

NINETEEN DAY FEAST

Quotes and Guidance



National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Czech Republic, 2024

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PRAYER FOR THE NINETEEN DAY FEAST

O God! Dispel all those elements which are the cause of discord, and prepare for us all those things which are the cause of unity and accord! O God! Descend upon us Heavenly Fragrance and change this gathering into a gathering of Heaven! Grant to us every benefit and every food. Prepare for us the Food of Love! Give us the Food of Knowledge! Bestow on us the Food of Heavenly Illumination!

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá)

SELECTED QUOTES ON THE NINETEEN DAY FEAST

FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ’U’LLÁH

1. Verily, it is enjoined upon you to offer a feast, once in every month, though only water be served; for God hath purposed to bind hearts together, albeit through both earthly and heavenly means.

(*Kitáb-i-Aqdas, The Most Holy Book, No. 57*)

FROM THE WRITINGS OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ

2. O ye true friends! Your letter hath been received and it brought great joy. God be praised, ye had made ready an entertainment and established the feast which is to be held every nineteen days. Whatsoever gathering is arranged with the utmost love, and where those who attend are turning their faces toward the Kingdom of God, and where the discourse is of the Teachings of God, and the effect of which is to cause those present to advance—that gathering is the Lord’s, and that festive table hath come down from heaven.

It is my hope that this feast will be given on one day out of every nineteen, for it bringeth you closer together; it is the very wellspring of unity and loving-kindness.

Ye observe to what a degree the world is in continual turmoil and conflict, and to what a pass its nations have now come. Perchance will the lovers of God succeed in upraising the banner of human unity, so that the one-colored tabernacle of the Kingdom of Heaven will cast its sheltering shadow over all the earth; that misunderstandings among the world’s peoples will vanish away; that all nations will mingle one with another, dealing with one another even as the lover with his beloved.

It is your duty to be exceedingly kind to every human being, and to wish him well; to work for the upliftment of society; to blow the breath of life into the dead; to act in accordance with the instructions of Bahá’u’lláh and walk His path—until ye change the world of man into the world of God.

(*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, No. 47*)

3. O ye loyal servants of the Ancient Beauty! In every cycle and dispensation, the feast hath been favored and loved, and the spreading of a table for the lovers of God hath been considered a praiseworthy act. This is especially the case today, in this dispensation beyond compare, this most generous of ages, when it is highly acclaimed, for it is truly accounted among such gatherings as are held to worship and glorify God. Here the holy verses, the heavenly odes and laudations are intoned, and the heart is quickened, and carried away from itself.

The primary intent is to kindle these stirrings of the spirit, but at the same time it follows quite naturally that those present should partake of food, so that the world of the body may mirror the spirit’s world, and flesh take on the qualities of soul; and just as the spiritual delights are here in profusion, so too the material delights.

Happy are ye to be observing this rule with all its mystic meanings, thus keeping the friends of God alert and heedful, and bringing them peace of mind, and joy.

(*Ibid., No. 48*)

4. Thy letter hath been received. Thou didst write of the Nineteen Day festivity, and this rejoiced my heart. These gatherings cause the divine table to descend from heaven, and draw down the confirmations of the All-Merciful. My hope is that the breathings of the Holy Spirit will be wafted over them, and that each one present shall, in great assemblies, with an eloquent tongue and a heart flooded with the love of God, set himself to acclaiming the rise of the Sun of Truth, the dawn of the Daystar that lighteth all the world.

(Ibid., No. 49)

5. You have asked as to the feast in every Bahá'í month. 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.

(Ibid., No. 50)

6. As to the Nineteen Day Feast, it rejoiceth mind and heart. 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.

(Ibid., No. 51)

7. ... deliver unto each of the friends a most wondrous Abhá greeting; cleave unto that which is the cause of enkindlement and attraction, and hold the Nineteen-Day Feast.

(Additional Tablets, Extracts and Talks)

8. ... Rest you assured that ... I am with you heart and soul at every meeting; be sure of this. Hold you the Nineteen Day Feasts with utmost dignity.

(Bahá'í Meetings, A Compilation, No. 19)

9. Ye have written of the Nineteen Day festivities. 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.

(From a Tablet to an individual believer)

10. The Nineteen Day Feast was inaugurated by the Báb and ratified by Bahá'u'lláh, in His holy book, the Aqdas, so that people may gather together and outwardly show fellowship and love, that the divine mysteries may be disclosed. The object is concord, that through this fellowship hearts may become perfectly united, and reciprocity and mutual helpfulness be established. ...

In brief, 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 center 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. ...

It is my hope that the Nineteen Day Feast may become firmly established and organized so that the holy realities which are behind this meeting may leave behind all prejudices and conflict, and make their hearts as a treasury of love. Even if there is the slightest feeling between certain souls – a lack of love – it must be made to entirely disappear. There must be the utmost translucency and purity of intention.

They must enjoy the love of God, acquire the power for the promotion of the happiness of mankind and the Word of God. With such high mention must this Feast become an established institution. When they gather in this meeting, all those present must turn their faces toward the Kingdom of Abhá, and from their hearts supplicate, invoke and entreat toward the lofty throne, beg of God's forgiveness for all shortcomings, read the teachings and arise to His service.

Then spread the feast and give refreshments. Assuredly great results will be the outcome of such meetings. Material and spiritual benefits will be assured. All who are present will be intoxicated with the breezes of the Love of God, and the Breath of the Holy Spirit will with tremendous power inspire the hearts.

If this meeting be established on such a rock, it will become a power which will attract heavenly confirmations, be the means of the appearance of the Light of God, and the reality of every subject will become unfolded. Such a meeting will be under the protection of God. It is my hope that you will continually hold these meetings and that each time it will become more and more the center of all the virtues, the point for the effulgence of God.

May your hearts be enlightened!

May your faces become radiant!

May your spirits be illumined!

May your thoughts find wider range of vision!

May your spiritual susceptibilities be increased!

May the realm of God surround you, and may your hearts become the treasury of heaven!

This is my hope.

(From a talk given at a Nineteen Day Feast in London, England, 29 December 1912)

11. You must continue to keep the Nineteen Day Feast. It is very important; it is very good. But when you present yourselves in the meetings, 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. ...

Each one of you must think how to make happy and pleased the other members of your Assembly, and each one must consider all those who are present as better and greater than himself, and each one must consider himself less than the rest. Know their station as high, and think of your own station as low. Should you act and live according to these behests, know verily, of a certainty, that that Feast is the Heavenly Food. That Supper is the 'Lord's Supper!' I am the Servant of that gathering.

(In *Star of the West*, Vol. IV, No. 7, p. 120)

12. Thou hast written ... concerning the Feast.

This Feast was established by His Highness the Báb, to occur once in nineteen days. Likewise, the Blessed Perfection (Bahá'u'lláh) hath commanded, encouraged and reiterated it.

Therefore, it hath the utmost importance. Undoubtedly you must give the greatest attention to its establishment and raise it to the highest point of importance, so that it may become continual and constant. The believers of God must assemble and associate with each other in the utmost love, joy and fragrance. They must conduct themselves (in these Feasts) with the greatest dignity and consideration, chant divine verses, peruse instructive articles, read the Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, encourage and inspire each other with love for the whole human race, invoke God with perfect joy and fragrance, sing the verses, glorifications and praises of the Self-subsistent Lord and deliver eloquent speeches. The owner of the house must personally serve the beloved ones. He must seek after the comfort of all and with the utmost humility he must show forth kindness to everyone. If the Feast is arranged in this manner and in the way mentioned, that supper is the 'Lord's supper,' for the result is the same result and the effect is the same effect.

(*Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 468-469)

FROM THE LETTERS OF SHOGLHI EFFENDI

13. They [Local Spiritual Assemblies] must undertake the arrangement of the regular meetings of the friends, the feasts and the anniversaries, as well as the special gatherings designed to serve and promote the social, intellectual and spiritual interests of their fellow-men.

(*Bahá'í Administration*, Part 2, Letter of 12 March 1923)

14. The Bahá'ís must learn to forget personalities and to overcome the desire—so natural in people—to take sides and fight about it. They must also learn to really make use of the great principle of consultation. There is a time set aside at the Nineteen Day Feasts for the Community to express its views and make suggestions to its Assembly; the Assembly and the believers should look forward to this happy period of discussion, and neither fear it nor suppress it....

(On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, from a letter dated 30 June 1949 to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria)

15. The beloved Guardian has instructed me to write you concerning an action recently taken by your National Assembly, as published in your January-February Bahá'í News, that non-Bahá'ís may attend 19 Day Feasts if 'the earnestness of their interest in the Faith' is vouched for by a declared believer.

The Guardian wishes me to direct your attention to the fact that none of the institutions of the Faith nor its cardinal principles may be changed under any circumstances.

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.

Thus the Guardian feels you should rescind the action taken by your Assembly in opening the Feasts to 'near Bahá'ís,' as it is not consistent with the spirit of the administrative order for non-Bahá'ís or near Bahá'ís to attend the 19 Day Feasts, particularly the administrative portion of the Feast.

The Guardian realizes the spirit which animated you in making the suggested proposal, in order that the teaching work might go forward more aggressively; but he feels in the long run it would be detrimental to the Faith, and therefore should be rescinded as indicated above.

(On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, from a letter dated 28 May 1954 to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria)

16. As regards your question concerning the Nineteen Day Feasts: ... As to non-Bahá'ís attending: this should by all means be avoided, but if non-believers come to a Nineteen Day Feast, they should not be put out, as this might hurt their feelings.

(On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, from a letter dated 21 September 1946 to two believers)

17. The Naw-Ruz Feast should be held on March 21 before sunset and has nothing to do with the 19 Day Feast. The 19 Day Feast is administrative in function whereas the Naw-Ruz is our New Year, a Feast of hospitality and rejoicing.

(On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, from a letter dated 5 July 1950 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States)

18. Attendance at 19 Day Feasts is not obligatory, but highly desirable, and effort should be made by the friends not to deprive themselves of this spiritual and communal rallying point once in every Bahá'í month.

(On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, from a letter dated 23 December 1948 to an individual believer)

19. 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.

(On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, from a letter dated 2 October 1935 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the USA and Canada)

20. In regard to the Nineteen Day feasts, Shoghi Effendi is of the opinion that the believers should be impressed with the importance of attending these gatherings which, in addition to their spiritual significance, constitute 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.

(On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, from a letter dated 22 December 1934 to an individual believer)

FROM THE LETTERS OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

21. ...we feel that it will be helpful to you to know that songs whose words are the primary Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh or 'Abdu'l-Bahá are all quite fitting for the devotional portion of the Feast. Indeed, the Persian chants are such songs, out of a different tradition; they are a way of giving music to the holy Word, and each person who chants does it in a way which mirrors his feeling and expression of the Words he is uttering. As for songs whose words are poetic and the composition of persons other than the Figures of the Faith, these may be desirable but in their proper place....

(From a letter dated 22 February 1971 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

22. Apart from the direct access which one has to an Assembly, local or national, or to a Counselor or Auxiliary Board member, there are specific occasions for the airing of one's views in the community. The most frequent of these occasions for any Bahá'í is the Nineteen Day Feast which, "besides its social and spiritual aspects, fulfills 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." At the same time, Shoghi Effendi's advice, as conveyed by his secretary, goes on to stress the point 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."

(From a letter dated 29 December 1988 to the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the United States of America)

GUIDANCE ON THE NINETEEN DAY FEAST

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

27 August 1989

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.

“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 endowed 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 Center 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.

[...]

... 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. ...

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. ...

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 program. 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 enamored 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 ardors 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 labored 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,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

17 May 2009

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In its Ridván message of 2008, the Universal House of Justice referred to the widening impact of the dynamism flowing from the interactions between the three participants in the Five Year Plan. The celebration of the Nineteen Day Feast has not remained unaffected by this growing dynamism. ...

Over the course of the Plan, in response to questions that have been raised about the Nineteen Day Feast, the House of Justice has described how certain fundamental principles are to be applied within the context of a steadily expanding community that is embracing souls from all walks of life, from every background. Since its comments in this respect may well be of interest to all National Spiritual Assemblies, we have been asked to write to you as follows.

Decentralization of the Feast in urban centres

The decentralization of the Nineteen Day Feast in urban centres, where a significant percentage of humanity currently resides, is an inevitable consequence of the growth of the Faith ...

In this connection, we are requested to draw your attention to the 27 December 2005 message of the House of Justice which indicated that, as the process of growth continued to gather momentum worldwide, urban centres would need to be divided into progressively smaller areas, perhaps ultimately into neighbourhoods, as a means of facilitating planning and implementation. ...

[...]

Choice of language

As a general principle, the Nineteen Day Feast and other official Bahá'í gatherings should be conducted in the conventional language spoken by the people of the locality. However, ... when the Feast is decentralized, the question may well arise as to whether the programme can be conducted in the language spoken by the minority population most prevalent in a neighbourhood. At this stage, the House of Justice does not wish to lay down any hard and fast rules, and it is left to the discretion of the Local Spiritual Assembly concerned to decide, under the guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly, how to address the matter, approaching it with both flexibility and an attitude of learning.

Naturally, whether the Feast is held centrally or in several locations, a Local Assembly will want all the friends to feel that they are part of one unified community, irrespective of linguistic differences, and will take steps to ensure that an inviting atmosphere is created. To this end, selections from the Writings in the diverse languages spoken by the friends might well be included in the devotional programme of the Feast. Further, suitable ways should be found to inform believers not fluent in the language in which the Feast is conducted of the content of major messages and announcements. During consultations, they should be afforded an opportunity to express their views, in their own language if necessary. It should be feasible to offer any translation needed in a manner that does not interfere with the smooth running of the meeting.

Attendance of those who are not Bahá'ís

The Nineteen Day Feast is an institution of the Cause, which serves, in part, as a means for the Bahá'í community to address its affairs in a full and frank manner, without fear of creating misunderstandings among

those unfamiliar with its purpose. It is for this reason that participation is limited to members of the Bahá'í community.

In general, the believers are discouraged from inviting those who are not Bahá'ís to the commemoration of the Feast. However, friends of the Faith do sometimes appear unexpectedly, and they are not to be turned away. Courtesy and the spirit of fellowship require that they be warmly received. In this light, unanticipated visitors, who were by and large infrequent in the past, have been welcome to join the devotional and social portions of the Feast, but either they were asked to absent themselves during the administrative portion or that segment of the programme would be eliminated entirely.

Now, with the Plan's framework for action well established in so many places, growing numbers enjoy ready access to Bahá'í community life through the core activities, and there is greatly increased likelihood that those who are close to the Faith will learn about the Nineteen Day Feast and appear at its celebration. The House of Justice has decided that, in such instances, rather than eliminating the administrative portion completely or asking the visitors to withdraw, those conducting the programme can modify this part of the Feast to accommodate the guests. The sharing of local and national news and information about social events, as well as consultation on topics of general interest, such as the teaching work, service projects, the Fund, and so on, can take place as usual, while discussion of sensitive or problematic issues related to these or other topics can be set aside for another time when the friends can express themselves freely without being inhibited by the presence of visitors.

A similar approach to the administrative portion may be adopted when the Feast is celebrated in the home of a family with some members who are not Bahá'ís. As part of planning these occasions, careful thought must be given, on the one hand, to the requisites of hospitality and love, and, on the other, to those of confidentiality and unfettered discussion on important and sensitive subjects. The Local Assembly, in consultation with the believers who have such relatives, should endeavour to find a satisfactory way to resolve each situation that arises.

Accumulating experience

The continued expansion of the Bahá'í community in the years to come will surely give rise to a range of challenges that will affect how the devotional, administrative, and social aspects of the Nineteen Day Feast are conducted in diverse localities. Responsibility for addressing these challenges will fall, in the first instance, on Local Spiritual Assemblies. Theirs is the duty to remain alert to conditions in their communities, to consult with the friends, to respond thoughtfully to a multiplicity of needs and circumstances, and to remain flexible without compromising fundamental principles. In this connection, they would naturally seek advice from the Auxiliary Board members. National Spiritual Assemblies will, in collaboration with the Counsellors, follow developments closely, familiarize themselves with approaches taken in different localities, facilitate learning to determine which approaches prove most effective over time, and offer guidance and encouragement.

We are to assure you of the supplications of the Universal House of Justice in the Holy Shrines that the Blessed Beauty may confirm your ongoing efforts to guide the friends in discharging their vital responsibilities to promote the Cause of God throughout the world.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat