (Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1982) vol. I, p. 212.

administrative order: system or structure consisting of Bahá'í Institutions for the purpose of uniting, managing, and directing the affairs
confirmed: approved with authority
exclusively: only; solely
institution: established social structure ⇗ authorized and maintained through prescribed rules and agencies
permitted: allowed or authorized
principle: governing truth or standard
prominent: distinct and outstanding
variation: difference, [even] by partial change

SHARING EXERCISE: *A breath from the spirit of inspiration...*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to complete the statements below. When everyone has finished, have each person share, in a round, one thing that was outstanding or inspiring and what spiritual feelings it enkindled. Please remind everyone not to remark on the comments of others.

One thing from the quotations that was outstanding or inspiring to me was _____

_____

It made me feel _____

_____

I felt this way because _____

_____

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SOME QUESTIONS: *A cup from the showers of confirmation…*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to answer the following questions. They can usually find answers in the quotations just studied or in the introduction. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers.

1. `Abdu'l-Bahá said: "...this is my hope: that the Nineteen Day Feast become the cause of great spiritual solidarity between the friends...." What does solidarity look like at Feast? What feelings does it generate for you? Name some other ways you can perceive solidarity at Feast. _____
_____
_____

2. Shoghi Effendi stated that the Bahá'í Feasts "are not strictly obligatory, but the believers should endeavour to regularly attend them."[1] Why do you think it is important for you to attend the Nineteen Day Feast regularly? _____
_____

3. From your experience, in what order are the three segments of Feast to occur?
- ☐ a. administrative, devotional, then social
- ☐ b. social, administrative, then devotional
- ☐ c. devotional, administrative, then social
- ☐ d. social, devotional, then administrative

4. The _____ segment of Feast is set aside to provide specifically "for a period of consultation on the affairs of the Bahá'í community, including the sharing of news and messages."[2]

5. Who can be invited to attend a Bahá'í Feast?
- ☐ a. anyone's child under fifteen years of age who considers himself Bahá'í and has parental consent[3]
- ☐ b. the non-Bahá'í spouse of a declared Bahá'í
- ☐ c. anyone
- ☐ d. only the holy
- ☐ e. declared Bahá'ís only
- ☐ f. any visiting Bahá'í from another community

6. It was written on behalf of the Guardian: "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 National Spiritual Assembly. The Local Assembly is, therefore, the proper medium through which local Bahá'í communities can communicate with the body of the national representatives."[4]
It is during the _____ portion of Feast that these suggestions may be made.

7. When a person who is not a Bahá'í inadvertently shows up at Feast… (answers are not found in the quotations or introduction)
- ☐ a. they will be warmly welcomed.
- ☐ b. they are welcome to participate in the entire Feast, but the administrative portion will be modified to accommodate their attendance.
- ☐ c. discussion of sensitive or problematic issues will be set aside for another occasion when the Bahá'ís can express themselves freely without being inhibited by the presence of visitors.
- ☐ d. all of the above

Continued on next page…

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[1] Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, "The Nineteen Day Feat". In *The Compilation of Compilations: Prepared by the Universal House of Justice 1963-1990*, (Maryborough: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), vol. no. 958, p. 439.
[2] Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Notes no. 82, p. 202.
[3] The Universal House of Justice, "The Nineteen Day Feat". In *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. no. 976, p. 446.
[4] Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, "The Nineteen Day Feat". In *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. no. 993, p. 451.

8. When a Bahá'í with family members who are not Bahá'í hosts a Feast in their home on behalf of the local Assembly, the family members should be treated in the same spirit as that expressed in a, b, and c in question seven above. (answers are not found in the quotations or introduction)
☐ true ☐ false

9. The Universal House of Justice wrote about inviting non-Bahá'ís to Feast: "...a Bahá'í should certainly not invite a non-Bahá'í to attend."[1] Why is this? _____

_____

_____

10. `Abdu'l-Bahá said: "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."[2] What can you do to help this happen? _____

_____

APPLICATION: *Showing forth divine light...*

Facilitator

Read through #1 together and proceed as stated. Then take time for the participants to write out their individual plans for action in #2. (these are not shared) When everyone has finished, move on to the closing reading.

1. IMAGINING THE POSSIBILITIES: *Visions of radiant lights...*

Bahá'u'lláh wrote: *"It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action...."* Imagine how the Bahá'í Teachings in this study class could be translated into reality and action. Take turns sharing the possibilities. Begin your statements with: *"**One could**...."* Suggest as many ideas as you want.

2. DECIDING ACTION: *Mirroring forth a beam of light...*

From your experience in this study class on "The Nineteen Day Feast," describe what ***you*** are inspired to put into reality and action. ***I will*** *make conscious efforts to...* _____

_____

My *next step will be...* _____

_____

CLOSING MEDITATION: *A heart song...*

Letter dated 27 August 1989 from the Universal House of Justice

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Nineteen Day Feast, its framework, purpose and possibilities, have in recent years become a subject of increasing inquiry among the friends. It occupied much of the consultation at the Sixth International Bahá'í Convention last year, and we feel the time has come for us to offer clarifications.

The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh encompasses all units of human society; integrates the spiritual, administrative and social processes of life; and canalizes human expression in its varied forms towards the construction of a new civilization. The Nineteen Day Feast embraces all these aspects at the very base of society. Functioning in the village, the town, the city, it is an institution of which all the people of Bahá are members. It is intended to promote unity, ensure progress, and foster joy.

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[1] The Universal House of Justice, cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 804, p. 242.
[2] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), no. 51, p. 91.

"If this feast be held in the proper fashion," `Abdu'l-Bahá states, "the friends will, once in nineteen days, find themselves spiritually restored, and endued with a power that is not of this world." To ensure this glorious outcome the concept of the Feast must be adequately understood by all the friends. The Feast is known to have three distinct but related parts: the devotional, the administrative, and the social. The first entails the recitation of prayers and reading from the Holy Texts. The second is a general meeting where the Local Spiritual Assembly reports its activities, plans and problems to the community, shares news and messages from the World Centre and the National Assembly, and receives the thoughts and recommendations of the friends through a process of consultation. The third involves the partaking of refreshments and engaging in other activities meant to foster fellowship in a culturally determined diversity of forms which do not violate principles of the Faith or the essential character of the Feast.

Even though the observance of the Feast requires strict adherence to the threefold aspects in the sequence in which they have been defined, there is much room for variety in the total experience. For example, music may be introduced at various stages, including the devotional portion; `Abdu'l-Bahá recommends that eloquent, uplifting talks be given; originality and variety in expressions of hospitality are possible; the quality and range of the consultation are critical to the spirit of the occasion. The effects of different cultures in all these respects are welcome factors which can lend the Feast a salutary diversity, representative of the unique characteristics of the various societies in which it is held, and therefore conducive to the upliftment and enjoyment of its participants.

It is notable that the concept of the Feast evolved in stages in relation to the development of the Faith. At its earliest stage in Iran, the individual friends, in response to Bahá'u'lláh's injunctions, hosted gatherings in their homes to show hospitality once every nineteen days and derived inspiration from the reading and discussion of the Teachings. As the community grew, `Abdu'l-Bahá delineated and emphasized the devotional and social character of the event. After the establishment of Local Spiritual Assemblies, Shoghi Effendi introduced the administrative portion and acquainted the community with the idea of the Nineteen Day Feast as an institution. It was as if a symphony, in three movements, had now been completed.

But it is not in only the sense of its gradual unfoldment as an institution that the evolution of the Feast must be regarded; there is a broader context yet. The Feast may well be seen in its unique combination of modes as the culmination of a great historic process in which primary elements of community life—acts of worship, of festivity and other forms of togetherness—over vast stretches of time have achieved a glorious convergence. The Nineteen Day Feast represents the new stage in this enlightened age to which the basic expression of community life has evolved. Shoghi Effendi has described it as the foundation of the new World Order, and in a letter written on his behalf, it is referred to as constituting "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."

Moreover, because of the opportunity which it provides for conveying messages from the national and international levels of the administration and also for communicating the recommendations of the friends to those levels, the Feast becomes a link that connects the local community in a dynamic relationship with the entire structure of the Administrative Order. But considered in its local sphere alone there is much to thrill and amaze the heart. Here it links the individual to the collective processes by which society is built or restored. Here, for instance, the Feast is an arena of democracy at the very root of society, where the Local Spiritual Assembly and the members of the community meet on common ground, where individuals are free to offer their gifts of thought, whether as new ideas or constructive criticism, to the building processes of an advancing civilization. Thus it can be seen that aside from its spiritual significance, this common institution of the people combines an array of elemental social disciplines which educate its participants in the essentials of responsible citizenship.

If the Feast is to be properly experienced, beyond an understanding of the concept must also be the preparation of it and the preparation for it. Although the Local Spiritual Assembly is administratively responsible for the conduct of the Feast, it often calls upon an individual or a group of individuals to make preparations—a practice which is consonant with the spirit of hospitality so vital to the occasion. Such individuals can act as hosts and are sometimes concerned with the selection of the prayers and readings for the devotional portion; they may also attend to the social portion. In small communities the aspect of personal hospitality is easy to carry out, but in large communities the Local Spiritual Assembly, while retaining the concept of hospitality, may find it necessary to devise other measures.

Important aspects of the preparation of the Feast include the proper selection of readings, the assignment, in advance, of good readers, and a sense of decorum both in the presentation and the reception of the devotional programme. Attention to the environment in which the Feast is to be held, whether indoors or outdoors, greatly influences the experience. Cleanliness, arrangement of the space in practical and decorative ways—all play a significant part. Punctuality is also a measure of good preparation.

To a very large extent, the success of the Feast depends on the quality of the preparation and participation of the individual. The beloved Master offers the following advice: "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 enamoured 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 ardours of the spirit."

In absorbing such advice, it is illuminating indeed to view the Nineteen Day Feast in the context in which it was conceived. It is ordained in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* in these words: *"It hath been enjoined upon you once a month to offer hospitality, even should ye serve no more than water, for God hath willed to bind your hearts together, though it be through heavenly and earthly means combined."* It is clear, then, that the Feast is rooted in hospitality, with all its implications of friendliness, courtesy, service, generosity and conviviality. The very idea of hospitality as the sustaining spirit of so significant an institution introduces a revolutionary new attitude to the conduct of human affairs at all levels, an attitude which is critical to that world unity which the Central Figures of our Faith laboured so long and suffered so much cruelty to bring into being. It is in this divine festival that the foundation is laid for the realization of so unprecedented a reality.

That you may all attain the high mark set for the Feast as a "bringer of joy", the "groundwork of agreement and unity", "the key to affection and fellowship" will remain an object of our ardent supplications at the Holy Threshold.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
The Universal House of Justice

"The Nineteen Day Feast." In *The Compilation of Compilations: Prepared by the Universal House of Justice 1963-1990,* (Maryborough: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), vol. I, pp. 419-22.

ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures...*

1. all answers are valuable
2. all answers are valuable
3. c
4. administrative (or consultative)
5. a, e, and f
6. administrative (or consultative)
7. d, [see *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 2001-2022*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing, 2024), par. 132.10-132.12, pp. 267-68.]
8. true, [see *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 2001-2022*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing, 2024), par. 132.10-132.12, pp. 267-68.]
9. the Feast is for Bahá'ís only
10. all answers are valuable