



Bahá'i Journal UK

Journal of the Bahá'í Community of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
October, 2001 / 158BE



Letters **1**

Letters to the Editor

I would like to make a few observations concerning feasts, in the hope of generating a discussion that will benefit us all. There is an ongoing consultation about making feasts more appealing for the young ones so that they will enjoy the feasts and look forward to coming again. Of course many of the salient points that are raised will also apply to adults, especially when they are new to the faith, but there is a special case to be made for young children.

I have heard about the good attendance in Iran and India and the warmth and loving companionship that is observed. In that context it was mentioned that children should be encouraged to sit with arms folded throughout the devotional. Bearing in mind that prayer is “conversation with God”¹ and that due reverence should be instilled in children from a young age, it would be wonderful if this could be part of their early training.

Obviously if music is woven into the programme in a tasteful manner then this would also be conducive to making the experience more memorable. However, the music should be chosen with care because certain renderings of the Writings may not go down well.

It is of course possible that there will evolve in time a style of music that will become generally acceptable. After all, Afro/American jazz evolved in part from gospel music and a desire to put spiritual feeling into religious worship. But not everybody likes jazz or gospel singing. Why? Too boisterous? Too different?

Christians generally have lost their legacy of chanting, but many former Christians fondly remember the hymn singing which enabled them to feel more involved in the act of worship. Perhaps the very act of singing the hymn together with the rest of the congregation gave a feeling of “togetherness”. In fact, many are still moved when they hear a rendering of a hymn that they loved. It is unlikely that we would ever be going down that road but we might learn from that and other cultural customs in trying to find a solution. We need to cultivate respect and reverence and connect this with joy and a sense of well being, similar perhaps to that experienced in meditation.

So what is the answer? Certainly more involvement, although we need to explore all possibilities if we wish to avoid the risk of alienating our young ones. If a period of reflection or meditation is of more value than seventy years of pious worship,² then perhaps an intense musical dedication to the praise of God may be of more value than forty minutes of readings! So what are we to do? Is it to be compromise, tolerance, flexibility or more music? Dare we even use the words tolerance or flexibility in relation to this subject? In any event, the object of this letter is mainly to stimulate some discussion and perhaps we can learn from each other’s experiences.

Ron Ford (Brighton & Hove)

1. Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era, p. 6

2. Kitáb-i-Iqán, p. 152

... have been scattered in hundreds of pounds worth of flowers, which soon withered and died. A lasting tribute to the deceased is surely a donation to the Fund in their name. I think it would be wonderful if we could throw off this custom of flowers for the dead and change our way of thinking.

If we tell the Finance Department that our contribution is to the memory of a particular person, and if we supply the name and address of the next of kin, then a card will be sent saying that we have made a donation in memory of their relative. I suspect that the deceased would be happy that their passing has helped the Fund. I know I would if it were me!

Barbara Smith

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Editor: Patrick Morrissey, e-mail: p.morrissey@ntlworld.com, fax: 0870 136 3730

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