

Guidelines for Creating Bahá'í Devotional Chants and Music

1. Unison singing of prayers

“It is entirely proper to set prayers to music, and the friends are free to sing prayers in unison. . . . We assume also that the friends will always keep in mind that whether read, chanted or sung, prayers should be uttered with a proper sense of reverence.” From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the NSA of Australia, Feb. 6, 1973, *Compilation on Music*, p. 6

2. Is unison singing “congregational prayer”?

“You have asked whether it is permissible for the friends to chant a prayer collectively. There is a difference between chanting a prayer collectively and congregational prayer. The latter is a formal prayer usually led by an individual using a prescribed ritual. Congregational prayer in this form is forbidden in the Faith except in the case of the Prayer for the Dead. While reciting prayers in unison and spontaneously joining in the recitation of the Words of God is not forbidden, the friends should bear in mind the advice of the beloved Guardian on this subject when he stated that: `...although the friends manner they practice should not acquire too rigid a character, and thus develop into an institution. From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, February 6, 1975. (*Lights of Guidance*, p. 460)

3. Altering the text

“It is permissible to use selections from the Holy Writings as lyrics to be accompanied by musical compositions and to repeat verses or words.” [From *Bahá'í Writings on Music*, compiled by the Universal House of Justice, p. 9 & 10]

“No doubt prayer and parts of the Tablets, “Hidden Words”, etc. will be suitable, but he does not feel it would be advisable to abridge any given part, in other words to leave out parts of a paragraph or a meditation and foreshorten it in this manner.” (From a letter dated 3 July 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer.)

In response to a question from a believer concerning minor alterations of words for the sake of correct accent or the addition of a word for the sake of perfect meter, the beloved Guardian stated the following: “Slight alterations in the text of the prayers are permissible, and I would advise you to give a musical form to the revealed word itself which I feel will be exceedingly effective. I will pray that the Beloved may inspire you to accomplish this great service to His Cause.” (In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter date 8 April 1931 written on his behalf to an individual believer.)

4. Music for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar (House of Worship)

“Let me restate some of the functional requirements which should be met by devotional music for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as we may derive them from the writings: - Such musics should enhance the text. - They should increase the clarity and vibrancy of the creative word. - They should be spiritually refreshing and quickening: lightening the heart, enrapturing the soul, and filling the hearer with joy. They should attract the hearts of humanity to God.” Armstrong-Ingram, R. Jackson. (1996) “Considerations in Setting Sacred Text to Music for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar”, *Arts Dialogue*, p. 4

5. Preserve stylistic and cultural diversity

“In short, the writings require that musics composed for, and selected for, use in the Mashriq'u'l-Adhkar aim at certain affective qualities while clearly delivering the sacred text. These requirements are not tied to any particular style of music belonging to any particular culture, and may be applied in any culture. They do make very specific demands, but demands referring to goals rather than means.”

Armstrong-Ingram, R. Jackson. (1996) “Considerations in Setting Sacred Text to Music for the Mashriq'u'l-Adhkar”, Arts Dialogue, p. 4