

In this workshop we'll be exploring some words from the Baha'i Faith and comparing concepts from Baha'i teachings to some of the findings and principles from the fields of psychology and sociology currently supported by the latest research.

To begin, here are a list of concepts we'll explore. Before we start investigating what these mean and what we can learn by applying these, take a few moments to explore what you already think about these concepts:

| From Psychology and Sociology | From Baha'i |
|--|--|
| Harsh startups | Exercise mildness and forbearance and calm |
| Conflict escalation versus de-escalation or defusing. | Their agitation was turned into peace, their doubt into certitude |
| A difference between complaints and criticisms. | each must use perfect liberty in stating his views and unveiling the proof of his demonstration. |
| Contempt (sarcasm, cynicism, mockery, hostile humor, sneering, name-calling, etc.) | Should any taunt and mock at you, meet him with love. |
| Defensiveness, shifting blame. | "offer them milk and honey in return" |
| Avoidance coping. | Spirit of frank and loving consultation. |
| Stonewalling, disengaging, estrangement. | Consultation, frank and unfettered, is the bedrock of this unique order. |
| Love as a motivational drive. | To be in love and charity with all men |
| Social cohesion. | All souls become as one soul, and all hearts as one heart. |
| Social Capital (bridging and bonding). | two souls that are closely attached in heart. |
| Intimacy. | no remnant of either love or hate may linger therein |
| Differentiation. | Show to alien souls the same loving kindness ye bestow upon your faithful friends. |
| Us-versus-them group identity. | be detached from all that is in heaven and on earth. |
| Confirmation bias. | |

Principles of Baha'i Faith that are most relevant to interpersonal relationships:

Consultation.

Frank and unfettered

Frank and loving

Unity.

Unity as a core value and goal.

Fundamental unity not in conflict with superficial disagreement or differences of opinion.

Love.

An animating purpose.

When absent, must be regained.

Removal of prejudice.

An awareness of human biases and tendencies to distort our perceptions.

Seeking a vision of God as a method to restore universal love and destroy prejudices.

Humility.

A perception of the fundamental equality of worth of all souls.

A sense that we *belong* to God, and *not* to our constructed social "self" or ego.

The opening of the *Book of Certitude* (Kitab-i-Iqan) by Baha'u'llah:

IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD, THE EXALTED, THE MOST HIGH.

No man shall attain the shores of the ocean of true understanding except he be detached from all that is in heaven and on earth. Sanctify your souls, O ye peoples of the world, that haply ye may attain that station which God hath destined for you and enter thus the tabernacle which, according to the dispensations of Providence, hath been raised in the firmament of the Bayan.

THE essence of these words is this: they that tread the path of faith, they that thirst for the wine of certitude, **must cleanse themselves of all that is earthly—their ears from idle talk, their minds from vain imaginings, their hearts from worldly affections, their eyes from that which perisheth.** They should put their trust in God, and, holding fast unto Him, follow in His way. Then will they be made worthy of the effulgent glories of the sun of divine knowledge and understanding, and become the recipients of a grace that is infinite and unseen, inasmuch as man can never hope to attain unto the knowledge of the All-Glorious, can never quaff from the stream of divine knowledge and wisdom, can never enter the abode of immortality, nor partake of the cup of divine nearness and favour, unless and until he ceases to regard the words and deeds of mortal men as a standard for the true understanding and recognition of God and His Prophets.

Consider the past. How many, both high and low, have, at all times, yearningly awaited the advent of the Manifestations of God in the sanctified persons of His chosen Ones. How often have they expected His coming, how frequently have they prayed that the breeze of divine mercy might blow, and the promised Beauty step forth from behind the veil of concealment, and be made manifest to all the world. And whensoever the portals of grace did open, and the clouds of divine bounty did rain upon mankind, and the light of the Unseen did shine above the horizon of celestial might, they all denied Him, and turned away from His face—the face of God Himself. Refer ye, to verify this truth, to that which hath been recorded in every sacred Book.

Ponder for a moment, and reflect upon that which hath been the cause of such denial on the part of those who have searched with such earnestness and longing. . . .

O ye lovers of this wronged one! Cleanse ye your eyes, so that ye behold no man as different from yourselves. See ye no strangers; rather see all men as friends, for love and unity come hard when ye fix your gaze on otherness. And in this new and wondrous age, the Holy Writings say that we must be at one with every people; that we must see neither harshness nor injustice, neither malevolence, nor hostility, nor hate, but rather turn our eyes toward the heaven of ancient glory. For each of the creatures is a sign of God, and it was by the grace of the Lord and His power that each did step into the world; therefore they are not strangers, but in the family; not aliens, but friends, and to be treated as such.

Wherefore must the loved ones of God associate in affectionate fellowship with stranger and friend alike, showing forth to all the utmost loving-kindness, disregarding the degree of their capacity, never asking whether they deserve to be loved. In every instance let the friends be considerate and infinitely kind. Let them never be defeated by the malice of the people, by their aggression and their hate, no matter how intense. If others hurl their darts against you, offer them milk and honey in return; if they poison your lives, sweeten their souls; if they injure you, teach them how to be comforted; if they inflict a wound upon you, be a balm to their sores; if they sting you, hold to their lips a refreshing cup.

O God, my God! These are Thy feeble servants; they are Thy loyal bondsmen and Thy handmaidens, who have bowed themselves down before Thine exalted Utterance and humbled themselves at Thy Threshold of light, and borne witness to Thy oneness through which the Sun hath been made to shine in midday splendour. They have listened to the summons Thou didst raise from out Thy hidden Realm, and with hearts quivering with love and rapture, they have responded to Thy call. . . .

'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, pages 24-25.

Act in accordance with the counsels of the Lord: that is, rise up in such wise, and with such qualities, as to endow the body of this world with a living soul, and to bring this young child, humanity, to the stage of adulthood. **So far as ye are able, ignite a candle of love in every meeting, and with tenderness rejoice and cheer ye every heart. Care for the stranger as for one of your own; show to alien souls the same loving kindness ye bestow upon your faithful friends. Should any come to blows with you, seek to be friends with him; should any stab you to the heart, be ye a healing salve unto his sores; should any taunt and mock at you, meet him with love. Should any heap his blame upon you, praise ye him; should he offer you a deadly poison, give him the choicest honey in exchange; and should he threaten your life, grant him a remedy that will heal him evermore. Should he be pain itself, be ye his medicine; should he be thorns, be ye his roses and sweet herbs.** Perchance such ways and words from you will make this darksome world turn bright at last; will make this dusty earth turn heavenly, this devilish prison place become a royal palace of the Lord--so that war and strife will pass and be no more, and love and trust will pitch their tents on the summits of the world. Such is the essence of God's admonitions; such in sum are the teachings for the Dispensation of Baha.

'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, page 35.

A perfect person, according to 'Abdu'l-Baha in his *Secret of Divine Civilization* (pages 35-42):

. . . The first attribute of perfection is learning and the cultural attainments of the mind, and this eminent station is achieved when the individual combines in himself a thorough knowledge of those complex and transcendental realities pertaining to God, of the fundamental truths of Qur'anic political and religious law, of the contents of the sacred Scriptures of other faiths, and of those regulations and procedures which would contribute to the progress and civilization of this distinguished country. He should in addition be informed as to the laws and principles, the customs, conditions and manners, and the material and moral virtues characterizing the statecraft of other nations, and should be well versed in all the useful branches of learning of the day, and study the historical records of bygone governments and peoples. . . .

. . . The second attribute of perfection is justice and impartiality. This means to have no regard for one's own personal benefits and selfish advantages, and to carry out the laws of God without the slightest concern for anything else. It means to see one's self as only one of the servants of God, the All-Possessing, and except for aspiring to spiritual distinction, never attempting to be singled out from the others. **It means to consider the welfare of the community as one's own. It means, in brief, to regard humanity as a single individual, and one's own self as a member of that corporeal form, and to know of a certainty that if pain or injury afflicts any member of that body, it must inevitably result in suffering for all the rest.**

The third requirement of perfection is to arise with complete sincerity and purity of purpose to educate the masses: to exert the utmost effort to instruct them in the various branches of learning and useful sciences, to encourage the development of modern progress, to widen the scope of commerce, industry and the arts, to further such measures as will increase the people's wealth. For the mass of the population is uninformed as to these vital agencies which would constitute an immediate remedy for society's chronic ills. . . .

. . . Other attributes of perfection are to fear God, **to love God by loving His servants, to exercise mildness and forbearance and calm, to be sincere, amenable, clement and compassionate;** to have resolution and courage, trustworthiness and energy, to strive and struggle, to be generous, loyal, without malice, to have zeal and a sense of honor, to be high-minded and magnanimous, and to have regard for the rights of others. Whoever is lacking in these excellent human qualities is defective. . . .

. . . But once having been honoured with God's supreme distinction, and having been vouchsafed His bountiful grace, they would, if they were able, have freely offered up ten thousand lives in His path! Nay, their blessed souls, contemptuous of the cage of their bodies, would yearn for deliverance. A single warrior of that host would face and fight a multitude! And yet, **how could they, but for the transformation wrought in their lives, be capable of manifesting such deeds which are contrary to the ways of men and incompatible with their worldly desires?**

It is evident that nothing short of this **mystic transformation** could cause such spirit and behaviour, so utterly unlike their previous habits and manners, to be made manifest in the world of being. **For their agitation was turned into peace, their doubt into certitude, their timidity**

into courage. Such is the potency of the Divine Elixir, which, swift as the twinkling of an eye, transmuteth the souls of men! . . .

--*Kitab-i-Iqan*, page 157

In this day, the gathering of a board for consultation is of great importance and a great necessity. For all, obedience to it is a necessity, especially because the members (of it) are the hands of the Cause.

So they (members) must confer and consult in such a way that neither disagreement nor abhorrence may occur. **When meeting for consultation, each must use perfect liberty in stating his views and unveiling the proof of his demonstration. If another contradicts him, he must not become excited because if there be no investigation or verification of questions and matters, the agreeable view will not be discovered neither understood. The brilliant light which comes from the collision of thoughts is the "lightener" of facts.**

If all views are in harmony at the end of a conference, it will be excellent; but if, God forbid! disagreement occurs, then the decision must be according to the greater number in harmony. If, after reaching the result, one or other of the members does not agree with it, neither of the other members nor any one must argue with or reproach him, but keep silence; then they will write to this Servant.

-- 'Abdu'l-Baha in *Baha'i World Faith*, page 406.

Whenever an illumined assembly of the friends of God is gathered, Abdu'l-Baha, although bodily absent, is yet present in spirit and in soul. I am always a traveller to America and am assuredly associating with spiritual and illumined friends. **Distance is annihilated and prevents not the close and intimate association of two souls that are closely attached in heart even though they may be in two different countries.** I am therefore thy close companion, attuned and in harmony with thy soul.

- 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha*, page 103

Let those who meet you know, without your proclaiming the fact, that you are indeed a Baha'i. Put into practice the Teaching of Baha'u'llah, that of kindness to all nations. **Do not be content with showing friendship in words alone, let your heart burn with loving kindness for all who may cross your path.**

Oh, you of the Western nations, be kind to those who come from the Eastern world to sojourn among you. Forget your conventionality when you speak with them; they are not accustomed to it. To Eastern peoples this demeanour seems cold, unfriendly. **Rather let your manner be sympathetic. Let it be seen that you are filled with universal love. When you meet a Persian or any other stranger, speak to him as to a friend; if he seems to be lonely try to help him, give him of your willing service; if he be sad console him, if poor succour him, if oppressed rescue him, if in misery comfort him.** In so doing you will manifest that not in words only, but in deed and in truth, you think of all men as your brothers.

What profit is there in agreeing that universal friendship is good, and talking of the solidarity of the human race as a grand ideal? Unless these thoughts are translated into the world of action, they are useless.

The wrong in the world continues to exist just because people talk only of their ideals, and do not strive to put them into practice. If actions took the place of words, the world's misery would very soon be changed into comfort.

- 'Abdu'l-Baha (words attributed to him by note-takers at a lecture he gave). *Paris Talks*, page 16.

I ask you all, each one of you, to follow well the light of truth, in the Holy Teachings, and God will strengthen you by His Holy Spirit so that you will be enabled to overcome the difficulties, **and to destroy the prejudices which cause separation and hatred amongst the people.** Let your hearts be filled with the great love of God, let it be felt by all; for every man is a servant of God, and all are entitled to a share of the Divine Bounty.

Especially to those whose thoughts are material and retrograde show the utmost love and patience, thereby winning them into the unity of fellowship by the radiance of your kindness.

- 'Abdu'l-Baha (words attributed to him by note-takers at a lecture he gave). *Paris Talks*, page 28

. . . The deplorable wars going on in these days are caused by the fanatical religious hatred of one people for another, or the prejudices of race or colour. Until all these barriers erected by prejudice are swept away, it is not possible for humanity to be at peace. For this reason Baha'u'llah has said, 'These Prejudices are destructive to mankind'.

Contemplate first the prejudice of religion: consider the nations of so-called religious people; if they were truly worshippers of God they would obey His law which forbids them to kill one another.

If priests of religion really adored the God of love and served the Divine Light, they would teach their people to keep the chief Commandment, 'To be in love and charity with all men'. But we find the contrary, for it is often the priests who encourage nations to fight. Religious hatred is ever the most cruel!

All religions teach that we should love one another; that we should seek out our own shortcomings before we presume to condemn the faults of others, that we must not consider ourselves superior to our neighbours! We must be careful not to exalt ourselves lest we be humiliated.

Who are we that we should judge? How shall we know who, in the sight of God, is the most upright man? God's thoughts are not like our thoughts! How many men who have seemed saint-like to their friends have fallen into the greatest humiliation. Think of Judas Iscariot; he began well, but remember his end! On the other hand, Paul, the Apostle, was in his early life an enemy of Christ, whilst later he became His most faithful servant. How then can we flatter ourselves and despise others?

Let us therefore be humble, without prejudices, preferring others' good to our own! **Let us never say, 'I am a believer but he is an infidel', 'I am near to God, whilst he is an outcast'.** We can never know what will be the final judgment! Therefore let us help all who are in need of any kind of assistance.

Let us teach the ignorant, and take care of the young child until he grows to maturity. When we find a person fallen into the depths of misery or sin we must be kind to him, take him by the hand, help him to regain his footing, his strength; we must guide him with love and tenderness, treat him as a friend not as an enemy.

We have no right to look upon any of our fellow-mortals as evil. . . .

- 'Abdu'l-Baha (words attributed to him by note-takers at a lecture he gave). *Paris Talks*, pages 147-149

O SON OF SPIRIT!

The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.

- *Hidden Words Arabic 2.* (Baha'u'llah)

In session 1 we covered some passages from the Bahá'í writings that described consultation, unity, love, removal of prejudice, and humility. In this second session we'll continue to refer to those ideas, but we'll focus more on some ideas from psychology and social work. These are ideas about what works and what doesn't work in interpersonal relationships. As we explore these, we'll ask questions about what answers or insights we can bring from the Bahá'í scriptures and sources.

Startups. Harsh startups and soft startups.

John Gottman writes: "Softening the startup is crucial to resolving conflicts because, my research finds, discussions invariably end on the same note they begin. That's why 96 percent of the time I can predict the fate of a conflict discussion in the first three minutes! If you start an argument harshly—meaning you attack. . . verbally—you'll end up with at least as much tension as you began." (page 161).

The key insight Gottman brings to us is that how we start a discussion or disagreement is profoundly important. If we are negative and accusatory, we're unlikely to solve a problem or get what we want.

Initial experiences, first impressions, the original tone of something—all these seem far more important than they should be. If we were purely rational or saintly beings it seems we should be able to overcome negativity and get back on track. But in actual practice, people rarely do, and rarely can. So, the way we start things is very important.

What do Baha'i teachings say about the way we ought to start things? What are the Baha'i teachings about how we can initiate conversations about things where we have disagreement? What spiritual principles are involved that would, if we applied them regularly, shape our startups?

Conflict escalation versus de-escalation or defusing.

When people are in disagreement, sometimes the disagreement becomes very high in conflict, and other times the differences are discussed far more dispassionately. Even when people are in passionate disagreement, with high levels of conflict, they can still be polite and kind to each other. The fact that there is a disagreement or conflict isn't as important as the *way* the conflict or disagreement are expressed. Some ways are more likely to resolve a situation, and can be experienced as satisfying and fruitful by people engaged in the process. Some ways are very unlikely to resolve a situation, and leave everyone feeling bad.

Control your voice. Most people do not. It takes a conscious effort to control one's voice. Be careful in your choice of words. Certain words are going to trigger hostility.

Focus on the issue, and keep statements about the current issue. It's fine to talk about feelings, thoughts, or behaviors, but these must be specific things that are directly related to the issue being discussed. Any slip into generalizations, or evaluations of people, are likely to escalate conflict.

Know what triggers your hostility, and notice what triggers hostility in the other person. Few people can think about what they are thinking and feeling. Most people, in most circumstances, say what comes to their mind, and feel the emotions that come over them without reflection about what they are feeling or what they are about to say.

Recognize whether there is comfortable and friendly conflict, or hostile and angry conflict. It's a good idea to stop a discussion or conversation when the conversation gets hostile and angry. One method to do this is to bring focus to the goal of the conversation. What are we trying to accomplish here? What result do we want?

Certain kinds of statements can cause embarrassment and humiliation. For example, statements of what someone should do, or what they ought to do, or what they must do, always carry a message that the person giving the advice or direction knows more than the person who is hearing the message. In some cases this is expected, as when a teacher or training coach tells a student what they must do. But in many forms of conversation between equals, the unlooked for advice or guidance given by a peer can be taken as condescending, insulting, and totally lacking in humility. Instead of giving unwanted advice or using directive language such as "you need to do something" it's better to ask a question. "What do you think would happen if you did such-and-such?" Or even, "it seems to me like doing such-and-such might help you, but I'm not sure, what do you think?"

Complaints and Criticism.

Complaints only address a specific issues, and that's okay. Criticism is more global, and adds on negative words about someone's character or personality. Criticism is toxic.

Contempt (sarcasm, cynicism, mockery, hostile humor, sneering, name-calling, etc.).

When people hear this in another person they may get flooded with emotions, and their thinking breaks down. People often become defensive, which moves the focus from some issue to some emotions and thoughts about the people involved in the conversation.

Defensiveness and shifting blame around.

You can often keep a discussion going in a healthier direction by avoiding getting defensive. Instead of shifting blame or laying blame, just repeat what people are saying, or make factual observations about the issues or circumstances. It's often useful to repeat the meaning or content of what someone has said so that they understand you have heard them.

Coping Strategies. Avoidance Coping.

We all have various ways of dealing with difficult issues or things that make us feel uncomfortable. Faced with threats, problems, issues, tasks, and feelings, we often find behaviors that help us cope with the situation. Avoidance coping is a way of removing ourselves from a problem. This can be a negative thing, when we ignore signs that indicate we need to make a change, or when we procrastinate. But sometimes avoidance can be healthy, as when we avoid dealing with a problem when we are feeling extremely upset, and wait until we have calmed down.

Differentiation.

Many psychologists suggest that problems in interpersonal relationships are likely when people are "enmeshed" or "co-dependent." These terms refer to a situation where people look to others for ideas about how they ought to feel. In such situations, people might only feel good if they feel other people approve of them. They may look to others for validation and love, and if they don't feel they are

Us-versus-them group identity.

Humans are social animals. According to evolutionary theory and evolutionary psychology, many of our tendencies and preferences are rooted in evolved brain structures that helped us survive for thousands of generations when we lived in small-to-medium clans or tribes of a few dozen to a few hundred people.

It seems likely that as people in different groups came into contact with each other, they would distinguish themselves from each other and consider the differences between groups. There would be advantages, especially for persons with power or prestige in one group, to spread the idea that their group was better than the other group. In fact, it has been demonstrated in psychology laboratory experiments that people are very much ready to see that people belong in groups or categories, and to then make generalizations or pre-judgments about those groups and categories and the people within them. It is also very easy for people to hold negative views of groups or categories to which they don't belong, and positive views of groups or categories to which they do belong. In other words, it seems humans have a weakness for falling into thinking about groups as either "us" or "them."

Studies of atrocities and genocidal wars show that a fundamental issue in all these cases is that the perpetrating group has defined the victim group as being less-than-human, a "dirty" or

“contaminating” out-group that must be destroyed in order to purify, liberate, or rescue the perpetrating group.

Military training in boot camp today helps train people to feel a profound bias in favor of their group (their nation, their branch of the military service, their squad or platoon), and a strong bias against the enemy, who are dehumanized as “the enemy” or “the bad guys” or “targets” in the language of military action. Before modern psychology and science was applied in helping to “program” military recruits, estimates are that well over half, and perhaps as many as three quarters of soldiers would not aim directly at enemy soldiers, or would simply not fire their guns.

In studies of group dynamics, scientists have found that having a “in-group” versus “out-group” mentality, where particular out-groups are used as examples of “how we don’t do things” and “otherness,” is associated with more order and regulation within the group. If you can contrast how “people like us” behave or believe versus how others do, then people in your group are more likely to conform to whatever rules, codes, and standards are part of your group.

Of course, any group, in order to convince people to join it or stay in it, must have some idea that it is a good group, and worthy of having people join it or remain loyal to it. And, naturally, in contrasting one’s favored groups (the groups to which one belongs) with those groups one doesn’t belong to, it makes sense to say to oneself that “my group is right for me, and it’s more right for me than other groups would be.” After all, if one thinks other groups are better than one’s own group, one might want to defect to those other groups. So, simply as a matter of logic, people will tend to favor their own groups, or think more highly of them.

When, if ever, can an “us-versus-them” bias be useful and good for people? If you can think of a case where this sort of bias is useful or good, what conditions can make it good or acceptable?

In relationships among a small group of friends, how can the us-versus-them mentality be harmful?

Confirmation Bias.

Psychology offers a key insight about how we perceive the world. Our mind forms models of how things are, and then as we look around us and experience life, we tend to accept whatever fits into our models, and we are far more likely to miss or discount any evidence that contradicts our models. Not only do we have these sorts of perceptual filters, we even go out of our way to find information that confirms what we believe.

One of the early studies of this was conducted by interviewing fans before and after a football game. People who supported one team saw a very different game from the supporters of the other team. It’s easy to see how this works in politics as well. Some people subscribe to *The Nation* and *The Progressive*, and they read liberal or radical blogs, and they listen to liberal or radical radio news (if they can find it). Other people subscribe to *The Weekly Standard* or *National Review*, and they read conservative blogs, and they listen to conservative radio or watch the Fox network news. If you talk to two people who represent these two extremes of approaches to learning about world events you will hear amazingly different accounts of the world. Some events will seem extremely significant to one person while the other person will seem unable to understand or recognize any significance in the same event.

In disagreements the confirmation bias usually works to make dialogue more difficult. When people feel ownership of a position, and feel they have invested some degree of their reputation or honor in a particular position, they are likely to develop a confirmation bias where anything

said in support of that position will sound especially reasonable and logical, while anything that would contradict or modify that position sounds ridiculous, wrong-headed, or foolish. Often this confirmation bias may be felt very slightly, so that a person has a subtle feeling of bias, and may not even be aware of it.

People who are not depressed usually have a confirmation bias in their own favor. This seems to be psychologically healthy. Healthy people usually seem to have a perceptual filter that helps them accept themselves and feel positively about themselves. This bias makes people more likely to think that their opinions and ideas are better, and the opinions and ideas that differ from theirs are not quite as good.

What teachings or practices in the Baha'i Faith recognize the confirmation bias?

What do we do in our inner work (prayer, meditation, study of the Writings) to help us control our confirmation bias?

What do you think we can do, or should do, to control or at least moderate (decrease) the power of our confirmation biases?

Think back to a time where you strongly disagreed with something, or consider a situation in the community now where you feel that someone is doing something that isn't right (you might simply feel people are doing something that is a waste of time, or they are doing something less efficiently than they could be doing). Do you see any confirmation bias in yourself when you compare your opinions about what is happening to the opinions of those who are, in your opinion, less right?

Two Baha'i Quotations:

While in Paris, 'Abdu'l-Baha is reported to have said: **In order to find truth we must give up our prejudices, our own small trivial notions; an open receptive mind is essential. If our chalice is full of self, there is no room in it for the water of life. The fact that we imagine ourselves to be right and everybody else wrong is the greatest of all obstacles in the path towards unity, and unity is necessary if we would reach truth, for truth is one.** (page 136 of *Paris Talks*):

'Abdu'l-Baha is reported by Joseph Hannen to have said in Chicago: **He who expresses an opinion should not voice it as correct and right but set it forth as a contribution to the consensus of opinion, for the light of reality becomes apparent when two opinions coincide. A spark is produced when flint and steel come together. Man should weigh his opinions with the utmost serenity, calmness and composure.** (page 72 of *Promulgation of Universal Peace*)