

HOMOCULTURE

Principles of Baha'i Education

by

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Bahá'í Publishing Committee

P.O. Box 348 Grand Central Annex New York, N. Y.

The source of all learning is the knowledge of God, exalted be His Glory! and this cannot be attained save through the knowledge of His divine Manifestation.

Bahà'u'lláh

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

The Revelation proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, His followers believe, is divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles and dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men.

The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the unity of God and of His Prophets, upholds the principle of an unfettered search after truth, condemns all forms of superstition and prejudice, teaches that the fundamental purpose of religion is to promote concord and harmony, that it must go hand-in-hand with science, and that it constitutes the sole and ultimate basis of a peaceful, and ordered and progressive society. It inculcates the principle of equal opportunity, rights and privileges for both sexes, exalts work performed in the spirit of service to the rank of worship, recommends the adoption of an auxiliary international language, and provides the necessary agencies for the establishment and safeguarding of a permanent and universal peace.

Shoghi Effendi.

Chief among the forces which have formed the present system of education are those derived from the spiritual consciousness bestowed upon the world by Christ. Implicit in His teachings was the sacredness of each and every person —no matter how humble—as an immortal soul whose destiny was pregnant with illimitable meanings, and whose perfect development was an obligation upon the social group.

Christ taught that we are our brother's keeper. And in the name of Christ—for the first time in the history of the Mediterranean world— education became imbued with democratic ideals. The monastic schools of the Middle Ages were open to all, regardless of class distinction. Sainly rulers like Charlemagne and Alfred felt the obligation to bestow education upon even the humble classes, so that they might develop to the full capacity of their spiritual being.

At the close of the 18th century Joseph Lancaster, a Quaker, became inspired with the vision and obligation to educate the children of the poor, so that they might have direct access to the Word of God with all its perfecting and developmental forces. The history of education points to this vision of Lancaster, put into organized form in the Royal Lancasterian Society, as the beginning of free universal education, not only in England but also in this country.

If so potent an influence has emanated, by mere implication, from the Teachings of Christ, it is clearly to be seen the Bahà'í Faith that upholds a universal civilization and contains a wealth of explicit directions regarding education, also exerts a revolutionary and momentous effect upon directive homoculture.

One universal system culture must eventually encompass the whole world, a common curriculum, a common aim, a common purpose underlying the distinctive educational expression of each nation.

What will be the nature of this new cosmic education which will encompass the whole world in the new age?

THE FAVORABLE SOIL FOR THE CULTIVATION OF PERSONALITY

The underlying thought that inspires and directs this universal education is homoculture — that is, the scientific cultivation of man to the point of his most complete perfectibility, just as agriculture is the perfecting of the earth's ability to produce, or as horticulture is the training of trees to bear the highest degree and quality of fruitage.

Educators must realize the sacredness of individuality. Each child, upon coming first to school, differs from another both in the effect of its past environment upon it and in the quality and destiny of its gifts and faculties. The aim of education should be to equalize the opportunities of cultural environment for every child, but to skillfully differentiate the training each child

receives in accordance with its capacities, tastes, and vocational and cultural trends.

True religion has the effect upon education of accentuating the qualities of sympathy, understanding, and appreciation. One of the chief functions of the educator is to discover and train the particular genius in each child. Professional wisdom and skill are employed to the utmost to assist in such analysis and development. Moreover, the atmosphere of kindness and mutual sympathy existing between teachers and pupils and between the pupils themselves, is such as to encourage rather than discourage the expression of individual differences and gifts. No one is derided, no matter how unique or out of the ordinary be his particular quality of thought and action. Such a spiritually fostering environment furnishes a favorable soil for the cultivation of personality to its fullest and richest perfection.

THE CHIEF FUNCTION OF EDUCATION

Closely related to the development of individual talents is the important question of character training. What is of greater value to the unfolding life of the growing child than the formation of a character which shall be ennobled with the qualities of integrity, earnestness, responsibility, serviceableness and cooperation; a character free from egotism and completely qualified for harmonious living?

Every individual, religion teaches, has a dual nature. On the one hand he is inclined by the animal side of his nature to traits of selfishness, greed, brutality and sensuality. On the other hand, he is inclined by the spiritual side of his nature to traits of kindness, love, service, purity, harmony and cooperation.

The chief function of education, therefore, is to aid the child to develop to the utmost his spiritual qualities while ruling, subordinating, and sublimating his animal tendencies. "*There comes a time in the development of character,*" said 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "*when nobility of expression becomes habitual. We then hardly have to try to be good.*" But it is a long step from the weak and ignorant child, full of careless and selfish tendencies, to the mature man or woman clothed in the wisdom and power of a spiritualized character.

Bahá'í schools include spiritual training as part of their program. Children are taught spiritual precepts such as inspire and control behavior. They realize themselves as immortal souls on the quest of perfection. They know that their actions produce results that never end, that they can never escape the consequences of their own evil doing, that reward and punishment on the spiritual plane are as certain as the seasons and as the daily rising and setting of the sun. These truths they learn as the most important lessons in the evolution of character and the guidance for daily living.

Thus children are trained gradually to control and direct their actions from within, basing

their deeds on ideals of spiritual perfection. They are taught to act to please God rather than man. They are helped to become unselfish, cooperative, harmonious; to realize that the undue expression of the ego is the worst thing that can happen, and that the self is their worst enemy — the only "Satan." In this way they learn to control themselves not only outwardly in facing the world, but also in their unseen actions.

This education makes use of the spiritual training of children not only to insure security and peace within the nation but also to inculcate those glorious and all-embracing principles of world unity enunciated by Bahà'u'lláh which will stabilize civilization under the new dispensation. The children and youth of such schools, instead of learning from their books of history to fear and hate each other, imbibe ideals of world order and universal brotherhood. From the cradle up they are trained to look upon all the people of the world as their brothers. They are given the vision of the essential unity, relationship and interdependence of all human beings. Thus they become in the course of their education world citizens in the fullest meaning of the word, capable of sharing in and directing the world civilization for which they are being prepared.

RECONCILIATION OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION

A serious obstacle to character development in current education has been the prevalence of scientific materialism. The encroachment of science upon religion at the end of the nineteenth century has played a large part in the chaos and disintegration of civilization in the twentieth century. The sharp cleavage between spiritual aspiration and belief on the one hand and scientific knowledge and certainty on the other not only has resulted in depriving education of all spiritual impulse; but worse than that it has caused, so to speak, duality and strife within the individual. While in one direction the average educated man of today is seeking instinctively for that faith and guidance which alone can make life livable, in another direction he is held in rapt admiration of the miraculous precision and cosmic scope of a science which has seemed entirely hostile to religion. This struggle within the individual has been reflected in the outer life of the world. The old moralities based upon the spiritual teachings of the past have been discarded. And the empirical search for a practical morality based upon methods of trial and error has proved disastrous both to the individual and to society.

The Bahà'í Faith asserts the absolute unity of science and religion. "*Any religion which denies the plain truth of science,*" said 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "*is not truth, but merely superstition.*" The universe is one. The truth concerning it can be but one. There cannot be a truth about the universe which is scientific, and another opposing truth about the universe which is religious. Just as there is but one universe, so there is but one truth. And it is the aim of the Bahà'í educator to comprehend and to convey this unified body of truth to his students.

But the blame for this feud has not been entirely on the side of religion. Science has been equally dogmatic and fallacious. It has frequently asserted as facts ideas which were merely theoretical and which were later proved to be untrue. Now science is beginning to show a more reasonable attitude. A healthy skepticism is springing up, and the greatest scientists are beginning to wonder whether scientific knowledge is as definite as has been supposed. Many former dogmas of biology, of astronomy, chemistry, physics have been exploded. New discoveries and postulates all tend to point toward the unity of being; and in that unity of being all matter seems to dissolve into pure force. What is this Force, the primal mystery of which lies back of all the changing phantasmagoria of the material universe?

Today many of the world's greatest scientists, even though averse to proclaiming a belief in God as personified in the religious teachings of the past, admit a belief in both a Universal Force and a Plan which seems to underlie in a causal and evolutionary way all phenomena. They see the universe in terms of a Force so majestic, eternal, vast and illimitable, so perfect in plan and execution from microcosm to macrocosm, that the human intellect must stand in reverence and awe before this august, unknowable Mover of all things.

In this universal culture, science and religion are absolutely reconciled. Reason and faith are joined in a close working union. Every individual should become both scientific and spiritually minded. Bahá'u'lláh gave the highest praise to the work of scientists, and said that they are the pillars that support society and civilization. In the Bahá'í plan for world civilization there are no clergy, and scientific and educational professions are to hold the positions of highest esteem in the community.

EDUCATION — A SPIRITUAL LAW

Current education is open to grave criticism on the grounds of its failure to elicit interest and earnest effort on the part of youth. But Bahá'í students show a remarkably earnest spirit of devotion to their studies. This is because the acquisition of knowledge is one of the religious duties of Bahá'í youth. Bahá'u'lláh taught that to acquire learning was incumbent upon all:—*“Knowledge is like unto wings for the being (of man) and is like a ladder for ascending. To acquire knowledge is incumbent upon all, but of those sciences which may profit the people of the earth, and not such sciences as begin in mere words and end in mere words. . . . The real treasury of man is his knowledge. Knowledge is the means of honor, prosperity, joy, gladness, happiness and exultation;”* and 'Abdul-Bahá reemphasized this obligation of youth to acquire knowledge and intellectual training to the highest possible degree, so as to be *“the means of illumination and unlimited progress to the world.”* Therefore Bahá'ís from the earliest childhood realize it to be a religious obligation to acquire knowledge. They seek to expand their being to

the fullest capacity so as to become worthy citizens of the new age, able both to comprehend and to administer the world principles of Bahá'u'lláh and if possible to contribute to the expansion and progress of civilization.

The new education is seen as a spiritual process. That is to say, it is a complete unfolding and perfect functioning of the human soul. The traditional education has concerned itself chiefly with the intellect, which is after all merely one of the tools used by the human soul in its functioning upon this planet. This is a very limited view of education and necessarily has produced faulty and limited results. In fact, modern scientific intellectual education has come near to defeating its own end; it does not arouse in the average student a desire for attaining to the perfection of his own highest powers. The stimulation, the motive is lacking.

But now, with the renewed vision of man made in the image of God and dowered with almost unlimited gifts and powers, we see in education the means of developing that perfection which God destines for each soul. That is why education is in reality a spiritual process.

The curriculum of the future from primary up to graduate and professional courses, will be built around the central core of a practical understanding of the universe and world in which we live. The physical sciences will be taught under the comprehensive aspect of the unity of knowledge. In the same unified way the social sciences will be taught as the history of human culture, with due reference to all influences—geographic, climatic, political, economic, social and spiritual — which have organized and formed humanity into its present patterns. In all of these studies the objective is a knowledge that will lead to further progress for humanity, in accordance with Bahá'u'lláh's statement: "*Teach not those things that begin in mere words and end in words, but rather those things that pertain to human progress.*"

The study of languages will be reduced to a minimum by the creation of a universal auxiliary language to become effective throughout the world. Only the native language and this auxiliary language need be taught in the future curriculum. No ancient nor modern languages will be required, though they may be studied as electives.

Algebra, geometry and higher mathematics, like ancient languages, will be relegated to the category of electives. Meaningless drudgery will be eliminated from school work. The whole curriculum will be reduced in quantity. Academic assignments in the elementary and secondary schools will not require, for the average pupil, more than five hours work a day including all the time necessary both for preparation and recitation of lessons. (The quantity of mental work done under the existing system is excessive and in many cases actually injurious to the mind as well as to the body, said 'Abdul-Bahá.)

The acquisition of an art, craft, trade or profession will enable every person to fit into the social structure.

The most important feature of Bahà'í education is its universal quality. Intellectual and cultural isolations, provincialisms, meaningless and obstructive traditions and superstitions are transcended. The foundations of the future World Order must be laid in the schools, and its stability will be assured by the ideals and principles in which the youth of the world are trained.

Nationalistic educational systems must not be permitted to nourish a poisonous and militaristic jingoism on dogmas of untruth, hatred, fear, pride and vainglory. Youth must not be taught that their highest duty to the state is to take part in competitive enterprises the success of which depends upon the slaughter of millions of innocent youths of other countries. Rather must they come to realize, through education, their sacred obligations to uphold at all points the cause of universal peace, of world unity and brotherhood. They must learn to advance by means of individually righteous and creative living, as well as by collective activities, the prosperity and happiness of all mankind.