

Do Bahá'ís Have Clergy?

In the Bahá'í Faith there is no clergy. Tradition has taught the faithful followers of nearly all religions to leave significant spiritual decisions to religious leaders. Even in their relationship with God, some people look to priests as mediators for forgiveness. This long history of dependency has diminished people's curiosity and self-trust. The time has come for believers everywhere to become independent seekers, learners, and lovers of truth.

The Bahá'í community is directed by a unique democratic method based on spiritual principles such as purity of motives and love for justice and truth rather than personal concerns and interests. The functions of the clergy are carried out not only by individual Bahá'ís, but also by elected assemblies on the local and national levels. The Universal House of Justice, also an elected body, coordinates and directs the Bahá'í community on the international level.

In administering the affairs of the community, the institutions of the Bahá'í Faith practice a form of consultation that involves full and frank discussion of issues. Matters are discussed with a desire to find the facts and to come to a decision based

on spiritual principles, unhampered by personal attachment to points of view. The Bahá'í scriptures state: "The shining spark of truth comes forth only after the clash of differing opinions." While the goal of consultation is unanimous agreement, when unanimity cannot be reached, the majority prevails.¹

Wisdom is the greatest virtue. But how can we attain wisdom? The easiest and most practical way is to seek the views of others, to learn from the experiences of competent and impartial people.

Say: no man can attain his true station except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation.² Bahá'u'lláh

Man must consult in all things, for this will lead him to the depths of each problem and enable him to find the right solution.³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Those who have knowledge and wisdom should not feel superior to others. The path of knowing and loving God is paved with forbearance, love, goodwill, and humility; not with pride and self-glory:

Show forbearance and benevolence and love to one another. Should any one among you be incapable of grasping a certain truth, or be striving to comprehend it, show forth,

when conversing with him, a spirit of extreme kindness and goodwill. Help him to see and recognize the truth, without esteeming yourself to be, in the least, superior to him, or to be possessed of greater endowments.⁴ Bahá'u'lláh

Prophecies declare that "at the end of the age" everything will be made new. The Bahá'í social order is so new, it cannot be compared with any other order. Its success in fostering and protecting the unity and harmony of the Bahá'í community and moving it forward towards a glorious fulfillment, through the noblest means, presents evidence of its distinction and divine origin. The present Bahá'í community, which encompasses 120,000 centers, 17,000 local assemblies, and 175 national assemblies in over 200 countries and territories, offers a perfect model for the future world order, when all humanity acknowledges Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.

Bahá'u'lláh's New World Order, unparalleled in all history, offers one more evidence of His divine origin. As Machiavelli wrote, "It must be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to plan, more uncertain of success, nor more dangerous to manage, than the creation of a new order of things."

1. *The Bahá'í Faith and its World Community*, U.S. Bahá'í Office of Public Information, June 1992, p. 2.

2. *Lights of Guidance*, p. 176.

3. *Lights of Guidance*, p. 230.

4. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 8.



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