

# Nationalism Workshop

## Overview

The workshop takes the form of Baha'i quotes on the topic, some dictionary definitions, a note to the questions, and some questions. It is suggested you read together and explore ideas raised by the quotes (you'll probably only get a certain way in) and then turn to the questions at a time that ensures you have enough time to do them. You'll want a quick preplan at the start of the meeting of how long you spend on each task so you don't overrun.

## Quotes from the Central Figures and Institutions

*These quotes are mostly from the House of Justice and Shoghi Effendi, but also include two useful quotes from the US NSA.*

1. The desperate search for solutions to the social and economic problems afflicting these countries is tempting people, in increasing numbers, to indulge in partisan political activities; the indigenous Bahá'ís should refuse to be drawn into such divisive pursuits.  
*The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 153, 1996 – Australia, the Cook Islands...*
2. It is often through our misguided feeling that we can somehow aid our fellows better by some activity outside the Faith, that Bahá'ís are led to indulge in politics. This is a dangerous delusion.  
*Shoghi Effendi, Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 31-32*
3. In such controversies they should assign no blame, take no side, further no design, and identify themselves with no system prejudicial to the best interests of that world-wide-Fellowship which it is their aim to guard and foster.  
*Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 448*
4. The Guardian wishes me to draw the attention of the friends through you that they should be very careful in their public utterances not to mention any political figures - either side with them or denounce them. This is the first fact to bear in mind. Otherwise they will involve the friends in political matters, which is infinitely dangerous for the Cause.  
*Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 441*
5. Let them refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their prospective nations, with the politics of their governments and the schemes and programs of parties and factions.  
*Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 448*
6. Active support of an individual who has announced his candidacy for political office is not permissible to Bahá'ís.  
*Universal House of Justice, May 25, 1992*
7. Bahá'ís do not seek political power. They will not accept political posts in their respective governments, whatever the particular system in place, though they will take up positions which they deem to be purely administrative in nature. They will not affiliate themselves with political parties, become entangled in partisan issues, or participate in programmes tied to the divisive agendas of any group or faction.  
*Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá'ís of Iran, 2 March 2013*
8. Let them beware lest they allow themselves to become the tools of unscrupulous politicians, or to be entrapped by the treacherous devices of the plotters and the perfidious among their countrymen.  
*Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 448*
9. Bahá'ís will not be party to any instigation to overthrow a government. Nor will they interfere in political relations between the governments of different nations. This does not mean that they are naive about political processes in the world today and make no distinction between just and tyrannical rule.  
*Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá'ís of Iran, 2 March 2013*
10. Bahá'ís vote in civil elections, as long as they do not have to identify themselves with any party in order to do so.  
*Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá'ís of Iran, 2 March 2013*
11. The candidate for whom a Bahá'í votes remains a strictly private matter.  
*National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, To the American Bahá'í community, September 14, 2012*
12. It is their duty to strive to distinguish, as clearly as they possibly can, and if needed with the aid of their elected representative, such posts and functions as are either diplomatic or political from those that are purely administrative in character, and which under no circumstances are affected by the changes and chances that political activities and party government, in every land, must necessarily involve.  
*Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 448*
13. Except to speak well of them, make thou no mention of the earth's kings, and the worldly governments thereof.  
*'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'Selections From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 92-93*
14. At the same time, Bahá'ís respect those who, out of a sincere desire to serve their countries, choose to pursue political aspirations or to engage in political activity.  
*Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá'ís of Iran, 2 March 2013*
15. Let them rise above all particularism and partisanship, above the vain disputes, the petty calculations, transient passions that agitate the face, and engage the intention, of a challenging world.  
*Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 448*
16. Notwithstanding the guidance above, the friends are encouraged to engage in public discourse on issues of general concern to society, many of which are also addressed by political candidates. Our contributions should be based on Bahá'í principles rather than partisan viewpoints. Material related to issues as varied as global climate change, race unity, the advancement of women, and global prosperity, produced under the guidance of the Universal House

of Justice and various National Spiritual Assemblies, is readily available to assist the friends in such discussions.

*National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, To the American Bahá'í community, September 14, 2012*

17. [We] should strive to acquire a more profound insight into the nature of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, which offers a pattern for a future society distinguished by justice and unity, far removed from the contention of competing political interests.

*The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 153, 1996 – Australia, the Cook Islands...*

18. Let them affirm their unyielding determination to stand, firmly and unreservedly, for the way of Bahá'u'lláh, to avoid the entanglements and bickerings inseparable from the pursuits of the politician, and to become worthy agencies of that divine policy which incarnates God's immutable Purpose for all men.

*Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 448*

19. The world situation is so confused and moral issues which were once clear have become so mixed up with selfish and battling factions, that the best way Bahá'ís can serve the highest interests of their country and the cause of true salvation for the world, is to sacrifice their political pursuits and affiliations and wholeheartedly and fully support the divine system of Bahá'u'lláh.

*Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 444*

20. We must build up our Bahá'í system, and leave the faulty systems of the world to go their own way. We cannot change them through becoming involved in them; on the contrary they will destroy us.

*Shoghi Effendi, Wellspring of Guidance, p. 134-135*

21. The approach adopted by the Bahá'í community of non-involvement in such activity is not intended as a statement expressing some fundamental objection to politics in its true sense; indeed, humanity organizes itself through its political affairs.

*Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá'ís of Iran, 2 March 2013*

22. In this connection, they view government as a system for maintaining the welfare and orderly progress of a society, and they undertake, one and all, to observe the laws of the land in which they reside, without allowing their inner religious beliefs to be violated.

*Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá'ís of Iran, 2 March 2013*

23. What we Bahá'ís must face is the fact that society is disintegrating so rapidly that moral issues which were clear a half century ago are now hopelessly confused and, what is more, thoroughly mixed up with battling political interests. That is why Bahá'ís must turn all their forces into the channel of building up the Bahá'í Cause and its administration.

*Shoghi Effendi, Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 31-32*

24. Even if the person is not attached to a political party, the very fact of promoting his candidacy over that of

other competitors is an act of partisanship, which is inimical to the principles of the Faith.

*Universal House of Justice, May 25, 1992*

25. If the institutions of the Faith, God forbid, became involved in politics, the Bahá'ís would find themselves arousing antagonism instead of love. If they took one stand in one country, they would be bound to change the views of the people in other countries about the aims and purposes of the Faith.

*Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 444*

26. They can neither change nor help the world in any other way at present. If they become involved in the issues the governments of the world are struggling over, they will be lost. But if they build up the Bahá'í pattern they can offer it as a remedy when all else has failed.

*Shoghi Effendi, Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 31-32*

27. What else could these weighty words signify if they did not point to the inevitable curtailment of unfettered national sovereignty as an indispensable preliminary to the formation of the future Commonwealth of all the nations of the world? Some form of a world super-state must needs be evolved, in whose favor all the nations of the world will have willingly ceded every claim to make war, certain rights to impose taxation and all rights to maintain armaments, except for purposes of maintaining internal order within their respective dominions. Such a state will have to include within its orbit an international executive adequate to enforce supreme and unchallengeable authority on every recalcitrant member of the commonwealth; a world parliament whose members shall be elected by the people in their respective countries and whose election shall be confirmed by their respective governments; and a supreme tribunal whose judgment will have a binding effect even in such cases where the parties concerned did not voluntarily agree to submit their case to its consideration. A world community in which all economic barriers will have been permanently demolished and the interdependence of Capital and Labor definitely recognized; in which the clamor of religious fanaticism and strife will have been forever stilled; in which the flame of racial animosity will have been finally extinguished; in which a single code of international law—the product of the considered judgment of the world's federated representatives—shall have as its sanction the instant and coercive intervention of the combined forces of the federated units; and finally a world community in which the fury of a capricious and militant nationalism will have been transmuted into an abiding consciousness of world citizenship—such indeed, appears, in its broadest outline, the Order anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh, an Order that shall come to be regarded as the fairest fruit of a slowly maturing age.

*Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p.40*

28. The question of independence for Scotland is plainly a political issue, and Bahá'ís should refrain from

discussing the matter, especially within the Bahá'í community. Believers are, of course, entirely free to decide for themselves whether to participate in the referendum and how to vote, taking care that their doing so does not lead to an impression of aligning with a partisan perspective. ... their abstaining from taking sides on the issue of Scottish independence should not be interpreted as Bahá'ís being uninterested in the affairs of their society. Rather, their approach to the advancement of society is derived from the teachings enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, at the heart of which is the cardinal principle of the oneness of humankind.

*From a letter dated 16 July 2013 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom*

29. We believe that, in the future, when the Bahá'í spirit has permeated the world and profoundly changed society, music will be affected by it; but there is no such thing as Bahá'í music. All it says in the teachings about music is that it can influence the heart and soul of man very deeply, and have an extremely uplifting effect.

*3 February 1952, to an individual.*

30. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.

*Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings 117*

## Dictionary Definitions

### Nationalism

1. spirit or aspirations common to the whole of a nation.
2. devotion and loyalty to one's own country; patriotism.
3. excessive patriotism; chauvinism.
4. the desire for national advancement or political independence.
5. the policy or doctrine of asserting the interests of one's own nation viewed as separate from the interests of other nations or the common interests of all nations.
6. an idiom or trait peculiar to a nation.
7. a movement, as in the arts, based upon the folk idioms, history, aspirations, etc., of a nation.

### Sovereignty

1. the quality or state of being sovereign, or of having supreme power or authority.
2. the status, dominion, power, or authority of a sovereign; royal rank or position; royalty.
3. supreme and independent power or authority in government as possessed or claimed by a state or community.
4. rightful status, independence, or prerogative.
5. a sovereign or independent state, community, or political unit.

## Note to the Workshop

Because the political form is the more infectious side of nationalism, most of the quotes have been about this, however in the questions below it is expected to take a much broader, wide-ranging view of nationalism.

## Useful Questions

1. Read, or listen to, the above *Quotes* from the Baha'i Writings and Institutions.
  - a. Whilst you read, underline any interesting points and pause where you need to reflect.
  - b. Summarise the quotations read.
2. What is *true* Politics ? [see #21]
3. What is *Partisan* Politics ? [see #1, 7, 15, 16, 24]
4. Describe the Baha'i system of Administration and how it provides an example to emulate. [see #26]
5. What is the individual Baha'i's involvement in Politics ? [see #7, 12]
6. What is *Nationalism* ? [see Dictionary definition]
7. What is *Sovereignty* ? [see Dictionary definition]
8. How do you encounter or read about Nationalism or Sovereignty in a typical year, and what varied kinds of are they ?
  - a. Suggest which of them are, on the whole, beneficial and detrimental ?
9. Regarding such Nationalism, what are the beneficial goals proponents are actually trying to aim at, and the detrimental effects of the methods used: how could these deeper goals be achieved using a Baha'i approach without the shortcomings?
10. When people try to engage us using some of the detrimental methods of Nationalism, via facebook, news, face-to-face discussion, what sort of action do we tend to take (with what outcome), and what action should we take ?
11. Discuss #27 in the light of these thoughts.
12. In the light of this discussion expand on how the arts, language and culture play a role in the questions surrounding Nationalism.
13. Any other discussion.