

Apathy and Violence

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Violence, of all kind, is on the increase throughout the world. In varying degree and form it is influencing and affecting the lives of children, youth, adults, as well as the older people in all societies. Its presence is being felt at home, in schools, universities, places of work or leisure, in urban as well as rural regions and in so called developed and developing countries.

In attempt to understand and deal with this wide-spread and ever increasing problem two schools of thought have developed, one of which has enjoyed and is still enjoying much greater degree of acceptance and recognition. This school of thought holds, that man, as an animal is governed by powerful instincts, one of the most important of which is the aggressive instinct (drive). This drive causes man to behave in a violent manner. Wars, crimes and aggressive acts of man are nothing but manifestations of this basic, strong and innate force. Therefore, there is little that man can do to eradicate violence and similar phenomena. Rather, through scientific findings and biological manipulation, through adoption of laws and development of law enforcement agencies, and through personal struggle and development of appropriate defence mechanisms man would be able to defend himself, to some extent, against the forces of his aggressive drive and thus decrease the intensity and frequency of his violent acts.

To further strengthen their argument, the exponents of this school cite mankind's long history of violence, war, crime, prejudice and other destructive acts as a convincing proof in favour of aggressive drive hypothesis. The same school which contends that man is an animal, perceives human societies in a similar manner and sees them basically as operating according to the laws of the jungle. In such an environment, force and power is the master, survival of the fittest the law, and aggression, competitiveness, individualism and productivity, the virtues. The guiding light of this school is science, the "hard core" science, science based on visible and measurable facts. All other components and aspects of human existence such as religion, poetry, intuition, imagination, morals and ethics, and to a large extent the arts are considered to be irrelevant, indication of neurosis, sign of weakness and basically a wasteful and non-productive activity and preoccupation. This school of thought, as mentioned earlier enjoys a widespread and usually unquestioned acceptance.

The second school of thought—which, because of several newly reported studies, is gaining increasing credence and acceptance—considers man's violence to be directly related to his education. In other words, it is held that violence is a learned behaviour, acquired through examples, faulty upbringing and misguided concepts, especially those concepts related to man and his world.

In the first part of this presentation I would briefly review some of the prevalent theories in respect to aggression, violence, fear and anxiety. Next follows a description of a new formulation focussing on violence and apathy as a consequence of faulty life processes. Part III focuses on the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith and their relevance to prevention of violence and apathy.

Part I Aggression, Violence, Fear and Anxiety: A Review

a. Aggression and Violence

In the early decades of this century, Freud, in his attempts to understand the nature of human behaviour postulated that man basically has two instincts, the life instinct or the sexual instinct, and the death instinct or the aggressive instinct. He wrote "our hypothesis is that there are two essentially different classes of instincts, the sexual instincts, understood in the widest sense — Eros, if you prefer that name, and the aggressive instincts, whose aim is destruction."¹²

In a letter dated 30th July 1932, Albert Einstein, upon the invitation of the League of Nations and its International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation in Paris, chose to write Freud for a "frank exchange of views on any problem..." To do so, Einstein posed the following question which in his opinion was "the most insistent of all the problems civilization has to face." He wrote: "This is the problem: Is there any way of delivering mankind from the menace of war?" Freud's response to this invitation, is in the form of a letter dated September 1932. He begins by stating that he expected that Einstein would "choose a problem on the frontiers of what is knowable to day, a problem to which each of us, a physicist and a psychologist, might have—particular angle of approach." Freud goes on to say "you have taken me by surprise, however, by posing the question of what can be done to protect mankind from the curse of war."¹³

Freud further elaborates his opinion and states that “It is a general principle..., that conflicts of interest between men are settled by the use of violence.” To prove this point he says: “This is true of the whole animal kingdom, from which men have no business to exclude themselves.”¹⁴ With this notion, considered by him as a fact, Freud goes on to elaborate upon this theme. He says: “According to our hypothesis human instincts are of only two kinds, those which seek to preserve and unite, which we call ‘erotic’ or ‘sexual’ ... and those which seek to destroy and kill and which we group together as the aggressive or destructive instinct. As you see, this is in fact no more than a theoretical clarification of the universally familiar opposition between Love and Hate... Thus according to Freud, man is basically aggressive and the aim of the individual and the community should be to control this instinct.

In an insightful paper, Gorney reviews the views of Freud, and Lorenz on Aggression and Love, and makes the following statements: “Freud’s discouraging view of aggression was that it welled up from within spontaneously. Although directed inward, primarily against the self, it could be deflected outward upon other people or things... This formulation allowed for the possibility that if one could shut off aggression (and violence) at the source, love would still exist. Lorenz’s supposition carried the instinctual conception of aggression a dismal step further toward hopelessness. Because love was to him nothing but made over aggression, elimination of aggression would also eradicate love.”¹⁶

This view, that aggression is an instinct, and thus a basic unavoidable component of human behaviour, has a subtle, but extremely dangerous appeal. It helps man to justify his violence, his wars, his crimes, his lust for power, his desire to rule, and his prejudices. There has been much discussion about whether indeed aggression is an instinct or a learned behaviour. A number of studies now are providing convincing evidence that aggression indeed is a learned behaviour and not an instinct as Freud, Lorenz and others in this group hypothesized.

In a ten year longitudinal study to determine how learning conditions in early childhood relate to aggression in late adolescence, Eron and his co-workers concluded that “the fact that aggressive behaviour is shaped by learning through socialization practices and varies by sex, detracts from the theories of the ethologists who argue that aggression in man is innately determined.”¹¹

In this presentation a view is advanced that aggression is a learned behaviour which manifests itself in a varying phenomenon ranging from being aggressive and competitive to violence, hate, war and crimes of all type. To understand this formulation, there is a need for further elaboration of the relationship between anger and aggression. However, before we begin to study this relationship, we should examine some of the present theories in respect to fear and anxiety, and anger.

b. Anxiety, Fear and Anger

The feeling of anxiety is a familiar one. We experience anxiety under varied circumstances and conditions. Sometimes we are able to locate the source of our anxiety, while at other times we are not able to do so. Fear is a similar experience to that of anxiety. However, in psychiatric literature a distinction is made between fear and anxiety. Fear is considered to occur when we are aware of the source of danger, while anxiety occurs when the source of threat and danger is not in our consciousness. Harold I. Lief describes the above points aptly: “Anxiety is a diffuse, highly unpleasant, often vague feeling of apprehension, accompanied by one or more bodily sensations that characteristically recur for the same person... Anxiety is an alerting signal, it warns of impending danger and enables the person to take measures to deal with a threat. Fear a similar alerting signal is ordinarily differentiated from anxiety on the basis of whether the threat is known or unknown, external or internal, immediate or future, definite or vague, non-conflictual or conflictual in origin...”²²

There is much said about anxiety in our times. The 20th century is called the age of anxiety. Stresses of modern life, civilization, industrialization and rapid change, all are believed to be contributing to man’s anxiety. The declining position of the individual in an increasingly complex world, varied responsibilities and demands put upon him and many actual dangers and threats of danger engulfing him, all are mentioned as causes of the anxiety of the modern man. This notion is especially upheld by psychoanalytic schools amongst others.²³ In this school it is believed that anxiety is closely related to experiencing either existence of danger or anticipation of danger. On the other hand, anxiety to some degree is considered essential for the individual’s safety and growth. Without some degree of anxiety, there is little motivation for protecting oneself or improving one’s condition in life. Rothenberg believes that anxiety and anger are closely related and both are the organism’s response to threat and danger. He states: “on the basis of all that is currently known about anger and anxiety, both clinically and experimentally, it seems likely that both of these phenomena are aspects of a diffuse, alerted and aroused state. Anger becomes the predominant manifestation of this state when the motoric arousal begins to be directed at the source of threat or obstruction or at an imagined source. Anxiety is the predominant manifestation when the motoric arousal is

undirected or is directed toward avoidance or escape. However, neither of these manifestations ever seems to occur exclusive of the other. Anger, especially, is always accompanied by anxiety.”²⁵

While these observations all are insightful and do clarify to some extent the nature of anxiety, anger and fear, nevertheless, there are several basic points left unanswered by them. We need to know the relationship between anxiety and fear on the one hand, and anxiety and aggression, and fear and aggression on the other hand. Finally, we need to understand where anger fits in this complex of feelings and behaviour.

Part II Life Processes

Man creates his way of life. In other words, the result of the interaction between the individual's innate endowments and his life experiences, especially those of his childhood, is the development of a person unique in his outlook, in his perception of the world and life, his response to challenges they offer him and the manner in which he attempts to resolve these challenges. Life characteristically and continuously exposes the individual to threats (challenges) and opportunities.

a. Threats to Life

Threats in our life are either actual or assumed. They either originate from the environment in the form of physical and social threat or from within, in the form of psychological and spiritual crisis. The individual could meet those dangers head on and with full consciousness, or they could creep upon him gradually and in a disguised form. Some perceive these threats in a realistic manner, and respond to them accordingly, while others either underestimate the intensity of the danger and subject themselves to injuries and affliction, or go over board and respond to the slightest challenge as though it was indeed a fearful and destructive danger.

Our perception of the danger situation is closely related to our upbringing and our endowments. The details of these differences are too lengthy to be discussed here and need to be the subject of another presentation.

In any case once the threat is felt two major defense mechanisms are put into motion for the purpose of protecting the integrity and the well being of the organism. These two mechanisms, defensive in nature, are immediate and automatic in their occurrence. They are innate. Depending on the nature of the individual's life experiences and endowments, one or the other defense mechanism takes a more predominant position in the manner in which the individual responds to the threats in his life.

These two defense responses are the fear response and the anger response. The fear response is composed of three components. The alert signal, which informs the individual of the threat, anxiety which puts into motion the needed energy for action, and an urge for escape or withdrawal, which is an appropriate response to the felt danger. The anger response, likewise, consists of three components. The first and second components are identical with those of fear. However, the third component consists of an urge to attack and thus to remove and eliminate the source of threat. The relationship between anxiety and fear on the one hand and anxiety and anger on the other hand, is observed both in research and in clinical work.*

During infancy and early childhood, the individual responds both with fear and anger. Indeed during this period of life, it is difficult to distinguish between these two responses. However, with the passage of time and experience and with the opportunity for observing the models in our lives, we choose one or the other response as our primary mode of defense against threats to our self integrity. This however does not automatically exclude the other defense response and indeed throughout life we respond to threats in our life, to a lesser or greater degree, with both fear and anger. Whenever we respond with either fear or anger, the other response is also present, usually in a less obvious manner.

The responses to the threat described above are in the realm of emotions and consist of desire and urge to either attack or escape, to fight or flight. Beyond this however, the individual has not committed himself. Depending on the intensity of the threat and the capacity of the individual to discipline himself, others could be unaware of the fact that the person has perceived a threat and has experienced either of the emotions of fear or anger.

Following this phase comes the phase of solution. In this phase, the individual has two basic choices. The first choice we call the “objective solution”. The person would evaluate the threat, its intensity, its potential danger and its relative importance. He further would evaluate his own capacity to deal with the threat and would make a decision to either carry out his urge to escape, in case of fear response, or to attack the source of threat, in case of anger response. This escape or attack, however, is solely for the purpose of self-preservation, and as such is a constructive act. There is another component of the objective solution, which is equally as important as the capacity for realistic evaluation of the situation. This component is the creative power of the individual. This is unique to him. It is the driving force which brings together the inherited endowments and life experiences of the individual and allows for a response, a unique response to that individual, at that time and situation. This is the reason that people with similar capacities, under similar circumstances respond to a threatening situation in different ways, all

healthy, and many quite creative. The existence of this creative force and its role in development of the individual's way of life is described quite clearly by Adler. He says: "Do not forget, the most important fact, that not heredity, and not environment are determining factors—both are giving only the frame and the influences which are answered by the individual in regard to his styled creative powers."⁵

The second solution, is the "pathological solution". This solution has in its roots, our faulty perception of ourselves and our world. The manner in which we deal with our fears and anger, and the anxiety and urges which goes with them is very much dependent upon our personality, which in turn is the result of interaction between our endowments and our environment. If we have been encouraged to deal with threats of our life with anger and have observed others to deal with their anger with aggressive behaviour and violence, we most likely would adopt the same behaviour.

Here is where the major problems related to aggression lies. We have stated that aggression and anger are fundamentally different. Anger is an emotion, which acts as a defense to protect the integrity of the individual. It is not an act. It doesn't have any negative, destructive component in it. It is an innate defense mechanism for the protection of the organism.

Aggression on the other hand, is a learned behaviour, which the individual uses as a solution to the needs felt by the organism in the form of anger or fear response in the face of a threat. Thus, as a learned behaviour, aggression and violence are the by-products of the life experience of the individual.

When the fear response has been in motion, here again the individual has the choice of objective evaluation of the danger situation, and dealing with it in a realistic and creative manner, or responding to the fear in a pathological form.

In the case of fear response, the pathological solution manifests itself in either the avoidance behaviour or apathy.

An avoidance behaviour, includes any behaviour which allows the individual to either underestimate his own capacities, or to overestimate the intensity and extent of the threats or both. In the extreme, individuals with such a life style are fearful, uncertain, apologetic, sickly and shy. They avoid opportunities of life and live a life of isolation, avoidance and emptiness.

Apathy, is another pathological solution used by many in the face of threats. Here the individual, for all practical purposes, avoids solution, abandons hope, and denies possessing inherent capacities and qualities which are obvious to the objective observers.

These two responses are behaviours which are used as solution to threats. They are learned from and modeled after those whom we in our childhood and later years tend to look up to.

The following diagram demonstrates the points we have made so far:

DIAGRAM 1 Fear and Anger, Apathy and Aggression

PHASE I	PHASE II			PHASE III	
Threat (From within or without)	Defense Response (EMOTIONS)			Solution (BEHAVIOUR)	
		Component I	Component II	Component III	
Threat or Danger (Includes needs denied)	Fear Response	Alert Signal	Anxiety Acute or Chronic	Urge to Escape or Withdraw	Healthy Solution Objective and Creative Solution Pathological Solution Avoidance Behaviour, and Apathy
	Anger Response	Alert Signal	Anxiety Acute or Chronic	Urge to Attack or Remove the Threat	Healthy Solution Objective and Creative Solution Pathological Solution Aggressive Behaviour and Violence
Actual or Assumed	Innate Response			Learned Behaviour	

The above diagram identifies three phases in the development of our response to life challenges, the Threat Phase, The Innate Defense Response and the third phase which consists of the learned behaviour used by the individual as a solution to the threats.

The threats are either from within or without and may be actual or assumed. The response to these threats are both in the form of fear or anger, with one or the other taking predominance. Both of these responses are accompanied by chronic or acute anxiety and the urge for escape or attack. The individual's personality which is the result of interaction between his innate qualities and his life experiences will attempt to deal with these threats, his fear and/or anger and the resulting anxiety in an objective and creative manner or in a pathological form. The following simplified diagram is of help in clarifying the different ways in which we usually respond to challenges in out life.

DIAGRAM II Healthy and Pathological Solutions to Threats to Life

		Pathological Solutions	Healthy Solutions
Threat	Fear Anxiety	1. Avoidance 2. Apathy	Objective and Creative Solution
	Anger Anxiety	1. Aggression 2. Violence	Objective and Creative Solution

This formulation has the following advantages. It identifies the mechanisms which the individual employs in response to the threatening situations in life. It differentiates between emotions and behaviour. It places fear and anger in the realm of emotions and identifies them as the two main defense responses in the face of danger and threat.

The anxiety, here, is defined as an unpleasant feeling. It is a component of both fear and anger, which are considered to be innate responses. It is the main motivating force which puts into motion the needed energy for escape from or attack upon the source of threat.

The individual, through the interaction between his life experiences and his endowments learns to respond predominantly with either anger or fear. He further learns to deal with his urge for escape or attack either in an objective and healthy manner or in a pathological way, manifesting itself in the form of aggression and violence. These are related to the anger response pattern. Avoidance behaviour and apathy are the pathological results when the fear response is in operation.

This formulation further allows us to study the causes of anger and fear by identifying the major types of threat to self integrity. Likewise, our views on the causes of aggression and apathy clearly demonstrate that attempts at eradicating aggression, violence, and apathy in our society would fail as long as we fail to focus our attention on the underlying dynamics of these conditions. We need to learn how to objectively deal with our fear and anger and prevent them from evolving into unhealthy behaviour patterns. We also would benefit from identifying the major sources of threat to man's self integrity, and employ necessary mechanisms to decrease and if possible eradicate these threats. These will be subject of further discussion, later in this presentation.

b. Life Opportunities

What are life opportunities? One could say that the challenges of life, in a sense, are its opportunities, and indeed many people transform life threats into opportunities. Opportunities in addition to challenges are also offered us in life. These need to be understood if we are to fully realize our potentialities.

An integral quality of life is growth. Every individual from birth to death is constantly in a fluid state, characterized by growth, progression and retrogression, integration and disintegration. In physical sense, once this process is stopped, death has arrived. Man experiences the same process in regard to his intellectual, emotional and spiritual realities.

Learning is a process of accumulation of knowledge, experience and wisdom. During the process of assimilation, the new knowledge and experience requires the re-evaluation and rejection of some of previously held beliefs. Thus, learning involves the simultaneous processes of integration and disintegration which are essential if we are to become individuals open to new ideas, willing to re-evaluate our previous notions and continuously be in search for the truth.

In emotional realms the same principles apply. Emotional maturity is characterized by a capacity for sharing, intimacy, trust, love and other directedness. It is achieved as the individual attempts to harmonize his experiences with his thoughts, feelings, hopes and fears. However, due to the fact that these aspects of our existence are by their very nature fluid, they are subject to retrogression, and progression, integration and disintegration. In other words, they are subject to the laws of growth.

Spiritual growth, encompasses our physical, intellectual and emotional growth, and gives everlasting and universal meaning to these processes of life. It too, is subject to the laws of growth. From the moment of birth on, the search for an all embracing vision and meaning of life is being conducted. In the process of such a search the individual constantly acquires new spiritual qualities. He improves upon the old ones and replaces the previous notions with broader and more universal visions. Thus, growth is one of the major and main opportunities of life.

The other opportunity which life offers is the opportunity for self-fulfillment. As the individual grows he becomes conscious of his uniqueness. He becomes aware of the need for cultivation of those qualities which would reveal that uniqueness and exalt the existence of its possessor. To this process, we have applied the term creativity. Without creativity, an individual experiences boredom and isolation.

Growth enables an individual to become aware and conscious of his life and achieve greater levels of maturity. Creativity provides the opportunity to develop meaning and vision and ultimately enables the achievement of fulfillment and universality.

The necessary fuel for growth and creativity is love. Without love, the human child would grow to be unhealthy, troubled and self-centered. Under such circumstances, neither his growth nor his creativity have the chance to develop to fruition. Many studies, including those by Bowlby^{6,7}, Skeels²⁹, Erikson¹⁰, Harlow and Harlow et al²⁰, all demonstrate the detrimental effects of deprivation, rejection and loss on the overall growth of the child and its long term negative effects.

To summarize, life's opportunities are basically two, Growth and Creativity. Love is necessary if the growth and creativity are to occur in a healthy manner. Under such circumstances the individual would experience maturity and fulfillment. In the absence of love the growth process is arrested and boredom and isolation set in.

The following two schema demonstrate the above:

1.

Life Opportunities	Growth	Love	→	Maturity	Universal Man
	Creativity	Love		Fulfillment	

2.

Life Opportunities	Growth	Inadequate (Absent) Love	→	Arrested Growth	Self-centered Individual
	Creativity	Inadequate (Absent) Love		Boredom & Isolation	

In the discussion of an unhealthy process of growth and creativity above, we stated that the end result of such a situation is arrested growth, boredom and isolation. The arrested growth in an individual manifests itself in disharmony between different aspects of his being. Thus, an individual in his mid-thirties could find himself intellectually or emotionally functioning at a level below his capacities. Under such circumstances the person would experience feelings of humiliation and frustration, which in turn would cause him to become angry and eventually apathetic and/or aggressive. Likewise, a person who has had no opportunity for the development of basic love and respect for himself or for the capacity to use his unique qualities, would find life empty and meaningless. This is a state of being which could not but cause boredom, apathy and aggression.

Here we have tried to show that violence has its roots in several specific conditions. One such condition is the faulty way in which we deal with fear and anger in our lives. The other condition is directly related to our incompetence and ignorance as to how to take advantage of life's opportunities in order to foster our growth and creativity.

The following schema outline the major causes of aggression and violence and their counter parts, i.e. withdrawal and apathy.

Pathological Life Processes

Life Challenges (Threats)	Fear + Severe Anxiety (chronic or acute)	Withdrawal and Apathy	Violence and Apathy
	Anger + Severe Anxiety (chronic or acute)	Aggression and Violence	

Life Opportunities	Growth	Absence of Love →	Arrested Maturity	Life Challenges (Threats)	Violence and/or Apathy
	Creativity		Boredom and Isolation		

Healthy Life Processes

Life Challenges (Threats)	Fear Anxiety	Objective and Creative Solution	Opportunities
	Anger Anxiety	Objective and Creative Solution	

Life Opportunities	Growth	Love	Maturity	Universal Man
	Creativity	Love	Fulfillment	

PART III Teachings of the Bahá'í Faith and Their Relevance to Prevention of Violence

a. Bahá'í Concept of Man

“Man is the noblest of all beings, the sum of all perfections.”¹ With this statement ‘Abdu’l-Bahá summarizes the Bahá'í Teachings in regard to the nature and stature of man. This view of man is closely related to the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith which state that the whole of creation is pure and good and that evil doesn't exist. The non-existence of evil is a notion of far reaching consequence and therefore it needs to be understood fully. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in one of his “table talks” elaborates upon this concept.

“In creation there is no evil, all is good. Certain qualities and natures innate in some man and apparently blame-worthy are not so in reality. For example, from the beginning of his life you can see in a nursing child the signs of desire, of anger and of temper. Then it may be said good and evil are innate in the reality of man, and this is contrary to the pure goodness of nature and creation. The answer to this is that desire, which is to ask for something more, is a praiseworthy quality, provided that it is used suitably. So if a man has the desire to acquire science and knowledge, or to become compassionate, generous and just it is more praiseworthy. If he exercises his anger and wrath against the blood thirsty tyrants who are like ferocious beasts, it is very praiseworthy, but if he does not use these qualities in a right way, they are blame-worthy.”²

However, man, created pure and noble, in his history and in his everyday life has manifested such behaviour and conduct which is a far cry from the characteristics of a noble and pure creation. The discrepancy between man's noble creation and his ignoble conduct is directly related to man's education.

In response to an inquiry regarding the cause of the differences and varieties in man's character 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that man "... has the innate character, the inherited character, and the acquired character which is gained by education. With regard to innate character, although the divine creation is purely good, yet the varieties of natural qualities in man come from the difference of degree, all are excellent, but they are more or less so, according to the degree. But the difference of the qualities with regard to culture is very great; for education has great influence. Education has a universal influence, and the differences caused by it are very great..."³

Education of children in the Bahá'í Faith is compulsory at a universal level and is the responsibility of the parents and the community alike. Acquisition of knowledge, of arts, of sciences and of spiritual realities are likewise the responsibility of every individual. Without a proper education, man loses the very essence of being a human and thus falls into an animal—like state, debased and aimless. To further understand this point we again refer to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings. He says:

if man himself is left in his natural state, he will become lower than the animal and continue to grow more ignorant and imperfect... If we wish to eliminate this dark plane of human existence. we must bring man forth from hopeless captivity of nature, educate him and show him the pathway of light and knowledge, until uplifted from his condition of ignorance he becomes wise and knowing, no longer savage and revengeful, he is endowed with attributes of heaven. But left in his natural condition without education and training, he will become more depraved and more vicious than the animal.⁴

In the above passage 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly identifies those characteristics of a proper education which would help man to become free of violence. Under such an education man needs to be freed from the hopeless captivity of nature and learn to effectively deal with challenges and threats of life. In addition he needs to acquire wisdom, knowledge, kindness and other attributes of a higher plane of existence. This clearly is related to the processes of growth and creativity outlined above.

Existing education doctrines, view man primarily in the negative, and consider him to be a slave to his instincts. Mans cruelty, aggression and violence are given independent realities by themselves, and as such, the educators endeavour to teach the students how to deal with and accept their violence and aggression. These efforts however are ineffective, primarily because what the individual needs to learn is how to deal with challenges of life and use its opportunities. Under such circumstances, the emphasis would be on prevention which is a far more effective way of dealing with such problems. However, such an education is difficult to achieve without existence of a milieu in harmony with the view of nobility of man.

b. The Bahá'í Community—A Milieu for Growth and Creativity

The Bahá'í Community can be viewed from many angles, each emphasizing one or the other of its unique characteristics. For the purposes of this presentation we would review those aspects of Bahá'í Community which provides opportunities for growth and creativity, in a basically united, safe and non-threatening environment. Individual growth does not take place in isolation or a vacuum. The interaction between the individual and his environment is the dynamic force which allows him to use the opportunities creatively and face the challenges provided by the environment. To understand what type of an environment is created in the Bahá'í Community, we shall elaborate on some of the Bahá'í concepts in regard to evolution of mankind.

Bahá'u'lláh teaches that mankind as a whole sails through similar stages of growth and development as a human individual does. Thus at one time mankind collectively was in its infancy, at another time in his childhood, and now is going through the period of adolescence, rapidly approaching its manhood. Shoghi Effendi, in referring to this growth process, describes the present state of mankind in the following manner:

“The long ages of infancy and childhood, through which the human race had to pass, have receded into the background. Humanity is now experiencing the commotions invariably associated with the most turbulent stages of its evolution, the stage of adolescence, when the impetuosity of youth and its vehemence reach their climax, and must gradually be superceded by the calmness, the wisdom and the maturity that characterize the stage of manhood. Then will the human race reach that stature of ripeness which will enable it to acquire all the powers and capacities upon which its ultimate development must depend.”²⁶

Adolescence is a period of change, of upheavals and of transition. The adolescent needs an appropriate environment in which he would be able to sail through this turbulent stage and arrive at the calm shores of adulthood. If the adolescent is not provided with such an environment, then his integrity is threatened and conflicts arise. Emotions

and passions take charge of him and in his lonely and misguided struggle he succumbs to destructiveness, violence, apathy and withdrawal.

Mankind now in its adolescence, realizes that he himself alone is incapable of directing his own growth. Gradually he is becoming aware that a total change in his thinking, life-style, attitudes, beliefs and consciousness must precede any improvement in his present dilemma.

But what is needed to make this change of course possible? The adolescent needs a stable environment, in which an authority with characteristics of universality, justice and mercy would provide him with the opportunity to mature and develop in a unique and creative manner. In such a community, guidance would come not from the collective will of individuals where one adolescent would be guiding another adolescent. Rather, the guidance would come from a universal and a supreme source. The following passage by Shoghi Effendi fully demonstrates this point:

“The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, whose supreme mission is none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations, should if we be faithful to its implications, be regarded as signaling through its advent the coming of the age of the entire human race. It should be viewed not merely as yet another spiritual revival in the ever-changing fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage in a chain of progressive Revelations, nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, but rather as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man’s collective life on this planet. The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world civilization, the founding of a world civilization and culture, all of which must synchronize with the initial stages in the unfoldment of the Golden Age of Bahá’í Era — should by their very nature, be regarded as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation continue indefinitely to progress and develop.”⁷

The following statement by Horace Holley further elucidates the nature of Bahá’í Community:

“The inherent nature of the Community created by Bahá’u’lláh has great significance at this time, when the relative values of democracy, of constitutional monarchy, of aristocracy and of communism are everywhere in dispute. Of the Bahá’í Community it may be declared definitely that its character does not reflect the communist theory. The rights of the individual are fully safeguarded and the fundamental distinction of personal endowment natural among all people are fully preserved. Individual rights, however, are interpreted in the light of the supreme law of brotherhood and not made a sanction for selfishness, oppression and indifference. On the other hand, the Bahá’í order is not a democracy in the sense that it proceeds from the complete sovereignty of the people whose representatives are limited to carrying out the popular will. Sovereignty in the Bahá’í Community, is attributed to the Divine Prophet, and the elected representatives of the believers in their administrative function look to the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh for their guidance, having faith that the application of His universal principles is the source of order throughout the community. Every Bahá’í administrative body feels itself a trustee, and in this capacity stands above the plane of dissension and is free of that pressure exerted by factional groups.”²¹

So far we have attempted to outline some characteristics of the Bahá’í Community which foster growth and development of unique qualities of the individual. As we stated earlier love is an absolute and necessary element in such a process. This type of growth-inducing, all encompassing and universal love however is obtainable when the individual and community alike have developed those basic rules of human conduct which are free from oppression, fear, power struggle and authoritarianism and are characterized by basic trust, harmony, kindness, mutual respect and affinity at the highest level of human hopes, aspirations and spiritual capacities. This type of orientation is in fact what is called love orientation.⁸ In a love oriented community the individual not only is encouraged and helped to mature and attain fulfillment, he is also freed from anxieties, fears and anger closely related to living under threatening circumstances. The consequence of living in such an environment is that the chances for apathy, aggression and violence are reduced to a large extent. Therefore, at the centre of this change from power orientation to love orientation is the emphasis on love as a primary factor in human relationships replacing the orientation toward power, inherited from a past that was dominated by childlike needs.

The discussion of Bahá’í Community and its role in helping the individual to attain maturity cannot be complete without a reference to Bahá’í consultation. The basis which Bahá’u’lláh creates for training and development of the individual and the community is Bahá’í Consultation. It applies to all areas of human association, including the family and the community. Bahá’ís are encouraged to speak with “absolute freedom”

while seeing that “no occasion for ill—feeling or discord may arise.”²⁸ They are urged to see their ideas as contributions to the group and to struggle, to detach themselves from personal interest in them once they have been presented. Criticism of others as a means of social control is strongly discouraged, whether it occur in consultative situations or individual encounters. The spirit of trust that communication of this kind produces, in turn engenders real love and a profound sense of unity. The deep satisfaction such experiences provide are more than sufficient to overcome gradually and discipline the appetite for power or fear of inadequacy.

The following is a summary of this part of the presentation:

- Man is a noble creature,
- Proper education is needed for man’s nobility to manifest itself,
- Education takes place at the individual, family, and community level,
- Mankind collectively is going through its adolescent stage,
- Bahá’í Community with its administrative organization, its emphasis on love and unity and its unique consultation creates a milieu in which the individual and mankind as a whole, would be able to use their creative faculties, feel secure in facing the challenges of life and learn to deal with fears, frustrations and anxieties of life in an objective and creative manner.

CONCLUSION

Aggression and violence are learned forms of behaviour. They occur whenever the environment is threatening and the individual’s capacity for dealing with these threats are not fully developed. In addition to environmental threats, there exists another serious source of threat, which is directly related to the individual’s inner state of being, his sense of impotence, imperfection, and vulnerability. These conditions have a direct and inverse relationship to the level of maturity and the degree of fulfillment and creativity of the individual. The more creative and the more mature the individual is, the more capable he is to deal with threats and challenges of life, and therefore the less prone to aggression and violence.

To deal with threats and challenges of life a healthy degree of anxiety is needed. This healthy anxiety manifests itself in our excitement, impatience, sense of anticipation and intense desire to plunge ourselves into arduous, and challenging tasks of life. Apathy and/or violence result when anxiety reaches an acute level or lingers for a long duration. There is a similar result when the threats are monumental and we feel our capacity to deal with these threats to be minimal.

The opportunities of life manifest themselves in processes of growth and creativity, the end result of which is maturity, fulfillment, freedom to experiment and to create. At this level the individual becomes universal in his outlook and spiritual in his conduct. Love is the essential fuel for growth and creativity. Those growing in an environment characterized by inadequate or absence of love suffer boredom, isolation and disharmony in different aspects of their growth.

To help the individual to deal with threats of life in a healthy manner and learn to cultivate the opportunities of existence, he needs an education which would provide him with a positive sense of identity and trusting attitude towards the world and its people.

The Bahá’í Faith, with its concept of man as a noble creation, places a great emphasis on education, so that the individual will learn to deal with the threats of life in an objective and creative manner and consciously enhance his opportunities for growth and creativity.

The Bahá’í Community, structured on the principles of love, unity, trust and cooperation functions with consultative practices characterized by mature qualities of openness, frankness, love and humility. This creates a milieu in which threats are decreased and opportunities are enhanced. In such an environment, and under such educational practices, the emphasis is on prevention of violence, rather than on measures on how to cope with it.

Notes

* As Gellhorn states, “chronic anxiety is due to the simultaneous activities of the ergotropic and the trophotropic systems at a high level of arousal or psychologically speaking to fear and aggression.”¹⁷

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