

**The Nineteen
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Such an important event as the Nineteen Day Feast cannot be put together in haste. Through prayer and reflection, each believer must spiritually prepare himself or herself for the Feast, and during the event itself, everyone should participate with heart and mind, whether reading in the devotional part or merely listening to the passages being recited, whether giving reports, receiving guidance, or making suggestions, whether acting as the host or simply as one who partakes of hospitality with radiance and joy. In the same letter on the Nineteen Day Feast, the Universal House of Justice states:

“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.

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In the Bahá'í community, the believers meet often, among themselves and with others, for a variety of reasons: to pray, to study the Faith, to teach the Faith, to celebrate special occasions, to consult on community affairs, to create plans and projects, to implement their plans and to consult about what they have learned from their united actions and how they can improve them. And, of course, sometimes Bahá'ís meet just to be together in love and harmony, to enjoy the good company of one another. What is important to remember at all times is that Bahá'í meetings are spiritual in their essence and therefore endowed with spiritual potency. Bahá'u'lláh says:

“By My life and My Cause! Round about whatever dwelling the friends of God may enter, and from which their cry shall rise as they praise and glorify the Lord, shall circle the souls of true believers and all the favored angels.”

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‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

“Every meeting which is organized for the purpose of unity and concord will be conducive to changing strangers into friends, enemies into associates, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá will be present in his heart and soul with that meeting.”

To hold such spiritual meetings, no matter how small, brings untold blessings to the homes of Bahá’ís. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá once wrote to a believer:

“We hear that thou hast in mind to embellish thy house from time to time with a meeting of Bahá’ís where some among them will engage in glorifying the All-Glorious Lord...Know that shouldst thou bring this about, that house of earth will become a house of heaven, and that fabric of stone a congress of the spirit.”

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The Nineteen Day Feast is a unique feature of the Administrative Order of the Faith. It brings together the devotional, administrative and social aspects of community life. All these aspects should be equally emphasized, for the success of the Feast depends on the right balance among these three components. In a message written in August 1989 to the followers of Bahá’u’lláh throughout the world the Universal House of Justice states:

“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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During the administrative part of the Feast, the friends hear reports of the activities of Bahá'í communities near and far, consult upon the affairs of the Faith in their own community and reflect on its progress, become familiar with the guidance received from the Universal House of Justice, and make suggestions to the Local Assembly to be considered by it or to be passed on to the National Spiritual Assembly and, if necessary, even to the House of Justice. The consultations at the Nineteen Day Feast are of the utmost importance, for it is by this means that every individual believer participates in the affairs of the worldwide Bahá'í community.

As to the social part of the Feast, this is time for comradeship, hospitality, and love. Music can be played, uplifting talks be given, presentations be made by the children, in short, carefully selected expressions of culture which are dignified and joyful can be used to bring life to this part of the Feast.

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The reading of passages from the Bahá'í Writings in the gatherings of the friends is the source of utmost joy and is indispensable for the progress of the Cause. Bahá'u'lláh has enjoined upon us the following:

“It behooveth the friends in whatever land they be, to gather together in meetings, and therein to speak wisely and with eloquence, and to read the verses of God; for it is God’s Words that kindle love’s fire and set it ablaze.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has written:

“Hold meetings and read and chant the heavenly teachings, so that city may be illumined with the light of reality and that country become a veritable paradise by the strength of the Holy Spirit, for this cycle is the cycle of the Glorious Lord and the melody of oneness and solidarity of the world of mankind must reach the ears of the East and West.”

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The conversation of the friends in Bahá'í meetings must be focused entirely on spiritual matters and on the progress of the Cause. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has said:

“Today it behooveth one and all to forgo the mention of all else, and to disregard all things. . . . let them concentrate all their thoughts, all their words, on teaching the Cause of God and spreading the Faith of God, and inspiring all to characterize themselves with the characteristics of God; on loving mankind; on being pure and holy in all things, and spotless in their public and private life; on being upright and detached, and fervent, and afire.”

From among all Bahá'í meetings the Nineteen Day Feast, the gathering of the friends once every 19 days, has special significance. The Bahá'í calendar consists of 19 months of 19 days each, and Bahá'u'lláh Himself has enjoined upon all to observe this monthly meeting:

“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.”

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The Nineteen Day Feast consists of three parts. The first is the devotional part during which prayers are recited and passages from the Sacred Writings of the Faith are read. The second is the administrative part during which the friends consult on the affairs of the community. The third part is the material feast, the social meeting of the friends.

We get a glimpse of the importance of the devotional part of the Nineteen Day Feast from the following words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

“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.”

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