

## From untied to united: the power of one

How can the diverse elements of society join together in a spirit of unity, and is unity a prerequisite for community building and development?



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### Questions/Discussion on Unity

**1. If someone said to you that there is one thing you can do that could dramatically change the state of the world today – and we know what the state of the world is right now, there are wars, there is terrorism, poverty, corruption, environmental issues, climate change, issues with refugees arising from these other problems – if there was one thing you could do that could fix all of these things, what might that one thing be?**

Consider: one thing you can do is to help create unity- at every level, starting with your own self - becoming a 'together person', and going through to creating unity in our families, our communities, our societies, our international community, through to a unity of the world... is this idea helpful to you?

## **2. Is this something you think we could achieve, or is it too idealistic?**

Or is it actually very idealistic to think that we can carry on as we are in the world - unable to work together or live together peacefully as a world community- and to think we can achieve any kind of success at all as humanity?

How might disunity in a family interfere with the functioning of that family? Thinking locally about your school community- to what extent does the functioning of your school rely on unity and cooperation among the pupils, teachers and other staff?

## **3. Is it our job to create unity?**

All attempts to create unity in the past have been limited, almost always excluding some 'others'. We don't have any models for world unity from the past that we can follow. To accomplish this creative world unity is a completely new thing and it's something we need to figure out together.

#### **4. What is unity?**

- Some definitions of unity: a state of being at one, of working together, joining together, working in collaboration
- Unity makes us stronger - it helps us survive. It is a solver of problems, but is more than this...
- Unity isn't doing the same thing, all the time, it isn't uniformity. Unity is where the diversity of each individual, the creativity of that individual is honored, is used, and is reflected in the whole.
- Unity means eliminating prejudice of every kind—racial, religious, socio-economic, anything that is a barrier between people.
- The whole purpose of having unity is that it's creative. It's a way to release the powers within us, it's a way to enable humanity to create a civilization that will blossom, that will nurture and use the talents of every person, of every community, of every people, of every country, of all of humanity, to add to the richness of a mix that we are only just beginning to understand, and see what we might achieve if we came together to stop hurting each other and instead worked collaboratively with each other...
- Unity means justice. We can only build unity and peace with justice and fairness. What does justice mean? How does the concept of justice fit into unity?

## **5. Is unity important for community development? Is it a pre-requisite for peace?**

‘The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.’<sup>1</sup>

Many people think that once we have peace we can work together in unity, but it could be the other way around! This quote from the Baha’i Faith suggests that we might need unity before we can have peace and that building unity and building peace are intertwined.

## **6. Is unity possible?**

The world is getting smaller. We have the Internet, mobile phones, international flights; these things have revolutionized the ways in which we can connect. We’re coming much closer together through the media, we know more about each other, most of us here care more about the welfare of people in other places in the world than ever before. We can see their faces, we can hear their voices, we can see immediately what’s happening to them - our heart aches for their challenges and we try to be of assistance to them. We know the problems they face. We know that they’re trying their best to solve their problems but without collaboration and international cooperation, it’s very difficult, if not impossible, for them to do this.

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<sup>1</sup> From the Writings of Baha’u’llah

If we think about the history of human society we can see how progressively we have been through the stages of the unity of the family, to unity of tribes, to cities, to larger communities. For the first time in history we have the possibility of coming together as one world. We now need to make that last step to creating a global community.



**“The earth is but one country  
and mankind its citizens”<sup>2</sup>**

## **7. How do we get there?**

How can we get to this concept - that at the heart of humanity we're actually one people? And how can we go from an understanding of this concept to making it a reality. How can we develop the tools to do this?

One of the tools is consultation. How can we make sure we listen effectively to everyone, even people we don't agree with, or who are different? What do we do with those who dissent, or don't agree with us, those who aren't on board? And how can we guarantee the human rights of everyone? How can we – all together- come to an agreement about our vision for our future and our purpose, and make a common effort to realize this vision?

Another tool is to create a few of the basic institutions that would enable us to function more effectively at the international level. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century was a striving to develop these institutions. After the First World War, though a simplistic model- the League of Nations was a first attempt to try to achieve this. After the Second World War the United Nations was another attempt. If only we could identify those elements we need to truly collaborate at the international level, in a way that allows the voice of every state, every people, every voice to be heard... We have made progress, we have achieved a lot. We have the basis of these institutions- we just need to go further...

## 8. Summary

We want to put together the elements of a civilization which is more creative, more aligned to developing those aspects of our spiritual selves on the one hand, and our creative selves on the other; those things that create civilization, that enable joy to appear in our world, within ourselves and our communities.

We are looking at the question of the power of one, of one people, of one planet, of people working together; not because this is something that is imposed on us, but because we ourselves feel it's important and can achieve it, that we have that power....

‘ So powerful is the light of Unity that it can illuminate the whole earth’<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> From the Writings of Baha'u'llah

## **Acknowledgements**

This discussion sheet, written in conversational style, is based on a talk given by Dr. Wendi Momen, MBE on October 25 2015 for the Cambridge University Festival of Ideas. The talk itself is based on ideas found in the writings of the Baha'i Faith as explored by Wendi. The event was organized by the Cambridge University Baha'i Society.

Dr Wendi Momen holds a PhD in International Relations from the London School of Economics where she is a Governor. She was awarded the MBE in 2014 for services to the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. She has been a magistrate since 1982 and is chair of the family lay judges. She is a founder of Advance, which promotes justice, education and empowerment for women; and Naserian, which empowers Maasai widows in Tanzania.