

# **Justice Book \***

## **Some Baha'i Teachings on Human Development**

by

James J Keene

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## Preface

**Justice Book: Some Baha'i Teachings on Human Development** may be considered as a foundational document defining key turning points in modern history.

Some text in this book was distributed by the author to students in classes at Baha'i schools and conferences in the 1970s.

Fast forward to 2010 when parts of the book's chapters were published on the author's internet site *Independent Investigation of Truth* ([jameskeene.blogspot.com](http://jameskeene.blogspot.com)). Remarkably, after forty years, the content continued to be fresh and relevant.

Add another decade to the present, same deal. Why? The Baha'i writings focus on essential teachings on justice for humanity. In contrast, other sources may contain jargon and ideas popular for a time which fade as fads and fashions change. The Baha'i writings, however, focus on fundamental mechanisms of human development which remain constant.

A lesson from the foregoing 50 year story may be that the author should say the least possible to avoid that text becoming out-dated as times change. Thus, the reader will not find reference to, or discussion of, currently popular issues that may be completely forgotten in a few decades. This means the reader can customize the experience by creating his/her own analysis of issues presently popular in the media and public discourse.

In this book, quotations of the Baha'i writings start

with works by Baha'u'llah (Glory of God), who founded the Baha'i Faith in 1863. The writings of Baha'u'llah span the years of his revelation from 1852 to 1892.

Perhaps to prevent an endless number of interpretations and versions of these writings by Baha'u'llah, two and only two authorized interpreters were designated. First, 'Abdu'l-Baha (Servant of Baha), son of Baha'u'llah, was the center of the Baha'i Faith from 1892 to 1921. The writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha are viewed as Baha'i scripture. The second authorized interpreter was Shoghi Effendi, who served as Guardian of the Baha'i Faith from 1921 to 1957.

Almost all of the quoted writings in the present book are from Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha.

In 1963, The Universal House of Justice was elected as the top international administrative body of the worldwide Baha'i community, completing a transition from leadership by a single person to leadership by an elected body, a milestone transition in social organization.

Baha'u'llah is the primary source for the concept of justice presented, based on shaping of human behavior over time by rewards and punishments. It was over a half century later when researchers "discovered" this learning protocol previously defined by Baha'u'llah. In 1937, based on studies using animal subjects, experimental psychologist B F Skinner named this learning paradigm "operant conditioning", also known as "instrumental conditioning".

An important issue is the authenticity of texts comprising Baha'i writings as listed above. Almost all meet well-established scholarly criteria, such as chain of custody.

In a few cases, the authenticity may be in question. For example, when talks by 'Abdu'l-Baha were transcribed, did he actually review and approve each resulting text? There might also be some issues related to translation from Persian to English. Was the exact intent and meaning properly conveyed?

In this book, major points are quoted and emphasized, hopefully limiting or even eliminating any serious authenticity questions. Bold-face was sometimes added for emphasis by the author in quoted text.

Finally, the Baha'i writings presented are only a small sample of a vast number of documents produced by the central figures of the Baha'i Faith. The reader is invited to continue exploring this wonderful body of information ([www.bahai.org](http://www.bahai.org)).

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Pop Quiz:

**The Justice Book** is

- A. a survival manual
- B. an adventure story
- C. a justice cook-book
- D. justice made simple
- E. all of the above

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## WHAT IS JUSTICE?

Justice as set forth in the Baha'i writings unlocks the meaning of complex and confusing events in the world and how they are parts of a process by which mankind is evolving from its present turmoil to a unified world civilization.

In contrast, people often think of justice only in limited even though appropriate contexts such as in dispute resolution or prosecution for law violation.

However, for Baha'u'llah (Glory of God), the founder of the Baha'i Faith in the 19th century, justice is a principle to govern and organize society itself, God's judgment of society, not just a court's judgment of a law violation. In its most general definition, then, justice describes **the ongoing interaction between God and man**, an interaction which has three components: God's standard, man's alternatives, and the consequences of these alternatives.

### 1. God's Standard

Baha'u'llah declares that God is the source of the standard to which man's actions may be compared in order to learn their consequences:

Know verily that the essence of justice and the source thereof are both embodied in the ordinances proscribed by Him who is the Manifestation of the Self of God amongst men, if ye be of them that recognize this truth. He doth verily incarnate the highest, the infallible standard of justice unto all creation. (G,175)

As the body of man needeth a garment to clothe it, so the body of mankind must needs be adorned with the mantle justice and wisdom. Its robe is the Revelation vouchsafed unto it by God. (G,81)

A Book sent down in truth unto men of insight! It biddeth the people to observe justice and to work righteousness, and forbiddeth them to follow their corrupt inclinations and carnal desires, if perchance the children of men might be roused from their slumber. (G,306-307)

Baha'u'llah claimed to be God's current messenger for this modern era. Hence, his teachings may be considered as God's standard for this day:

Upon reflection, men of equity and discernment will witness, with outward and inward eyes, the effulgence of the orb of justice in all that We have revealed. (BWF,179)

The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice... (BWF,142)

In pursuing this theme, we shall quote liberally from Baha'u'llah and his Son, 'Abdu'l-Baha, given Baha'u'llah's statement:



Who else but Baha can speak forth before the face of men, and who else but He can have the power to pronounce that which He was bidden by God, the Lord of Hosts. (ESW,121)

God's standard applies to the behavior of all people since Baha'u'llah wrote that "None shall be secure this Day from the decree of God" (G,41). Assuring us that God's standard is geared to our capacity, Baha'u'llah states that "He will never deal unjustly with anyone, neither will He task a soul beyond its power" (G,106).

It may be a good idea to keep this in mind when we consider in more detail a little later some of Baha'u'llah's specific insights about and instructions for each phase of our communities.

## **2. Alternatives: Our Choices**

Although people often find themselves overwhelmed by the multitude of alternative actions that they might take, man is continually making choices between two basic alternatives: to act in accordance with God's standard or not. Baha'u'llah's teachings regulate the relationships among men and thus provide a sub-definition of justice which describes the quality of the interaction between man and man. 'Abdu'l-Baha points out that an expanded social consciousness is one of the main elements of this justice:

...justice and impartiality...means to have no regard for one's own personal benefits and selfish advantages, and to carry out the laws of God without the slightest concern for anything else. It means to see one's self as

only one of the servants of God, the All-Possessing, and except for aspiring spiritual distinction, never attempting to be singled out from the others. It means to consider the welfare of the community as one's own. It means, in brief, to regard humanity as a single individual, and one's own self as a member of that corporeal form, and to know of a certainty that if pain or injury afflicts any member of that body, it must inevitably result in suffering for all the rest. (SDC,39)

In the Bahá'í writings, this justice is an essential prerequisite for order in the world, for the unity of mankind, and even for the survival of the human race:

And the tent of the order of the world is hoisted and established on two pillars: reward and retribution. (BWF,198)

We entreat God to deliver the light of equity and the sun of justice from the thick clouds of waywardness...The establishment of order in the world and the tranquillity of the nations depend on it. (ESW,28-29)

Until these (justice and right) are realized on the plain of existence, all things shall be in disorder and remain imperfect. (BWF,290)

The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among people. In this exalted Word, the sea of God's wisdom is moving: all the books of the world are not sufficient to contain its interpretation. (BWF,182)

The tent of existence is upheld upon the

pillars of justice, and not upon forgiveness. The continuance of mankind depends upon justice, and not upon forgiveness...the constitution of communities depends upon justice, not upon forgiveness. (SAQ,309-310)

Justice and equity are twin guardians that watch over men. (ESW,13)

Justice, "the light of men" (BWF,182), is a characteristic distinctive of humankind and of the individual member of society:

Say: Observe equity in your judgment, ye men of understanding heart! He that is unjust in his judgment is destitute of the characteristics that distinguish man's station. (G,204)

Justice requires that one's words be congruent with his deeds:

O Son of Spirit! Know thou of a truth: He that biddeth men be just and himself committeth iniquity is not of Me, even though he bear My name. (HW,10)

Be fair to yourselves and to others, that the evidences of justice may be revealed, through your deeds, among Our faithful servants. (G,278)

This implies that a person should give himself a just and fair self-evaluation:

Set before thine eyes God's unerring Balance and, as one standing in His Presence, weigh in that balance thine actions every day, every moment of thy life. Bring thyself to account

ere thou art summoned to a reckoning...  
(PDC,39)

Another feature of justice is moderation:

Overstep not the bounds of moderation, and  
deal justly with them that serve thee. (G,235)

Whoso cleaveth to justice, can, under no  
circumstances, transgress the limits of  
moderation. (G,342)

Thus in the grand scheme of justice as an  
interaction between God and man, man's first  
alternative is to treat himself and his fellow man  
justly by obeying Baha'u'llah's teachings. The second  
basic alternative is to reject the Divine standard. In  
particular, as we shall see below, for each phase of  
our society, Baha'u'llah has specified man's  
alternatives in terms of God's standard.

### **3. Consequences**

The third component of divine justice is the  
consequences of man's actions. Like man's  
alternatives, these consequences can be divided into  
roughly two categories.

#### **(1) Reward**

The first is achieving the divine purpose for man,  
which involves carrying "forward and ever-advancing  
civilization" (BWF,114), in which the "potentialities  
inherent in the station of man, the full measure of  
his destiny on earth, the innate excellence of his  
reality, must all be manifested in this promised Day  
of God" (BWF,128-129). This is the result of  
obedience to God's standard and is experienced by

people as **reward**.

## **(2) Punishment**

The second group of consequences follow from a rejection of, or indifference to, Baha'u'llah's teachings which leaves unchecked the fundamental disease of human society for which Baha'u'llah prescribed his teachings. These consequences are further suffering and loss of human potential and may be likened unto **punishment** for this rejection.

## **Learning Process**

Thus divine justice is a learning process for man. Behavior congruent with God's standard is rewarding and hence strengthened though its own inherent wisdom as revealed by Baha'u'llah. On the other hand, actions contrary to Baha'u'llah's teachings and hence inhibiting growth are punished and eventually are extinguished when the punishment resulting from these actions is found to be more severe than the sacrifice of giving them up. Baha'u'llah declares:

O people of God! The trainer of the world is justice, for it consists of two pillars: Reward and retribution. These two pillars are two foundations for the life of the people of the world. (BWF,195)

The Great Being saith: The structure of world stability and order hath been reared upon, and will continue to be sustained by, the twin pillars of reward and punishment. (G,219)

Justice is receiving and giving what is deserved. "...for bounty is giving without desert, and justice is giving what is deserved" (SAQ,269). "Know that to do justice is to give to every one according to his deserts" (SAQ,304).

In sum, the three components of divine justice are:

- (1) the **standard** which defines the best means for human development and to which man's actions may be compared in order to learn whether they will have positive or negative consequences,
- (2) our choices, or **alternative actions**, which either accept or reject the divine standard, and
- (3) the rewards and punishments which are the **consequences** of these actions and by which people learn to fulfil their destiny through the plan of Baha'u'llah, who sums up the relationship between our alternatives and their consequences:

He who shall accept and believe, shall receive his reward; and he who shall turn away, shall receive none other than his own punishment. (G,339)

If ye believe, to your own behoof will ye believe; and if ye believe not, ye yourselves will suffer. (G,148)

The fear of God hath ever been the prime factor in the education of His creatures. (ESW,27)

Through initial acceptance of the divine standard or through the negative consequences of rejection, people come to

...know those things which lead to loftiness or to baseness, to shame or to honor, to affluence or to poverty. (BWF,167)

## God and People Interact: Gameboard Edition





## **THE POWER OF JUSTICE**

Baha'u'llah proclaims the power of divine justice in the current search by humanity for order: Justice is...

...a powerful force. It is, above all else, the conqueror of the citadels of the hearts and souls of men, and the revealer of the secrets of the world of being, and the standard-bearer of love and bounty. (ESW,32)

He warns unjust persons of position in the world not to take justice lightly:

Take heed, O concourse of the rulers of the world! There is no force on earth that can equal in its conquering power the force of justice and wisdom. (G,219)

No light can compare with the light of justice. (ESW,28)

The best beloved of all things in My sight is justice. (HW,3)

If this Cause be of God, no man can prevail against it... (G,220)

The following statement by Baha'u'llah dramatizes the power of justice by making it clear that divine justice, and not mercy, is the guiding force in the current affairs of the world:

God is my witness! Had it not been in conflict with that which the Tablets of God have decreed, I would have gladly kissed the hands of whosoever attempted to shed my blood in the path of the Well-Beloved. (G,102)

In Baha'u'llah's words, this is

the day when the Balance of Justice shall be set, the day when unto every one shall be rendered his due, when the doings of all men, be they rich or poor, shall be weighed. (G,251)

Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instill new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth. All the wondrous works ye behold in this world have been manifested through the operation of His supreme and most exalted Will, His wondrous and inflexible Purpose. (G,141)

## **JUSTICE IN THE CONDITION OF HUMANITY**

According to the process of divine justice, the cumulative progress of mankind up to our time is generally the consequence of acceptance of the guidelines laid down by God's great educators in the past, such as Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. Baha'is call this process "progressive revelation". The founders of the world's great religions are described as "manifestations of God".

Similarly, consequences of denial of the divine standard proclaimed by Baha'u'llah include the following features of the current sickness of humanity:

### **1. Suffering and Self-Punishment**

The promised day is come, the day when tormenting trials will have surged above your heads, and beneath your feet, saying: "Taste ye what your hands have wrought!" (PDC,3)

They are themselves the victims of what their own hearts have devised, and yet they perceive it not. (BWF,132)

...as they have failed to appreciate this loving-kindness and these bounties, they have been, and will be, afflicted with the retribution which their acts must entail. (ESW,106)

## **2. Blinded Perception**

The dust of sedition hath clouded the hearts of men, and blinked their eyes. (G,40)

## **3. Leaders and Persons of Position Lose Power**

From two ranks amongst men power hath been seized: kings and ecclesiastics. (PDC,20)

We had seized the reins of authority by the power of God and His Divine might, as He alone can seize, Who is the Mighty, the Strong. (ESW,105)

## **4. Eventual Perception of Past Errors**

Erelong, they will perceive the consequences of what their hands have wrought in the Day of God... This is the Day whereon the earth shall tell out her tidings. (G,40)

The time is at hand when whatsoever lieth hid in the souls and hearts of men will be disclosed. (ESW,107)

Erelong will ye witness the result of your deeds; for the Lord My God lieth in wait and is watchful of your behavior... (BA,174)

O Children of Fancy! Know verily, that while the radiant dawn breaketh above the horizon of eternal holiness, the satanic secrets and deeds done in the gloom of night shall be laid bare and manifest before the peoples of the world. (HW,65)

We have set forth the whole matter before thee, that perchance thou might realize what thou hast done... (G,230)

The world is in great turmoil, and the minds of its people are in a state of utter confusion. We entreat the Almighty that He may graciously illuminate them with the glory of His Justice, and enable them to discover that which will be profitable unto them at all times and under all conditions. (G,97-98)

Thus, one consequence of the past rejection of the divine standard and of the continuance of the malfunction for which this standard was prescribed is that these past errors and the perpetrators of these errors are eventually exposed.

### **5. The Present Plight of Justice**

Justice is, in this day, bewailing its plight, and Equity groaneth beneath the yoke of oppression. (G,92)

We entreat God to deliver the light of equity and the sun of justice from the thick clouds of waywardness, and cause them to shine forth upon man. (ESW,28)

### **6. The Extinction of the Old World Order**

The day is approaching when We will have rolled up the world and all that is therein, and spread out a new order in its stead. (G,313)

In sum, the justice in the condition of humanity today is that the above features of the sickness of individuals and society are the consequences of their failure to implement the new standard announced by Baha'u'llah.

### **Condition of Humanity**

1. Suffering and Self-Punishment
2. Blinded Perception
3. Leaders and Persons of Position Lose Power
4. Eventual Perception of Past Errors
5. The Present Plight of Justice
6. The Extinction of the Old World Order

In contrast to this disintegrative process, the unity, vigor and growth of the Baha'i world community are consequences of the extent to which its members have translated that which has been written in the Baha'i writings into reality and action. \*

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