

Working Toward Oneness

These days the news seems particularly full of divisive attitudes and behavior generally un conducive to feelings of oneness or social cohesion. For sanity's sake, it's good to build some sort of mental framework around how to develop a form of collective decision-making in society, in politics and elsewhere, that would be more conducive to peaceful relations.

Bringing the sacred and the secular into alignment has been the historical task of religion. Bahá'ís use the expression, "walking the spiritual path with practical feet". But it's also walking the secular path with spiritual feet, i.e. basing our social mores on spiritual values.

There are a few basic principles that can make our collective decision-making process infinitely easier and more unifying, some backed by interesting new research. I've been trying to learn these "rules of consultation" since becoming a Bahá'í, and I can vouch for the fact that they're much easier said than done. But, when practiced, they can be quite effective.

Various degrees of bullying, overt and covert, are extremely common, in school, work, and politics. Yet psychologically safe environments – think kindness – cause teams to bond, resulting in better ideas. You may have learned a version of that in kindergarten, but it's now been confirmed by Google's research into the key behaviors of successful teams. (NY Times article [here](#).)

Being willing to change our minds or add a different viewpoint to our perspective, is also important. One of the goals of true listening is to incorporate other ideas into our own experience, and even to do a complete one-eighty, without apology, when warranted. It's important to be open-minded and as free of ego as possible. You can't go into successful decision-making sessions unwilling to budge.

Another key element of civil discourse is to neither give offense nor take offense. A dispassionate search for solutions and for truth is essential to successful group decision-making. Some (and I wish I were one) have mastered the art of dispassionate discourse, which requires considered rather than spontaneous speech. Calm discourse in times of difficulty doesn't make us heartless, it brings us together. The most eloquent and inspiring of our leaders have used it to great effect.

Truth may be many faceted, but it isn't multiple. That may be the most important thing to remember. If we haven't arrived at agreement, we probably haven't really listened – to each other and to the data.

"And the splendor of that light is in the hearts, yet it is hidden under the veilings of sense and the conditions of this earth, even as a candle within a lantern of iron... In like manner, when thou strippest the wrappings of illusion from off thine heart, the lights of oneness will be made manifest." (Bahá'u'lláh, [The Seven Valleys](#), The Valley of Unity)

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