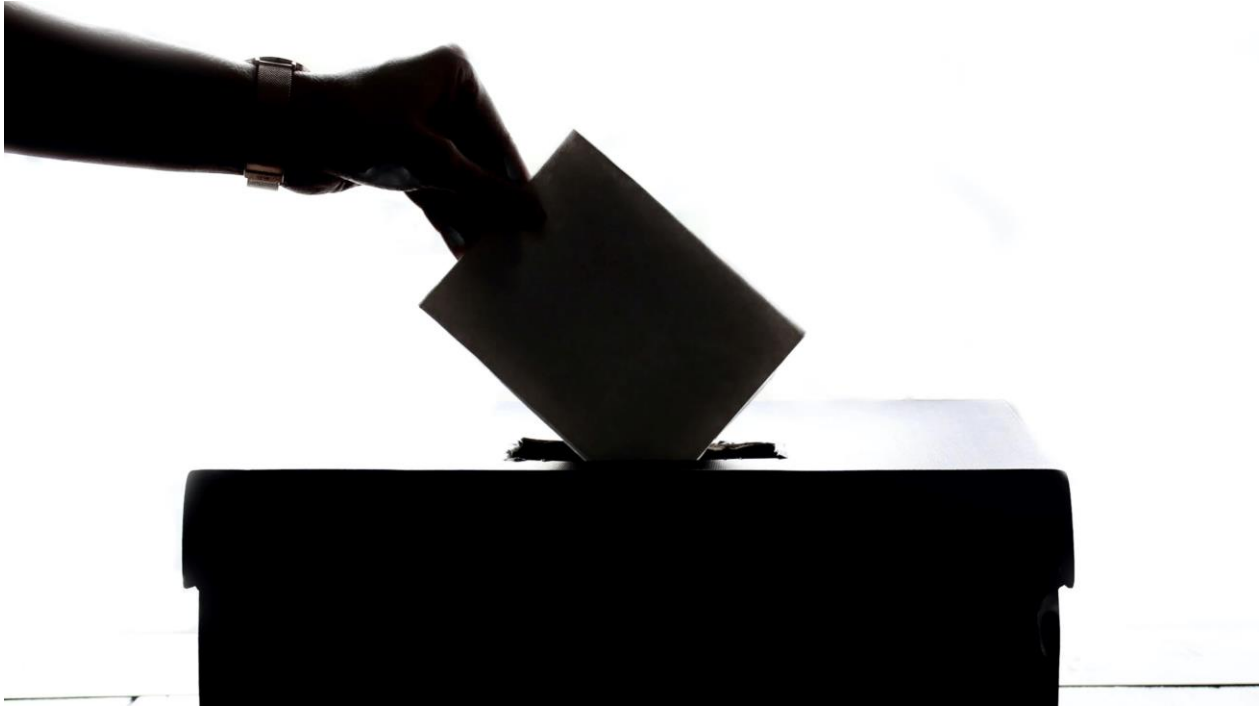


Guidance on referendums and civil elections

Reproduced from “Bahá’í Aotearoa”



It is up to the private conscience of each believer to decide how to vote in the general election and the referendums to be held soon. Quotations are provided here to assist in reflecting on the issues involved.

With a national election coming up, accompanied by two referendums, believers are thinking about the Bahá’í principles that should guide them in these matters. Below are some quotations which elucidate those principles.

The upcoming referendums are (1) the Cannabis Legalisation and Control Referendum and (2) the End of Life Choice Referendum.

The quotations below deal with four matters. First is the general principle of non-involvement in partisan politics. Second is guidance on voting in civil elections with a non-partisan approach. Third is principles relating to the End of Life Choice Referendum. Fourth is principles relating to the Cannabis Legalisation and Control Referendum.

As the referendums both involve a conscience vote, the National Assembly strongly recommends that the friends make this a private decision after their prayerful reflection on the quotations. It is best to not discuss the matter with others or on social media, since this will inevitably lead to differences of view amongst the believers, and has the potential to create discord and wrangling. Displaying a critical or judgemental attitude towards the views of others, within or beyond the Bahá’í community, would be unhelpful towards our most basic aim, that of building higher levels of unity.

Extracts relating to non-involvement in partisan politics generally

Conflict and contention are categorically forbidden in His Book. This is a decree of God in this Most Great Revelation. It is divinely preserved from annulment and is invested by Him with the splendor of His confirmation. Verily He is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

— Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*

The world stands more and more in need of the hope and the strength of spirit that faith imparts. Beloved friends, you have of course long been occupied with the work of nurturing within groups of souls precisely the attributes that are required at this time: unity and fellow feeling, knowledge and understanding, a spirit of collective worship and common endeavour.

— **Universal House of Justice, Naw Rúz 177 to the Bahá'ís of the World**

At a time when the urgency of attaining higher levels of unity, founded on the incontestable truth of humanity's oneness, is becoming apparent to larger and larger numbers, society stands in need of clear voices that can articulate the spiritual principles that underlie such an aspiration.

— **Universal House of Justice, 9 May 2020 to all National Spiritual Assemblies**

Bahá'ís and Bahá'í institutions should not take positions on the political decisions of governments, including disputes among governments of different nations; should refrain from becoming involved in debates surrounding any political controversy; and should not react, orally or otherwise, in a manner that could be taken as evidence of support for a partisan political stance. It is not for a Bahá'í, in offering social commentary, to vilify specific individuals, organizations, or governments or to make attacks on them. Indeed, the Guardian specifically cautioned the friends against referring to political figures in their public remarks, whether in criticism or support.

— **On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 27 April 2017 to an individual**

... in pursuing their aims, Bahá'ís cannot become embroiled in political controversies that would divide the Bahá'í community, dissipate its energies, and deflect it from its purpose to unify society. In attempting to determine what lines of action may be suitable in this regard, believers are advised to turn to their National Spiritual Assemblies.

— **On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 6 August 2020 to an individual**

It is not our purpose to impose Bahá'í teachings upon others by persuading the powers that be to enact laws enforcing Bahá'í principles, nor to join movements which have such legislation as their aim. The guidance that Bahá'í institutions offer to mankind does not comprise a series of specific answers to current problems, but rather the illumination of an entirely new way of life. Without this way of life the problems are insoluble; with it they will either not arise or, if they arise, can be resolved.

— **Universal House of Justice, 21 July 1968 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States**

While Bahá'ís hold specific beliefs about human identity, sexuality, personal morality, and individual and social transformation, they also believe that individuals must be free to investigate truth and should not be coerced. They are, therefore, enjoined to be tolerant of those whose views differ from their own, not to judge others according to their own standards, and not to attempt to impose these standards on society.

— **On behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 9 May 2014**

Although they affirm their conviction that Bahá'u'lláh's teachings reflect God's purpose for humankind in this Day, Bahá'ís do not seek to impose their values on others. They do not pass judgement on others on the basis of their own moral standards and can never presume to know the standing of any soul in the eyes of God. Rather, the friends are enjoined to show forth unconditional love, to engage in fellowship with all, and to be forbearing, concerned with their own shortcomings and not those of others.

— **On behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 22 April 2013**

On no subject are the Bahá'í teachings more emphatic than on the necessity to abstain from faultfinding and backbiting while being ever eager to discover and root out our own faults and overcome our own failings. If we profess loyalty to Bahá'u'lláh, to our Beloved Master and our dear Guardian, then we must show our love by obedience to these explicit teachings. Deeds not words are what they demand, and no

amount of fervour in the use of expressions of loyalty and adulation will compensate for failure to live in the spirit of the teachings.

— **On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 12 May 1925 to an individual believer**

The term “politics” can have a broad meaning, and therefore it is important to distinguish between partisan political activity and the discourse and action intended to bring about constructive social change. While the former is proscribed, the latter is enjoined; indeed, a central purpose of the Bahá’í community is social transformation. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s treatise *The Secret of Divine Civilization* amply demonstrates the Faith’s commitment to promoting social change without entering into the arena of partisan politics. So too, innumerable passages in the Bahá’í Writings encourage the believers to contribute to the betterment of the world. “Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in,” Bahá’u’lláh states, “and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.”

— **On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 23 December 2008 to an individual**

How striking that, amid the cacophony of fixed opinions and opposing interests that grows everywhere more fierce, you are focused on drawing people together to build communities that are havens of unity. Far from disheartening you, let the world’s prejudices and hostilities be reminders of how urgently souls all around you need the healing balm that you alone can present to them.

— **Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2016 to the Bahá’ís of the World**

Believers are free, indeed are encouraged, to study the Writings for themselves and to express their understanding of them. Such personal interpretations can be most illuminating, but all Bahá’ís, including the one expressing the view, however learned he may be, should realize that it is only a personal view and can never be upheld as a standard for others to accept, nor should contention ever be permitted to arise over differences in such opinions.

— **On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 27 August 1998 to an individual**

Extracts related to voting in civil elections

As regards the non-political character of the Faith,... The friends may vote, if they can do it, without identifying themselves with one party or another. To enter the arena of party politics is surely detrimental to the best interests of the Faith and will harm the Cause. It remains for the individuals to so use their right to vote as to keep aloof from party politics, and always bear in mind that they are voting on the merits of the individual, rather than because he belongs to one party or another. The matter must be made perfectly clear to the individuals, who will be left free to exercise their discretion and judgement.

— **On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, 16 March 1933**

The main principle, as you know, is that the friends should refrain from participating in any political election, unless they ascertain that in casting their vote for this or that candidate they are not affiliating themselves with any political party or organization, and are not identifying themselves with any political program. The whole question hinges on the matter of identification, and not on voting in itself.

The application of this principle the Guardian has left to the individuals who are conscientiously required to submit their own special cases in which they are doubtful to their assemblies for consideration and guidance.

— **On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 28 December 1936**

No Bahá’í vote for an officer, no Bahá’í participation in the affairs of the Republic, shall involve acceptance of a program or policy that contravenes any vital principle, spiritual or social, of the Faith. No

vote cast, or office undertaken, by a Bahá'í should necessarily constitute acceptance, by the voter or office holder, of the entire program of any political party. No Bahá'í can be regarded as either a Republican or Democrat, as such. He is above all else, the supporter of the principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, with which, I am firmly convinced, the program of no political party is completely harmonious.

— Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*

Regarding your question: The Guardian does not see how Bahá'í participation with other organizations and religious bodies in a non-political meeting to promote civic unity and welfare along some line can be considered political. Much as the friends must guard against in any way ever seeming to identify themselves or the Cause with any political party, they must also guard against the other extreme of never taking part with other progressive groups, in conferences or committees designed to promote some activity in entire accord with our teachings—such as, for instance, better race relations.

— On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 21 November 1948

Extracts relating to the End of Life Choice Referendum

As to the questions relating to euthanasia ... the House of Justice has asked us to share with you these two statements...

As to the Bahá'í viewpoint on the removal or withholding of life support in medical cases where intervention prolongs life in disabling illnesses, nothing has been found in the Sacred Text specifically on this matter. In such cases decisions must be left to those responsible, including the patient.

(From a letter dated 31st May 1979 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

We have received your letter of March 18, 1974 in which you ask for the Bahá'í viewpoint on euthanasia and on the removal of life support in medical cases where physiological interventions prolong life in disabling illnesses. In general our teachings indicate that God, the Giver of life, can alone dispose of it as He deems best, and we have found nothing in the Sacred Text on these matters specifically but in a letter to an individual written on behalf of the beloved Guardian by his secretary regarding mercy killings, or legalized euthanasia, it is stated:

...this is also a matter which the Universal House of Justice will have to legislate.

Until such time as the Universal House of Justice considers legislation on euthanasia, decisions in the matters to which you refer must be left to the consciences of those responsible.

(From a letter dated 17 May 1974 from the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Alaska)

— On behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the compiler of *Lights of Guidance*, 27 October 1981

It is too bad that young and promising men, who if they remain living can render great services to humanity, should take away their life at a moment of despair.

The world, especially in these days, is full of woes and sufferings. We should be brave and have a stout heart. Trials and tribulations should arouse in us added vigour and greater determination and not dampen our zeal and kill our spirit.

— On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 12 March 1933

As to your question concerning the meaning of physical suffering and its relation to mental and spiritual healing. Physical pain is a necessary accompaniment of all human existence, and as such is unavoidable. As long as there will be life on earth, there will be also suffering, in various forms and degrees. But suffering, although an inescapable reality, can nevertheless be utilised as a means for the attainment of

happiness. This is the interpretation given to it by all the prophets and saints who, in the midst of severe tests and trials, felt happy and joyous and experienced what is best and holiest in life. Suffering is both a reminder and a guide. It stimulates us better to adapt ourselves to our environmental conditions, and thus leads the way to self improvement. In every suffering one can find a meaning and a wisdom. But it is not always easy to find the secret of that wisdom. It is sometimes only when all our suffering has passed that we become aware of its usefulness. What man considers to be evil turns often to be a cause of infinite blessings. And this is due to his desire to know more than he can. God's wisdom is, indeed, inscrutable to us all, and it is no use pushing too far trying to discover that which shall always remain a mystery to our mind.

— On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 29 May 1935, *Unfolding Destiny*

There are three types of freedom. The first is divine freedom, which is one of the inherent attributes of the Creator for He is unconstrained in His will, and no one can force Him to change His decree in any matter whatsoever....

The second is the political freedom of Europeans, which leaves the individual free to do whatsoever he desires as long as his action does not harm his neighbour. This is natural freedom, and its greatest expression is seen in the animal world. Observe these birds and notice with what freedom they live. However much man may try, he can never be as free as an animal, because the existence of order acts as an impediment to freedom.

The third freedom is that which is born of obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Almighty. This is the freedom of the human world, where man severs his affections from all things. When he does so, he becomes immune to all hardship and sorrow. Wealth or material power will not deflect him from moderation and fairness, neither will poverty or need inhibit him from showing forth happiness and tranquillity. The more the conscience of man develops, the more will his heart be free and his soul attain unto happiness. In the religion of God, there is freedom of thought because God, alone, controls the human conscience, but this freedom should not go beyond courtesy. In the religion of God, there is no freedom of action outside the law of God. Man may not transgress this law, even though no harm is inflicted on one's neighbour. This is because the purpose of Divine law is the education of all — others as well as oneself — and, in the sight of God, the harm done to one individual or to his neighbour is the same and is reprehensible in both cases. Hearts must possess the fear of God. Man should endeavour to avoid that which is abhorrent unto God. Therefore, the freedom that the laws of Europe offer to the individual does not exist in the law of God. Freedom of thought should not transgress the bounds of courtesy, and actions, likewise, should be governed by the fear of God and the desire to seek His good pleasure.

— 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in the compilation "Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith"

Extracts relating to the Cannabis Legalisation and Control Referendum

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.

— 'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet, quoted in the compilation "Prohibition of Intoxicating Drinks"

It is the challenging task of the Bahá'ís to obey the law of God in their own lives, and gradually to win the rest of mankind to its acceptance.

—Universal House of Justice, 6 February 1973 to all National Spiritual Assemblies

It should be noted that the gradual introduction and application of certain laws which require followers to abandon their time-honored laws and practices to which they have been accustomed is not new in this Dispensation. This gradual introduction of laws may be found also in earlier religions. For example, the consumption of alcohol was common among the Arabs during the days of Muhammad. The Qur'an decrees prohibition of drinking alcohol in stages. Muhammad introduced the prohibition of alcohol in a progressive manner. At first, He said that there are advantages and disadvantages in drinking, but that the disadvantages outweigh the advantages (see Qur'an 2:219). Some time later, He counselled His followers not to perform obligatory prayers if they were intoxicated (see Qur'an 4:43), and finally, when people became accustomed to these restrictive measures, He forbade drinking altogether (see Qur'an 5:89).

— **Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, "Monogamy, Sexual Equality, Marital Equality, and the Supreme Tribunal", 27 June 1996**

In reply to your request of October 24, 1967 that we issue a statement concerning "the use of marijuana, LSD and other psychedelic products", we have already informed the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States that Bahá'ís should not use hallucinogenic agents, including LSD, peyote and similar substances, except when prescribed for medical treatment. Neither should they become involved in experiments with such substances.

Although we have found no direct reference to marijuana in the Bahá'í writings, since this substance is derived from what is considered to be a milder form of cannabis, the species used to produce hashish, we can share with you a translation from the Persian of a Tablet of Abdu'l-Bahá on hashish:

Regarding hashish, you had pointed out that some Persians have become habituated to its use. Gracious God! This is the worst of all intoxicants, and its prohibition is explicitly revealed. Its use causeth the disintegration of thought and the complete torpor of the soul. How could anyone seek this fruit of the infernal tree, and by partaking of it, be led to exemplify the qualities of a monster? How could one use this forbidden drug, and thus deprive himself of the blessings of the All-Merciful?...

Alcohol consumeth the mind and causeth man to commit acts of absurdity, but ... this wicked hashish extinguisheth the mind, freezeth the spirit, petrifieth the soul, wasteth the body and leaveth man frustrated and lost.

— **Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Hawaiian Islands, 11 November 1967**

Dealing in heroin or other similar drugs which are forbidden in the Faith should certainly not be undertaken by Bahá'ís except in the context of the legitimate handling of such drugs that doctors and similar professionals may be called upon to undertake in the course of their duties. Furthermore, dealing in narcotics is in many countries a crime and on this basis also would be forbidden to Bahá'ís.

— **Universal House of Justice, cited in a compilation on alcohol and drugs sent to an individual believer by the International Teaching Centre, October 17, 1978**