

Prohibition on Drinking Alcohol

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CONTENTS

- I. Extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh
- II. Extracts from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá
- III. Extracts from Letters Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi
- IV. Extracts from Letters Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

I.

Extracts From The Writings Of Bahá'u'lláh

1. It is inadmissible that man, who hath been endowed with reason, should consume that which stealeth it away. Nay, rather it behooveth him to comport himself in a manner worthy of the human station, and not in accordance with the misdeeds of every heedless and wavering soul.¹

("Kitáb-i-Aqdas", Paragraph 119 (p. 62))

2. O Son of Dust!

Turn not away thine eyes from the matchless wine of the immortal Beloved, and open them not to foul and mortal dregs. Take from the hands of the divine Cupbearer the chalice of immortal life, that all wisdom may be thine, and that thou mayest hearken unto the mystic voice calling from the realm of the invisible. Cry aloud, ye that are of low aim! Wherefore have ye turned away from My holy and immortal wine unto evanescent water?

("The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh, Persian no. 62, rev. ed. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), pp. 43-44)

3. Fear ye God, O people of the earth, and think not that the wine We have mentioned in Our Tablet is the wine which men drink, and which causeth their intelligence to pass away, their human nature to be perverted, their light to be changed, and their purity to be soiled. Our intention is indeed that wine which intensifieth man's love for God, for His Chosen Ones and for His loved ones, and igniteth in the hearts the fire of God and love for Him, and glorification and praise of Him. So potent is this wine that a drop thereof will attract him who drinketh it to the court of His sanctity and nearness, and will enable him to attain the presence of God, the King, the Glorious, the Most Beauteous. It is a wine that blotteth out from the hearts of the true lovers all suggestions of limitation, establisheth the truth of the signs of His oneness and divine unity, and leadeth them to the Tabernacle of the Well-Beloved, in the presence of God, the Sovereign Lord, the Self-Subsisting, the All-Forgiving, the All-Generous. We meant by this Wine, the River of God, and His favour, the fountain of His living waters, and the Mystic Wine and its divine grace, even as it was revealed in the Qur'an, if ye are of those who understand. He said, and how true is His utterance: "A wine delectable to those who drink it."² And He had no purpose in this but the wine We have mentioned to you, O people of certitude!

¹ A newer translation of this passage has been substituted for the translation originally included.

² Qur'an 47:15

Beware lest ye exchange the Wine of God for your own wine, for it will stupefy your minds, and turn your faces away from the Countenance of God, the All-Glorious, the Peerless, the Inaccessible. Approach it not, for it hath been forbidden unto you by the behest of God, the Exalted, the Almighty.

(From a Tablet- translated from the Arabic)

4. The Mystic Wine of the one true God hath a different intoxication and imparteth another exhilaration. The one diminisheth the intelligence of man, the other increaseth it. The one leadeth to perdition, the other bestoweth life.

(From a Tablet - translated from the Persian)

5. Drink ye, O handmaidens of God, the Mystic Wine from the cup of My words. Cast away, then, from you that which your minds abhor, for it hath been forbidden unto you in His Tablets and His Scriptures. Beware lest ye barter away the River that is life indeed for that which the souls of the pure-hearted detest. Become ye intoxicated with the wine of the love of God, and not with that which deadeneth your minds, O ye that adore Him! Verily, it hath been forbidden unto every believer, whether man or woman. Thus hath the sun of My commandment shone forth above the horizon of My utterance, that the handmaidens who believe in Me may be illumined.

(Quoted in "The Advent of Divine Justice" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), p. 33)

II.

Extracts from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

6. The drinking of wine is, according to the text of the Most Holy Book, forbidden; for it is the cause of chronic diseases, weakeneth the nerves, and consumeth the mind.

(Quoted in "The Advent of Divine Justice", p. 33)

7. Regarding the use of liquor: According to the text of the Book of Aqdas, both light and strong drinks are prohibited. The reason for this prohibition is that alcohol leadeth the mind astray and causeth the weakening of the body. If alcohol were beneficial, it would have been brought into the world by the divine creation and not by the effort of man. Whatever is beneficial for man existeth in creation. Now it hath been proved and is established medically and scientifically that liquor is harmful.

As to the meaning of that which is written in the Tablets: "I have chosen for thee whatsoever is in the heaven and the earth", this signifieth those things which are in accordance with the divine purpose and not the things which are harmful.

For instance, one of the existing things is poison. Can we say that poison must be used as it hath been created by God? Nevertheless, intoxicating liquor, if prescribed by a physician for the patient and if its use is absolutely necessary, then it is permissible.

In brief, I hope that thou mayest become inebriated with the wine of the love of God, find eternal bliss and receive inexhaustible joy and happiness. All wine hath depression as an after-effect, except the wine of the Love of God.

(From a Tablet- translated from the Persian)

8. Intellect and the faculty of comprehension are God's gifts whereby man is distinguished from other animals. Will a wise man want to lose this Light in the darkness of intoxication? No, by God! This will not satisfy him! He will, rather, do that which will develop his powers of intelligence and understanding, and not increase his negligence, heedlessness and decline. This is an explicit text in the perspicuous Book, wherein God hath set forth every goodly virtue, and exposed every reprehensible act.

(From a Tablet- translated from the Arabic)

III.

Extracts from Letters Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

9. With regard to your first question on alcohol and drinking, Bahá'u'lláh, fully aware of the great misery that it brings about, prohibits it as He expressly states that everything that takes away the mind, or in other words makes one drunk, is forbidden....
(15 February 1926 to an individual believer)
10. The wine mentioned in the Tablets has undoubtedly a spiritual meaning for in the "Book of Aqdas" we are definitely forbidden to take not only wine, but everything that deranges the mind. In poetry as a whole wine is taken to have a different connotation than the ordinary intoxicating liquid. We see it thus used by the Persian poets such as Saadi and Umar Khayyam and Hafiz to mean that element which nears man to his divine beloved, which makes him forget his material self so as better to seek his spiritual desires. It is very necessary to tell the children what this wine means so that they may not confuse it with the ordinary wine.
(4 November 1926 to an individual believer)
11. With regard to the question you have raised in connection with the sale of alcoholic liquors by the friends: he wishes me to inform you that dealings with such liquors, in any form, are highly discouraged in the Cause. The believers should, therefore, consider it their spiritual obligation to refrain from undertaking any business enterprise that would involve them in the traffic of alcoholic drinks.
(6 November 1935 to a Local Spiritual Assembly)
12. Concerning the third question (sale of alcoholic drinks at Bahá'í-owned premises and restaurants), the beloved Guardian has asked me to point out that this practice is highly improper and reprehensible and would be tantamount to encouraging acts that are forbidden in the Faith. It is indeed the conscientious duty of every true Bahá'í to abandon such practices. However, should a Bahá'í owner rent his property without himself taking any part whatever in the business, or giving aid to the tenant, then he would incur no responsibility. Nevertheless, the landlord should resort to every possible means to rid his premises of the defilement of this degrading business; how far more injurious if he himself were engaged in such repugnant affairs.
(From a letter dated 6 November 1935 to a National Spiritual Assembly translated from the Persian)
13. Concerning your question with regard to the use of alcohol for rubbing: the believers can make any use of alcohol for any such treatments, provided they do not drink it, unless, of course, they are compelled to do so, under the advice of a competent and conscientious physician, who may have to prescribe it for the cure of some special ailment.
(25 July 1938 to an individual believer)
14. With reference to your question whether those foods which have been flavoured with alcoholic liquors such as brandy, rum, etc. should be classified under the same category as the intoxicating drinks, and consequently be avoided by the believers, the Guardian wishes all the friends to know that such foods, or beverages, are strictly prohibited.
(9 January 1939 to an individual believer)
15. The reason Bahá'u'lláh forbade drinking alcoholic beverages is because it is bad for the health, more particularly for the mind. Of course you can point this out to Mr.... and Mr.... and you can also pray that they will themselves feel the urge to give it up; but these are habits each individual should seek to surmount for his own good.
(17 February 1945 to an individual believer)
16. The degree to which the use of alcohol has spread in the world today is truly alarming; it is a great evil, and we Bahá'ís can see clearly why Bahá'u'lláh prohibits its being taken at all.
(23 February 1946 to an individual believer)
17. Any work that helps people to get over the terrible habit of drinking is excellent, and should be looked upon with sympathy and approval by the Bahá'ís. He thanks you for the Alcoholics

Anonymous pamphlet you enclosed and was pleased to see it.

(26 July 1946 to an individual believer)

18. He feels you should, in teaching, certainly not start with such a difficult point as abstinence from wine; but when the person wishes to join the Faith he must be told...

(7 April 1947 to two believers)

19. Of course no Bahá'í should drink, and if he persists in it and refuses to make an effort to overcome it, the Assembly must take action. But in these newly established centres one must be very patient lest the whole group go to pieces because of too strong or sudden action.

(19 July 1947 to an individual believer)

20. When we realize that Bahá'u'lláh says ... that drinking destroys the mind, and not to so much as approach it, we see how clear are our teachings on these subjects.

(30 September 1949 to an individual believer)

21. However, drinking is prohibited in the Book of Laws and, although the Guardian has not made this an immediate issue to be considered when people apply for membership, all Bahá'ís should not drink, and if they persist the Assembly should take action....

(7 August 1950 to an individual believer)

22. From your letter it would be assumed that some of your believers feel that the law of the "Aqdas" regarding the use of intoxicating liquors is a personal one, and may be followed or not followed, as the individual desires. This is not correct. The law of the "Aqdas" regarding not using intoxicating liquors is binding on all Bahá'ís. The Guardian does feel, however, that with new Bahá'ís, coming into the Faith, leniency should be exercised; but he feels that when a person is a Bahá'í for some time, his Bahá'í association and the spirit of the Teachings which he studies and endeavours to exemplify will bring about a change in the character, and the individual will stop drinking. However, old and firm Bahá'ís must apply the law of the non-use of alcoholic beverages.

(19 August 1952 to an individual believer)

23. The Assemblies must be wise and gentle in dealing with such cases, but at the same time must not tolerate a prolonged and flagrant disregard of the Bahá'í Teachings as regards alcohol.

(26 June 1956 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

24. As regards the questions you asked: Under no circumstances should Bahá'ís drink. It is so unambiguously forbidden in the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh that there is no excuse for them even touching it in the form of a toast, or in a burning plum pudding; in fact, in any way.

There is no reason why Bahá'ís may not serve some alcoholic refreshment to their guests, if they feel sincerely that this will further their teaching work. If they can obtain their objectives without doing so, it would be better; but we don't want to give people the impression that we are peculiar in every way.

(3 March 1957 to an individual believer)

IV.

Extracts from Letters written by the Universal House of Justice

25. As to those believers who continue to drink, they should be lovingly exhorted, then firmly warned and eventually deprived of their voting rights. The number of times a person is exhorted and warned is a matter left to the discretion of each Local Spiritual Assembly, in consultation with the National Spiritual Assembly. The policy you adopt should not be one of removing the administrative rights of the believers in a bureaucratic and automatic way, as this would be unwise

and unjust. Your Assembly as well as all Local Spiritual Assemblies should courageously and continuously remind the friends of their obligation in this respect, handle firmly all flagrant cases, and use such cases, in a way that by force of example, they exert their influence upon the other believers. It must be made clear to the Local Assemblies that they should be willing to cooperate with the believers affected by such drinking habits, when any such believer promises gradually and systematically to reduce his drinking with the objective in mind of entirely abandoning this habit.

We feel sure that your National Assembly will, with wisdom, loving kindness and determination succeed in uprooting this evil from your ranks and bring about the spiritual upliftment and advancement of the believers under your area of jurisdiction.

(12 November 1965 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

26. There are certain scientific purposes for which alcohol may be used, but we believe that a Bahá'í should not willingly submit himself to scientific experiments requiring him to drink alcoholic beverages.

(13 June 1966 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

27. Alcohol should not be served at any reception, either at home or in a public place, at which you are host... We believe you should not use the term "cocktail party". The designation of either "tea" or "reception" would be preferable.

(31 December 1967 to an individual believer)

28. ...it is clear that on all occasions officially sponsored by Bahá'í Institutions or where the host is acting as a representative of the Cause alcohol should not be served. In private homes or in the course of business or professional activity it is left to the conscience of Bahá'ís themselves whether they serve alcoholic drinks to non-Bahá'ís but the obligation is very strong to observe the prohibition enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh.

(8 February 1968 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

29. ...no Bahá'í institution should serve alcoholic drinks under any circumstances, and we also feel that it would be inappropriate for a Bahá'í to serve such beverages at a function given by him.

(19 December 1968 to two believers)

30. As to question number 6 concerning the sale of alcohol by a believer, as you state, obviously he should cease to deal in the sale of alcohol in his shop. However, as he is a new believer and was engaged in this business before becoming a Bahá'í, he should be given a reasonable opportunity to find another means whereby he can earn a living and should be given every assistance by the National Spiritual Assembly to do so.

He should be treated with patience and understanding, especially if he is making efforts to dispose of this business and to seek other employment. However, if after a reasonable time has elapsed and no effort has been made to comply with the Bahá'í law, then, as a last resort, the Assembly would have no alternative but to suspend his administrative rights.

(13 March 1974 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

31. We have found no texts prohibiting the friends from using flavoured extracts in their food. This may be a matter for later legislation by the Universal House of Justice but for the time being the friends should be left free to do as they choose. The same principle applies to those who are employed in factories manufacturing such extracts.

(7 April 1974 to an individual believer)

32. Flagrant violation by members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í requirement to abstain from intoxicating drinks will certainly have a debilitating effect on the national community, and these violations should be forcefully resisted through frank consultation of the matter by the Counsellors with the National Spiritual Assembly, so that in addition to admonishments, stern warnings be given to the member or members concerned, and sanctions imposed, if disregard of Bahá'í laws is continued.

(From a memorandum dated 10 February 1975 to the International Teaching Centre)

33. Such employments [Bahá'ís who are in the employment of non-Bahá'ís and whose employment involves the serving or selling of alcoholic beverages] cover a very wide range of degree of involvement, therefore it is left to the individual to decide whether or not he feels his employment violates the spirit of the Bahá'í law. In cases of doubt he can, of course, consult his Spiritual Assembly for advice.

We have found no explicit text or instruction of the beloved Guardian on such a situation [the sale of alcoholic beverages by a business in which a Bahá'í is a partner with non-Bahá'ís] and feel that it is one in which no hard and fast rules should be drawn at the present time.... We feel that this is a matter which needs to be decided in each case in the light of the spirit of the teachings and the circumstances of the case, and unless the situation is one which is endangering the good name of the Faith or is obviously a ruse on the part of a believer to evade the Bahá'í law, it should be left to the conscience of the believer concerned who should, of course, be informed of the Bahá'í teachings concerning alcohol and should make every effort to dissociate himself from such an activity.

The above [paragraph] concerns Bahá'ís who are already in partnerships dealing in such matters. It is, however, obvious that a Bahá'í who is not in such a situation should not enter into it.

(From a memorandum dated 15 January 1976 to the International Teaching Centre) Extract from Letter written on behalf of The Universal House of Justice)

34. The future christening of the ... child should present no problem, for the Bahá'í parent should have no objection to the baptism of his child if the Catholic mother wishes it. Similarly, the use of champagne upon that occasion is a matter which she is free to undertake, but of course the Bahá'ís would not partake of alcoholic beverages.

(7 December 1977 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

35. The House of Justice ... points out that, as far as advertising is concerned, the Bahá'í must use wisdom in deciding what is allowable and what is not. For example, while the issuing of an advertisement specifically for wines would seem to be inadmissible, there would be no objection to a Bahá'í advertising agent's issuing an advertisement listing the prices of goods on sale at a supermarket even if wines and spirits are included on it. It is, thus, a matter of emphasis and wisdom. Primarily the House of Justice wishes the decision in such matters to be left to the judgement of the individual concerned, but where there is any doubt, or where the National Spiritual Assembly feels that the good name of the Faith is being injured, the Assembly should, of course, be consulted and could decide in specific instances.

In view of the requirements of his conscience in light of Bahá'í law, a Bahá'í advertising agent might be well advised to include a clause in any contract he signs in which difficulties of this nature might arise, protecting his right to demur.

(20 December 1977 to an individual believer)

36. Concerning the questions you raise about [doing] illustrations for the wine company manual, the House of Justice feels this is for you to decide...

(18 January 1978 to an individual believer)

37. As to your questions concerning the serving of alcohol by Bahá'ís to their non-Bahá'í guests, the House of Justice feels that, because of the many differing circumstances relating to this subject, it does not wish to make any definite statements at the present time. It is obvious that Bahá'ís themselves must not drink alcohol and the rest, for the time being, must be left to their own consciences....

Concerning your enquiry about a Bahá'í keeping brandy in his home for emergency use on the advice of a doctor, the House of Justice feels there is no objection to this.

(2 March 1978 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

38. In the case of a believer who continues to take alcoholic drinks the Assembly should decide whether the offense is flagrant, and, if it is, should try to help him to understand the importance of obeying the Bahá'í law. If he does not respond he must be repeatedly warned and, if this is

Prohibition on Drinking Alcohol

unsuccessful, he is subject to loss of his voting rights. In the case of an alcoholic who is trying to overcome his weakness the Assembly must show especial patience, and may have to suggest professional counselling and assistance. If the offense is not flagrant, the Assembly need take no action at all.

(26 September 1978 to a National Spiritual Assembly)