

TOWARDS A NEW
SPIRITUAL
ECONOMIC
SYSTEM

FROM A BAHÁ'Í PERSPECTIVE

BADI SHAMS

Towards a New Spiritual Economic System

From a Baha'i perspective

Badi Shams

Introduction

This book is a collection of some of my work on the concept of Baha'i economics. My goal has always been to simplify economics and make it accessible for the reader and not use technical, economic vocabulary. I hope that the reader finds it easy to understand.

I pray that the reader will find it helpful.

Chapter 1. "Random Thoughts of a Mystic Economist" Collection of my articles published on the BahaiTeachings.org website on various subjects, mainly about economic issues.

Chapter 2. Practical economic suggestions for everyday living.

Chapter 3. Study of the Baha'i Writings on the subject of economics.

Chapter 4. Practical suggestions for serving humanity.

Chapter 5. Workshop material for in-depth study of the Baha'i Writings on economics.

Chapter 6. "Economics of the Future" Compilation of the Writings of Baha'u'llah, Abdu'l-Baha, and Shoghi Effendi related to economics.

Chapter 7. "Guidelines for Economic Living" Compilation of the Writings of the Universal House of Justice on economic-related subjects.

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Dedicated to

*To all who vision spirituality as the foundation for
building the new economic system for the future*

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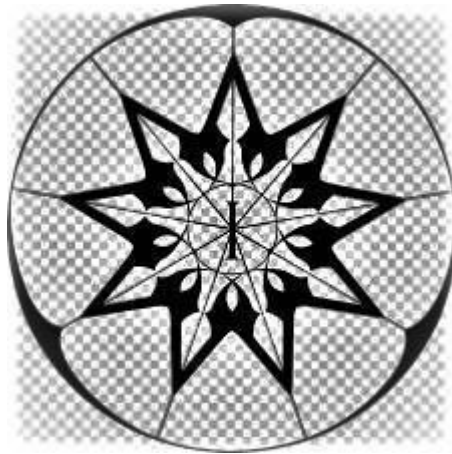
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Chapter 1

Random Thoughts of a Mystic Economist



Introduction

This chapter is a compilation of my writings at different times and in various situations of my life, describing my thoughts and emotions. They reflect my efforts to follow the Teachings of the Baha'i Faith. They show my love for mysticism and are influenced by mystics like Rumi, Kahlil Gibran, Hafiz, and others. They also highlight my formal training and degrees and informal training from the classroom of life.

I have tried to unite the two forces of spirituality and materialism to serve me. In these modern times, mystics with no financial resources have been denying themselves contemporary life's realities and unsuccessfully trying to turn the clock back to the past where life was simple.

On the other hand, without mysticism and spirituality filtering our material desires, our souls will suffocate in the atmosphere of materialism and greed caused by our modern economic system.

I believe that both mysticism and economics are gifts from the Creator for us to use wisely.

The key to happiness is balancing these two opposing energies to lead us to a positive and fulfilling life on this earth and prepare us for the next journey to the spiritual world.

In these writings, I hope that the readers will see the oneness of God, the oneness, religion, and humanity's oneness and recognize that all religions teach the same spiritual laws. They may also see my struggles in their struggles, taking comfort in knowing that life is a process of facing challenges in finding the right path to the Beloved.

Towards A New Spiritual Economic System

Our present economic system is sick and dying and cannot meet the needs of humanity.

The gap between rich and poor continues to grow wider and wider, which has increased the suffering of the masses. The solutions that can heal that suffering have been largely ignored.

The time has come to re-examine the fundamental assumptions that this system was built on and replace them with humane and moral ones. There is a great need to build an economic system fit to help humanity achieve its goal of an ever-advancing civilization, a world free of economic injustice, where people have all the necessities of life to live peaceful and fulfilling lives.

To accomplish all this, we need a shift in thinking. The Baha'i Teachings provide insights and suggestions to lay the foundation for a better economic future. We have the solutions and the technology to build a new system; all we need is the resolve and the will. Everyone has an inherent power to contribute and participate in this wonderful process. The time for action is upon us:

The welfare of any segment of humanity is inextricably bound up with the welfare of the whole. Humanity's collective life suffers when any one group thinks of its own well-being in isolation from that of its neighbours' or pursues economic gain without regard for how the natural environment, which provides sustenance for all, is affected. A stubborn obstruction, then, stands in the way of meaningful social progress: time and again, avarice and self-interest prevail at the expense of the common good. Unconscionable quantities of wealth are being amassed, and the instability this creates is made worse by how income and opportunity are spread so unevenly both between nations and within nations. But it need not be so. – The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017.

Unfortunately, today money is the yardstick we use to measure failure and success. This yardstick has derailed humanity from its spiritual path. Baha'is all around the world work towards a day when we will grow and expand our horizons and adopt a more spiritual yardstick for human achievements.

Money cannot and should not be the only means of measuring our lives. But now, we are far from that future and need to remember that a new economic system will occur when humanity and society's spiritual transformation has been accomplished, and with it, man's awareness of his spiritual station and his destiny.

In that future state of society, we will have subordinated our lower nature and behave less selfishly. Yes, currently, it is almost impossible to imagine such a society. But by introducing more of the spiritual qualities in our individual lives, we are laying the foundation for such a society and such an economic system. This goal may seem idealistic—but we are all dreaming of a better world and, with it, a new economic system. First, let us try to understand economics from the Baha'i point of view:

The secrets of the whole economic question are Divine in nature, and are concerned with the world of the heart and spirit. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Baha'i World*, Volume IV, p. 448.

We can empower ourselves to accelerate this fundamental change by being aware of things we can do to reach a better economic system. If we find an answer to the essential questions in life –“who am I,” “what is the purpose of my life” and “how much is enough,” we may then choose to live a simple life and determine to resist the consumer mentality and the tendency to buy the latest models when the old ones still function.

Suppose we approach work as a form of worship and spend as much energy in being contented and detached from material possessions as we spend getting them. In that case, we will transform ourselves into happier beings. Using honesty as our yardstick, we can avoid following society's shortcuts regarding taxation, insurance and expense claims. As business owners, we can practice contentment with a reasonable margin of profit and charge just interest rates, provide medical coverage, pay fair wages and share the profits we make with our employees. We can be honest about our products, fill out tenders and contracts and look for opportunities to help employees, co-workers, and even competitors. We can use excellent quality material with no wastage and no environmentally harmful ingredients.

As consumers, we can be knowledgeable about the lure of advertising and be honest in job interviews. We can report when we have been undercharged. We can replace competition with co-operation. If we truly follow a moral path in all our dealings, we will find ways to change the status quo by voluntarily contributing to charities and funds to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor.

Small changes in our attitude will change our daily economic activities, eventually leading us to a new economic system based on humanity, not greed. We have tremendous power as individuals to transform society and raise the standards for economic interactions. We owe it to all the poor and underprivileged people of the world who our present economic system has ignored. Their suffering is our failure to make a change.

The Connection Between Spiritual Principles and Financial Planning

I have often been asked by young people or their parents how they should plan to start their economic journey. It is a journey that has caused the ruin of many wise and spiritual individuals as they sink into the depths of the bottomless ocean of materialism.

There is nothing wrong with planning for a successful financial life and becoming wealthy, provided we realize that wealth can be a beautiful and a God-given tool to use to support our families and give service to humanity. The emphasis must be that it is a tool and not the goal for our creation.

Abdu'l-Baha, one of the central figures of the Baha'i Faith, wrote :

“Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual’s own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes. Above all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement, for such a benefactor would supply the needs and insure the comfort and well-being of a great multitude. Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy.”

We can teach the next generation to plan for their future and not feel guilty about acquiring wealth, provided they include spirituality in their financial plans. A balanced financial plan consists of both material goals and spiritual aspirations. Such a plan has the potential to guide young people to the full enjoyment of the fruit of their hard work through success financially and spiritually.

The pressure to plan for the future in our materialistic world is a great challenge even for mature adults, so it must be more challenging for the young. With so many crises going on today, it is difficult for many young people to imagine themselves in the future and see their place in it. I think about them and worry for their future — a future that seemingly does not look as bright as it did for me. Added to the age-old sentiment of not being taken seriously by the older generation, they face environmental challenges, fewer job opportunities, and a lack of job security. This pandemic also is a reminder that they may face more challenges of that kind in the future.

In many countries, parents plan for their kids to become doctors or engineers or follow the family business. Here in the West, the trend is to plan to earn lots of money. In this way, parents have decided their child’s life plan for them, and this support system is outdated. My heart goes out to young people who, pressured by the old ways, are trying to chart their path to the future.

Parents may also fail to teach their children the concept of delayed gratification. Those who practice delayed gratification demonstrate a well-defined purpose in life and the need to accomplish worthwhile goals. Delayed gratification means accepting the awareness of life’s

journey as a long one and planning for it. As Canadian motivational speaker Brian Tracy put it, “The ability to discipline yourself to delay gratification in the short term in order to enjoy greater rewards in the long term, is the indispensable prerequisite for success.” Speaking of children, Abdu’l-Baha, one of the central figures of the Baha’i Faith, advised parents to lovingly **“accustom them to hardship.”** He wrote:

“While the children are yet in their infancy feed them from the breast of heavenly grace, foster them in the cradle of all excellence, rear them in the embrace of bounty. Give them the advantage of every useful kind of knowledge. Let them share in every new and rare and wondrous craft and art. Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship. Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind.”

But to protect their children, parents may avoid creating such conditions and seek to protect them from any hardship. In addition, the education system, which should be preparing youth for the future, seems to be failing them. Many of my ex-students confessed that their years in school were wasted since they did not learn the basics of economic life and how to plan a practical economic path for their future.

Unfortunately, the education system has become a steppingstone for material success without considering other aspects of young people’s lives — the moral and spiritual aspects. Their schooling may lead them to material success but at the cost of their spiritual and human duties to themselves and humanity. They become one-sided individuals who have put all their energies into material achievements, forgetting to nurture their souls. Why? Because when they chart their future, they do not consider their spiritual goals.

I am reminded of this quotation from Abdu’l-Baha:

For man two wings are necessary. One wing is physical power and material civilization; the other is spiritual power and divine civilization. With one wing only, flight is impossible. Two wings are essential. Therefore, no matter how much material civilization advances, it cannot attain to perfection except through the uplift of spiritual civilization.

The most significant benefit of a balanced economic plan in life is that no matter who charts the financial goals, whether parents or the social trends, youth have the power to attach to it their spiritual and moral goals. In case their financial goals fail, spiritual goals can give them peace of mind that they did not waste God’s precious gift of life chasing only economic aims. Spiritual goals also help them avoid the world’s material traps.

We can offer our young generation the best gift by reminding them that they should not forget their spiritual goals, duties, and obligations and ensure that a spiritual plan is an integral part of their future economic planning.

How to Start Selflessly Serving Others

Every concerned citizen of this world struggles to balance their time, juggling efforts at spiritual growth, family life, work, and community commitments.

No thanks to technological advancement, with so many gadgets that enable us to multitask more and more, we have been transformed from human beings to human doings.

Also, the rampant spread of materialism threatens our spiritual growth and drains our energy. Given all this frenetic activity, how can we have time for one more thing—one more social action, one more commitment? Though providing a service to others may initially sound like one more chore to fit into our already busy lives, it does not necessarily need to become a big project. Any look, gesture, word, or action that helps others can give the gift of an act of service.

The concept of service is nothing new to most of us. We have a wealth of spiritual teachings on this subject from many religious sources, philosophers, poets, great thinkers, and humanitarians. We know how holy figures like Jesus, Muhammad, Mahatma Gandhi and Abdu'l-Baha exemplified service throughout their lives:

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. – Mark 10:45.

And do not forget to do good to one another. – Quran 2:238.

That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. – Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 250.

The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others. – Mahatma Gandhi

Service to humanity is service to God. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 8.

How else can our world become united if its citizens do not try to help each other? How else can the sufferings of the world be reduced? Like you and me, the world's ordinary people will ultimately make a difference and make this earth a better and more peaceful place—if we take one more extra step to help our fellow human beings.

The Baha'i teachings encourage all people to extend themselves into the arena of service to others:

A Baha'i who serves others is like unto a candle which burns and sheds light upon all those who circle around it. The highest attainable station of the candle is to burn and brighten the dark room, and the loftiest pinnacle of our progress and perfection is to be confirmed in service... – Abdu'l-Baha, *Star of the West*, Volume 8, p. 61.

Let us revisit this concept of service in each of our lives, and with the help of the brief list below, look at the many possibilities of service open to us. You can get involved with some service that fulfils your commitment and connects you to the larger community. This may also create more opportunities to meet people and introduce the concept of service to others in the best light possible through your actions. This list of service opportunities may help you find a service matching your talent or your passion:

- Doing one's job the best way possible is not only a great service—the Baha'i teachings considered it an act of worship
- Offering others your best self with a kind gesture, a kind word, a kind act. Give random acts of kindness: paying for someone in front of you in line, giving your place in line to someone in a rush, presenting a stranger with a bouquet of flowers, mowing the neighbour's lawn.
- Visiting and volunteering in senior facilities, group homes and hospitals
- Driving people to appointments, or shopping and cleaning for your neighbours
- Volunteering in women's centers, treatment facilities, homeless shelters, and organizations
- Teaching classes: dance, music, art, sports, literacy, computers and many other subjects
- Calling or visiting those in need—offering your companionship to people
- Teaching house repair, appliance repair or car repair
- Helping refugees and newcomers, volunteering with the Welcome Wagon
- Offering counselling, medical, or legal services
- Doing the sets, makeup, or costumes for plays
- And simply remembering, in your thoughts and prayers, those who are going through a difficult time.

As you embark on your quest to serve humanity, a few words of caution: Please make sure, while offering your services, that you respect the boundaries of agencies, individuals, and families. Also, focus on why you are there serving. Some people volunteer in organizations for self-recognition or out of boredom and do not really capture the essence of serving others with selfless intention. Be aware of this in any voluntary situation so it does not discourage you or negatively influence you.

However, if you approach the opportunity to serve others with a radiant countenance and the pure motivation of kindness and love, you'll find that the gifts you give will come back to you a thousand-fold.

Gross National Happiness & Other Spiritual Approaches to Wealth

We live in an age in which new ideas are born each day in every field of learning. I find quite interesting the many alternative ideas and theories suggesting new ways of solving our economic problems. As a member of the Baha'i Faith, I like to examine these theories from a Baha'i point of view. You may be wondering what needs fixing in the current economic situation in the world. One worthy answer to that question can be found in these words of Abdu'l-Baha:

Although the body politic is one family yet because of lack of harmonious relations some members are comfortable and some in direst misery, some members are satisfied, and some are hungry, some members are clothed in most costly garments and some families are in need of food and shelter. Why? Because this family lacks the necessary reciprocity and symmetry. This household is not well arranged. This household is not living under a perfect law. All the laws which are legislated do not ensure happiness. They do not provide comfort. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 38.

Of all the new concepts out there, I am especially attracted to two: Gross National Happiness and “barefoot economics.”

Gross National Happiness

As you probably know, the Gross National Product (GNP)—the total production of a given country—is the yardstick typically used to measure economic progress or growth. A higher GNP means more production and more growth in a given country. However, other concepts such as Gross National Happiness (GNH) have challenged the GNP's effectiveness.

A philosophy introduced by the king of Bhutan in 1972, GNH is calculated by an index that measures the collective happiness and well-being of a population. GNH is the goal of the government of Bhutan as stated in its constitution, enacted on 18 July 2008. The Bhutan GNH Index was first published in 2012.

GNH values collective happiness as the goal of governance by emphasizing harmony with nature and traditional values as expressed in nine domains of happiness and four pillars of GNH. The four pillars are:

1. Sustainable and equitable socio-economic development
2. Environmental conservation
3. Preservation and promotion of culture
4. Good governance

The nine domains of GNH are psychological well-being, health, time use, education, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity, and living standards.

“Barefoot Economics”

Acclaimed Chilean economist Manfred Max-Neef introduced the concept of “barefoot economics” in the 1980s. He explained, “The point is, you know, that economists study and analyze poverty in their nice offices, have all the statistics, make all the models, and are convinced that they know everything that you can know about poverty. But they don’t understand poverty.” – Daniel Margrain, “Stepping in the mud with the barefoot economist Max-Neef,” Scisno Media, 24 November 2016.

Max-Neef believes we have to look at economics with a new approach and change it fundamentally—or else humanity is bound to have a disastrous future. He says a good economic system has to be desirable to everyone since one is supposed to be designed and implemented for everyone. He is disappointed that most governments and economists in the world failed to learn from the financial crisis of 2008—even though they acknowledge the current economic system isn’t working (and some even say it’s poisonous).

Max-Neef suggests we build a new economic system based on five postulates and one fundamental value. The five postulates are:

1. The economy exists to serve the people, rather than the people existing to serve the economy
2. Development is about people and not about objects
3. Growth is not the same as development, and development does not necessarily require growth
4. No economy is possible in the absence of ecosystem services
5. The economy is a subsystem of a larger finite system, the biosphere, and so permanent growth is impossible

The fundamental value for sustaining a new economy should be that economic interest will never be allowed, under any circumstances, to be valued above reverence of life.

Correlation With The Baha’i Teachings

The central themes of GNH and “barefoot economics”—humanity’s happiness and respect for nature—are valued in the Baha’i teachings. It’s exciting to me that so many people with great awareness are looking at the world’s economic problems and offering remedies for its ills. I believe some of these wonderful ideas offered by so many amazing people will be considered for and incorporated into future economic systems. At the same time, it can be confusing to read, study, and try to synthesize all these different concepts and ideas, so I often use the Baha’i writings as my yardstick to place them in context and assess their value and

effectiveness in solving economic problems. In that spirit, I'll close with two passages sharing Baha'i perspectives on economics and how to effect fundamental economic change:

The secrets of the whole economic question are divine in nature, and are concerned with the world of the heart and spirit. In the Baha'i teachings this is most completely explained, and without the consideration of the Baha'i teachings, it is impossible to bring about a better state. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Star of the West*, Volume 22, Issue 3, p. 75.

By the statement 'the economic solution is divine in nature' is meant that religion alone can, in the last resort, bring in man's nature such a fundamental change as to enable him to adjust the economic relationships of society. It is only in this way that man can control the economic forces that threaten to disrupt the foundations of his existence, and thus assert his mastery over the forces of nature. – Shoghi Effendi, 26 December 1935, letter to an individual believer.

Making Sense of These Confusing Times

These days, the world's events baffle both the learned and the ignorant, confuse the young and the old, and perplex people of all ideologies and religions.

Because I'm a Baha'i, strangers and friends want to know what I think about the world's seemingly unresolvable problems. Even if they don't know much about the Baha'i Faith, they usually have some sense that my Faith gives me reasons to view world events differently. So I tell them that Baha'is believe humanity's future is bright and that humanity cannot resolve these upheavals using ideologies of bygone days or even today's digital database solutions.

They wonder about the source of these problems, and I am compelled to tell them that the Baha'i teachings cite the lack of morality and lack of spirituality in the world:

All conditions and requisites of the past unfitted and inadequate for the present time are undergoing radical reform. It is evident, therefore, that counterfeit and spurious religious teaching, antiquated forms of belief and ancestral imitations which are at variance with the foundations of divine reality must also pass away and be reformed. They must be abandoned and new conditions be recognized. The morals of humanity must undergo change. New remedies and solutions for human problems must be adopted. Human intellects themselves must change and be subject to the universal reformation. Just as the thoughts and hypotheses of past ages are fruitless today, likewise dogmas and codes of human invention are obsolete and barren of product in religion. Nay, it is true that they are the cause of enmity and conducive to strife in the world of humanity; war and bloodshed proceed from them, and the oneness of mankind finds no recognition in their observance. Therefore, it is our duty in this radiant century to investigate the essentials of divine religion, seek the realities underlying the oneness of the world of humanity and discover the source of fellowship and agreement which will unite mankind in the heavenly bond of love. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 143.

Humanity has lost its moral compass, and even human history cannot help us find our way out because the rate of change has accelerated so fast that we have no historical reference point. But we do know how many times humanity has reached the point of no return and has found a way out of seemingly impossible situations. World War II is an excellent example of when everything seemed very dark and hopeless, yet the forces of good managed to prevail.

Regardless of past history, though, it's hard to deny the gravity of our present world situation: the plight of millions of refugees who are running from terror and economic misery; the extreme nationalism leading to the election of governments throughout the world that enforce strict border controls, leaving migrant populations to endure in demeaning conditions; climate change that threatens the existence of the world to the point that the young generation wonders if it has a future; the religious fundamentalism and fanaticism spreading in every corner of the world, the glut of misinformation and propaganda that has replaced decency, respectful discourse and facts.

The Baha'i writings have helped me clarify what is happening and how the future will look. I believe in humanity's resilience and the reality of Divine guidance, which has helped humanity reach this point from our beginnings in the Stone Age. I see the present situation in the world as a process that humanity has to endure because when Baha'u'llah proclaimed his message to the rulers and the people of the world, he warned them about the consequences of their denial:

The world is in travail and its agitation waxeth day by day. Its face is turned toward waywardness and unbelief. Such shall be its plight that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly. Its perversity will long continue. And when the appointed hour is come, there shall suddenly appear that which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake. Then, and only then, will the Divine Standard be unfurled, and the Nightingale of Paradise warble its melody. – Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 118.

That nothing short of the fire of a severe ordeal, unparalleled in its intensity, can fuse and weld the discordant entities that constitute the elements of present-day civilization, into the integral components of the world commonwealth of the future, is a truth which future events will increasingly demonstrate. – Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 46.

Humanity today stands at a crossroads, and every individual has the privilege to be part of the plan to lead it towards unity and harmony. So I tell my friends that though they have an accurate picture of the problems in the world, they are wrong to give up and accept defeat while the struggle between the forces of construction and destruction plays out all around us. These upheavals send us signals so that we can play our part in preparing for a new spiritually-based system of global governance:

Through the power of Baha'u'llah all will be united. He upraised this standard of the oneness of humanity in prison. When subjected to banishment by two kings, while a refugee from enemies of all nations and during the days of His long imprisonment He wrote to the kings and rulers of the world in words of wonderful eloquence, arraigning them severely and summoning them to the divine standard of unity and justice. He exhorted them to peace and international agreement, making it incumbent upon them to establish a board of international arbitration—that from all nations and governments of the world there should be delegates selected for a congress of nations which should constitute a universal arbitral court of justice to settle international disputes. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 202-203.

As for the present time trends, it seems that in most cases, kindness and cooperation towards our fellow humans have taken a back seat to nationalism and self-interest. I believe that these trends are the “last hurrahs” of the decaying old order, whose followers are making a desperate attempt to hold on to political control. Yes, the world's changes are rapid and confusing, and most of the people in charge of making policies and laws cling to short-sighted goals instead of working for the betterment of the conditions of the world in all areas of life.

But all of this upheaval provides us with the opportunity to re-examine our values, to take hold of the vision of a united and peaceful world, and become a powerful part of its construction of a better future.

Karma, the Golden Rule and Newton's Third Law

We've all heard about the law of karma—or, if you prefer a more scientific approach, the law of cause and effect. Essentially, both describe the same underlying principle.

These two laws of karma and causality—the related concepts common to Buddhist, Hindu, Jain and many other religious traditions—essentially say that every action has a consequence, and that good actions will inevitably have good consequences.

Most people believe in those laws, which basically state that any individual's intent and actions will influence their future. That's a beautiful thing because any concept that makes us think about our actions' consequences will help us become better people, making the world a better place.

The law of karma makes us aware of our responsibility for our actions and creates the rational fear of committing an unkind act, mainly because we do not want the same thing to happen to us.

You can compare the law of karma with Newton's third law of motion in a scientific sense. Simply put, this law states that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Newton proposed it to describe physics' laws in the material universe—but it also expresses the truth of our spiritual reality. In fact, karma, causality and Newton's third law all express the same thing, and when combined, they express something even more profound—the essential harmony of science and religion.

The Baha'i writings explicitly endorse that harmony. Without it, they say, superstitions and dogmas ruin the purity of religion. Religious history offers many examples of this fact, where spiritual laws gradually turned into meaningless rituals and denial of scientific reality:

Religion and Science are inter-twined with each other and cannot be separated. These are the two wings with which humanity must fly. One wing is not enough. Every religion which does not concern itself with science is mere tradition ... Therefore science, education and civilization are most important necessities for the full religious life.

– Abdu'l-Baha, *Abdu'l-Baha in London*, p. 29.

God has endowed man with intelligence and reason whereby he is required to determine the verity of questions and propositions. If religious beliefs and opinions are found contrary to the standards of science they are mere superstitions and imaginations; for the antithesis of knowledge is ignorance, and the child of ignorance is superstition. Unquestionably there must be agreement between true religion and science. If a question be found contrary to reason, faith and belief in it are impossible ... – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 181.

According to the basic Sanskrit definition, karma simply means “action.” In essence, everything we do creates corresponding energy that comes back to us in some form or another—or, as the common phrase says, “what goes around comes around.”

Newton's third law says: For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. When applied, we know that physical force will cause a reaction and that no force or energy vanishes into nothing.

A word or an action by a person releases energies, too, just like the physical forces that affect the material world. These energies could be positive or negative, and the returning energies reflect that original intent.

The Baha'i teachings remind us about the consequences of our negative actions and why we should be conscious of them:

O companion of my throne! Hear no evil, and see no evil, abase not thyself, neither sigh and weep. Speak no evil, that thou mayest not hear it spoken unto thee, and magnify not the faults of others that thine own faults may not appear great; and wish not the abasement of anyone, that thine own abasement be not exposed. Live then the days of thy life, that are less than a fleeting moment, with thy mind stainless, thy heart unsullied, thy thoughts pure, and thy nature sanctified, so that, free and content, thou mayest put away this mortal frame, and repair unto the mystic paradise and abide in the eternal kingdom for evermore. – Baha'u'llah, *The Hidden Words*, p. 37.

These two laws may explain why all the religions and philosophers have universally agreed on the Golden Rule concept, which has been expressed in different wordings in many religions. The Golden Rule looks like the by-product of these two laws. What one puts in, whether physical or spiritual, that same energy will eventually come back. The Golden Rule makes us aware of our actions, so we can ponder the outcome before taking action or applying force.

Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. – Buddhism

In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. – Christianity

One word which sums up the basis of all good conduct...loving-kindness. Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself. – Confucianism

This is the sum of duty; do naught onto others what you would not have them do unto you. – Hinduism

Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself. – Islam.

What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. This is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary. Go and learn it. – Judaism

Do not wrong or hate your neighbor. For it is not he who you wrong, but yourself. – Native American Pima Proverb

Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself. – Zoroastrianism

The Baha'i teachings express the Golden Rule this way:

Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself. – Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 129.

So the conclusion becomes very clear if we look at our actions through Newton's law, the law of karma, or the Golden Rule. All of those immutable laws tell us that we should be very considerate and mindful of our actions because they always have consequences. In a sense, we create our own happiness, misery, or our hell and heaven.

Although we may never feel the results of our actions in this temporal world, those karmic consequences have more significance when seen in the light of our spiritual journey beyond this earthly life. Though these laws encourage us to be thoughtful about our actions lest we hurt someone, that is not the highest goal for us. Our goal is to achieve what Abdu'l-Baha has asked us to become:

Man is he who forgets his own interests for the sake of others. His own comfort he forfeits for the well-being of all. ... Nay, rather, his own life must he be willing to forfeit for the life of mankind. Such a man is the honor of the world of humanity. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Star of the West*, Volume 6, p. 304.

Religious Prejudice: A Personal Journey from East to West

The world at the moment faces many difficulties, and the foundations of our civilization have been threatened. One of those challenges is religious prejudice. But during a recent trip to a town in India, I witnessed something inspiring: people from different faiths coming together in unity. This reminded me that fostering the understanding that all religions are one and come from the same divine source is key to solving this world's challenges.

I travelled to India to get away from the consumerism of Christmas. Once there, one of the churches in town invited me to celebrate Christmas with them. I really like the idea of commemorating religious occasions with followers of any religion since it creates unity.

My dedication to eliminating racial prejudice comes, in part, from my own experience. I was born in Iran to a family that was all Muslims — except for my father, who was a Baha'i. My family exposed me to all the Islamic ceremonies and events, and my father tried to connect me to the Baha'i teachings. The sentiments of my Islamic environment influenced me. For example, I wanted badly to participate in the anniversary of the third Imam of Shi'a Islam's martyrdom and beat my chest to mourn his death, even though it happened centuries ago.

But when I chose to become a member of the Baha'i Faith, I became a target. I experienced a rude awakening at a tender age — my family members, my cousins, and even my grandma saw me as an inferior being. I heard many negative comments made about the followers of other religions but never about Moses or Jesus. Jesus' name is mentioned more than 51 times in Qur'an. That is because Jesus and Moses have been given the same station as Mohammad as one of the Prophets of God, sent by God to guide humanity.

Say (O Muslims): We believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered. -The Qur'an, Sura 2 – The Heifer

This is no different from what the Baha'i Writings teach:

It is clear and evident to thee that all the Prophets are the Temples of the Cause of God, Who have appeared clothed in diverse attire. If thou wilt observe with discriminating eyes, thou wilt behold Them all abiding in the same tabernacle, soaring in the same heaven, seated upon the same throne, uttering the same speech, and proclaiming the same Faith. Such is the unity of those Essences of Being, those Luminaries of infinite and immeasurable splendor! – Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*.

Later in life, in the 1980s, I moved to Canada. I had all these ideas about meeting people with whom I could talk and even disagree. That was my second — and perhaps worse — a rude awakening. To my shock, I witnessed a lack of knowledge and prejudice towards Muslims in particular and other minorities in general. As a Baha'i, I faced some persecution by some of

the Muslims in Canada — and now people called me “Muslim” and told me to return where I had come from.

I could not believe Westerners were so unaware of the truth about Islam. Most interpreted the actions of some Muslims as Islamic laws. In a peace walk and on other occasions, I tried to remind my fellow peace lovers about the role religious prejudice plays in creating wars and the importance of fighting them. After all, silence on prejudice is equal to supporting it and enabling it.

A concept addresses the problem of religious prejudice emphasized in the Baha’i teachings: the individual independent investigation of truth. I’ve seen firsthand how searching for truth for oneself changes hearts and ends prejudice rather than following what others say.

Abdu’l Baha wrote:

...every individual member of humankind is exhorted and commanded to set aside superstitious beliefs, traditions and blind imitation of ancestral forms in religion and investigate reality for himself. Inasmuch as the fundamental reality is one, all religions and nations of the world will become one through investigation of reality. – Abdu’l Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

With that in mind, the Christmas observance in India turned out to be very special.

The church also invited local dignitaries and other representatives from federal and local governments alongside all the leaders and representatives of all the religions in town. They even requested that a religious leader who belonged to no religion be present.

Everyone talked about the message of love that Jesus preached and reminded us how that message is still relevant and needed.

One of the speakers who represented a mosque in town surprised me by addressing followers of his own religion and quoting from the Quran:

“Those messengers – some of them We caused to exceed others. Among them were those to whom Allah spoke, and He raised some of them in degree. And We gave Jesus, the Son of Mary, clear proofs, and We supported him with the Pure Spirit.” – Qur’an 2:253.

This speaker further addressed his fellow Muslims and said that you are not a true Muslim if you do not believe in Jesus and give Him the reverence befitting His station.

I was touched by this gesture of fighting prejudice from within — a Muslim speaker reminding other Muslims in what light they have to see Jesus.

We must hold on to basic truths such as the oneness of God, the oneness of the source of all religions is one, and, most important of all, the oneness of mankind. Let’s investigate the truth about other faiths to offset the harm of religious prejudice. There is so much common ground in all religions — much more than any differences.

Simple Living a Solution in Times of Crisis

In these recent times, the events of the world again turn our attention to what is essential for our existence and what things are mere distractions and not necessary.

When we face a situation where we have to decide what is necessary, we are surprised to see how simple our needs are. You can listen to the stories of people who have faced death or a deadly disease and realized how wealth and possessions lose their charms and don't matter at all.

Throughout human history, we have examples of great people like the Sufis and the followers of other religions who practiced simplicity and advocated living a simple life and avoiding the complications that excess materialism brings with it. Manifestations of God like Jesus, Mohammad, Buddha, Moses, and Baha'u'llah, the Prophet-Founder of the Baha'i Faith, exemplified simple living.

However, we also have the example of other people who were regular people like you and me — such as Gandhi, who famously said, **“Live simply so that others may simply live.”** They showed us how simple living is done by practicing it.

The industrialization has brought with it the ability to have things that past generations could not dream of. It has led to us accumulating things that seemed necessary, and yet, in reality, we could easily do without them. This has brought us to where we are now. When a pandemic suddenly makes us think about what is essential and what is not. It teaches us what we can do with so little. Abdu'l-Baha, the son of Baha'u'llah, wrote:

Observe how darkness has overspread the world. In every corner of the earth there is strife, discord and warfare of some kind. Mankind is submerged in the sea of materialism and occupied with the affairs of this world. They have no thought beyond earthly possessions and manifest no desire save the passions of this fleeting, mortal existence. Their utmost purpose is the attainment of material livelihood, physical comforts and worldly enjoyments such as constitute the happiness of the animal world rather than the world of man. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*

Living a simple life brings peace of mind and removes some of the distractions of our life's journey. Many studies indicate that simplicity reduces stress in life and creates a sense of freedom from the burden of unnecessary possessions.

For those of us who prefer other ways than the religious approach of denouncing material possessions, there is a movement called “voluntary simplicity.” It encourages people to live a simple life by downsizing their lives. This movement has been described as “an anti-consumerist way of life that opposes the high consumption lifestyles prevalent in consumer societies today and voluntarily embraces ‘a simpler life’ of reduced consumption.”

Voluntary simplicity counters the effects of collecting possessions and believing they are necessary for survival. In reality, possessions often complicate our lives by making us feel

dependent on them. This way of thinking has led us to forget our spiritual destiny. The Baha'i Writings tell us:

Consider to what a remarkable extent the spirituality of people has been overcome by materialism so that spiritual susceptibility seems to have vanished, divine civilization become decadent, and guidance and knowledge of God no longer remain. All are submerged in the sea of materialism. – *Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace*

It should be noted that voluntary simplicity does not mean living in poverty, becoming an ascetic monk, or indiscriminately renouncing all the advantages of science and technology. It does not involve regressing to a primitive state or becoming a self-righteous puritan. And it is not some escapist fad reserved for saints, hippies, or eccentric outsiders. Instead, advocates of voluntary simplicity suggest that we examine our relationships with money, material possessions, the planet, ourselves, and each other. Voluntary simplicity is about discovering the freedom and contentment that comes with knowing how much consumption is enough.

This theme has something to say to everyone, especially those in consumer cultures bombarded daily with thousands of cultural and institutional messages insisting that more is always better. Voluntary simplicity is a philosophy of living that advocates a counter-cultural position based on notions of sufficiency and simplicity.

Voluntary simplicity can create a sense of peace of mind and free us to spend time on the goals that matter more in life. Some of the benefits of living this way are:

- **Conscious Consumption**

Living a simpler life isn't just about spending less — it's also about spending consciously. That means taking a careful look at every purchase and asking yourself whether it's worth the money you're spending, and the hours you're spending to make that money.

- **Fewer Belongings**

One side effect of consuming consciously is that you end up with fewer belongings.

- **Smaller Homes**

Housing is the biggest expense in most families' budgets, accounting for 26% of total spending. So it makes sense that families that want to downshift their spending often start by downsizing their homes. Choosing a small house can also simplify a family's life by giving them less space to maintain and clean and less room to accumulate more stuff.

- **Lower Energy Use**

Another benefit of smaller homes is that they use less energy to heat and cool. By choosing to live small and cutting back on the number of electrical gadgets, people can reduce their electricity use to the point where they can power their homes with solar panels or other forms of renewable energy.

- **Conscious Eating**

For most downshiffters, living simply also means eating simply: home-cooked meals made with whole, unprocessed foods.

- **Shorter Work Hours**

Voluntary simplicity isn't just about spending less money. The main point for most downshiffters is that, by spending less, they can afford to work less. If we reconnect with what is vital in our lives and worthy of our attention — and what is not — we can simplify our lives. That, in turn, could lead to living a less complicated existence based on solid personal principles. Those principles are what can guide us through times of crisis without feeling any sense of panic and help us stay firmly focused on the things that matter to our individual and collective progress, both spiritually and materially.

2 Effective Ways to Fight Your Ego, that Dangerous Enemy Within

No matter how we succeed in any field, a great danger exists within us all—the human ego. That common inner enemy has destroyed millions' relationships, careers and lives.

Our ego—the insistent, grasping, demanding lower self inside everyone—can make a lifetime of achievements disappear in an instant. It can manifest itself in the form of a gesture, a look, a word or an action, but the end result is often the same.

When the ego dominates our behaviour, it usually results in a victory for negativity and passivity or evil forces. Like a volcano ready to erupt, our egos constantly require the supervision of our higher, more spiritual nature.

The Baha'i Faith has numerous spiritual teachings that prepare us to face this lifelong test. The Baha'i writings differentiate between our two selves: our animal, material or lower nature—that insistent self we call the ego—and our spiritual, divine or higher nature:

In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone. Signs of both these natures are to be found in man. In his material aspects he expresses untruth, cruelty and injustice; all these are the outcomes of his lower nature. The attributes of his divine nature are shown forth in love, mercy, kindness, truth and justice, one and all being expressions of his higher nature. Every good habit, every noble quality belongs to man's spiritual nature, whereas all his imperfections and sinful actions are born of his material nature. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris Talks*, p. 60.

In our human history and the history of different religions, we can find many examples of how this hidden enemy victimized even good-hearted and spiritual men and women, destroying the great achievements earned in a lifetime. It has been the cause of the downfall of a great many leaders and learners in all walks of life. They could not see it coming or recognize its imminent danger until it was too late.

So being aware of our egos' demands, recognizing its signs, offering ways of dealing with it and finding ways to combat them or keep them under control. This awareness is essential for those who want to progress in life both materially and spiritually, presenting us with a lifelong conversation that we have to have with ourselves continually:

A man may converse with the ego within him saying: “May I do this? Would it be advisable for me to do this work?” Such as this is conversation with the higher self. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris Talks*, p. 179.

From this Baha'i approach, we can see that the human ego is not necessarily always a negative force—but like a spirited animal that can injure us if not kept under control, it requires careful vigilance.

Great religious figures, philosophers, poets and people of vision such as Rumi have recognized that truth and warned us to be aware of this invisible and elusive enemy:

Your worst enemy is hiding within yourself, and that enemy is your “nafs” (self) or false ego. – Rumi

Though one should conquer a 1000 times a 1000 men in battle, he who conquers his own self is the greatest of all conquerors. – Gautama Buddha

The lowliest and most abject of all things holdeth sway over thee, and that is none other than self and passion, which have ever been reprehensible. – Baha’u’llah, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 170.

Though very difficult, there are ways that the insistent self can be contained and subordinated with the help of two age-old methods used by different spiritual disciplines:

1. Self-knowledge

Because it lets us take an inventory of our minds and souls with honesty and the intention of discovering more about who we truly are, self-knowledge represents a valuable tool for controlling the ego. It allows us to discover what abilities we have to face our insistent self; it also helps us find the areas where we will likely be tested and possibilities of failure. This ongoing self-examination process requires the courage to face ourselves as who we are and not who we might wish to be. It requires honest self-examination, which the Baha’i teachings advise us to implement daily:

Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning; for death, unheralded, shall come upon thee and thou shalt be called to give account for thy deeds. – Baha’u’llah, *The Hidden Words*, p. 11.

An added benefit of self-knowledge is the spiritual growth and depth of understanding that comes with that ongoing process:

O, My servants! Could ye apprehend with what wonders of My munificence and bounty I have willed to entrust your souls, ye would, of a truth, rid yourselves of attachment to all created things, and would gain a true knowledge of your own selves—a knowledge which is the same as the comprehension of Mine own Being. – Baha’u’llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah*, pp. 326-327.

2. Meditation

Research has proven that meditation can strengthen the powers of your higher nature to deal with the challenges of life—and no challenge is bigger than the insistent self residing within:

As long as man is a captive of habit, pursuing the dictates of self and desire, he is vanquished and defeated. This passionate personal ego takes the reins from his hands, crowds out the qualities of the divine ego and changes him into an animal, a creature

unable to judge good from evil, or to distinguish light from darkness. He becomes blind to divine attributes ... – Abdu'l-Baha, *Divine Philosophy*, p. 133.

We have to deal with our insistent self or ego; otherwise, it can undo any success or progress. Once we recognize it as a serious threat to our good efforts—that our lives and our efforts in this world and our progress in the next world depend on the decisions we make—we will recognize the necessity to be vigilant.

The Baha'i teachings say we make our own heaven and hell here on Earth as a result of the choices we make:

Think ye of love and good fellowship as the delights of heaven, think ye of hostility and hatred as the torments of hell. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 245.

If we don't make the right decisions and give our higher nature the upper hand, we can easily fall victim to our lower nature. So we need to tune ourselves spiritually to make the right choices and receive the rewards and benefits of those choices. When we read the spiritual writings and meditate on their meaning, our souls are uplifted, affecting our decision-making. Our souls are tuned by reading, praying and meditating, and bringing ourselves to account each day. This important matter has great consequences in our lives, and we need to take the opportunity to adequately deal with it so that our lifelong achievements are not left to our egos.

We Grow When We are Uncomfortable

I always thought that life has to be without difficulties and full of happiness because God wanted it that way. In my dealings with friends and family, I also observed in my involvement with the education system that we have imparted this expectation to the next generation.

In schools, we would be alarmed if we saw the sign of unhappiness and would start making arrangements to remedy this condition and, in some cases, use the aids of professionals and medications, which are essential in severe and chronic cases. In most cases, it was an interruption of the individuals' process of finding, in a hard way, their place in the universe and figure a course of action.

I was not sure that our interference and interrupting was the right thing to do, knowing how the difficulties, such as facing religious prejudice, racial prejudice, health issues, poverty, and being a refugee for a long time, helped me to be the person that I am today. Those experiences purified my soul and toughened my ability to deal with unexpected events and happenings.

I am so grateful for those difficult times and happy that nothing interrupted that process, even though I hoped it would end.

So the question is, if this has been so good for me and how it has made me more reliant on a higher power than relying on my parents, family, and friends, then should I not share it? I am so thankful to have experienced them, and I wish that I could impart that feeling to others and explain the benefits of hardships and tests in life. That would be my gift to the next generation.

The cause of most of the problems in our life is our mistakes, but if we were not allowed to make mistakes, why would God give us the free will knowing full well that we will not listen to His teachings and guidance, which He has sent through His Manifestations?

I believe there is a pearl of wisdom and blessing in tests and difficulties, and many writings from all religions support this. Baha'u'llah, the prophet and founder of the Baha'i Faith, wrote:

... the Almighty hath tried, and will continue to try, his servants, so that light may be distinguished from darkness, truth from falsehood, right from wrong, guidance from error, happiness from misery, and roses from thorns. Even as He hath revealed: 'Do men think when they say "We believe" they shall be let alone and not be put to proof?'

Industrialization brought freedom from the physical world, and humanity started to master the elements with the help of inventions. With the invention of the steam engine, the process of conquering the forces of nature accelerated. It led to the construction and improvement of roads, railways, ships, airplanes, and other means of comfort.

The sciences opened up new opportunities to improve humanity's quality of life, which was extremely hard until then. These processes stepped up after the second war. Humanity was

intoxicated with a great desire to have more of whatever made life more comfortable. Movies — Hollywood in particular — newspapers, television, radio and other mass media promoted this trend. The education system became a path to achieving money to live a life without discomfort since money could supposedly solve all problems.

Every generation wants the best for the next and tries to make it as easy for them as possible, believing that it is the best way to raise children or educate them, and they go to great lengths and put so much energy into making things easy for their kids. Parents use their influence and wealth to get them to where they want them to go, living a life of ease and comfort so that they can live happily ever after.

Abdu'l-Baha, the son of Baha'u'llah, reminded us of the important elements of educating the children, and one of the factors is to “**accustom them to hardship.**” He wrote:

While the children are yet in their infancy feed them from the breast of heavenly grace, foster them in the cradle of all excellence, rear them in the embrace of bounty. Give them the advantage of every useful kind of knowledge. Let them share in every new and rare and wondrous craft and art. Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship. Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind.

Going through challenges and overcoming them gives young people self-esteem and confidence, which is essential for their growth. These difficult times are tough and rough on the outside but have a precious gift inside them.

Overcoming challenges are a learning process in the classroom of life. The point ignored is that obstacles, setbacks, sadness, illness, losses, and many more things are essential for understanding ourselves and our role in this world. Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, wrote:

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 meaning and 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 a man considers to be evil turns often to be a cause of infinite blessings.

I have not yet heard anyone complaining or questioning why everything is going so right for them. No one goes to a doctor or other professionals to get rid of the extreme feeling of happiness. We have been taught that life has to be a bed of roses, so it is natural to be happy. We have not been taught that difficult times are also crucial and vital for our growth.

We can change our mindset. All religions and great minds have taught us that life is a series of tests and difficulties. The creator designs them to test our physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of life so that we can find out and realize how we have done at the end of our lives. The price of failing and the reward of overcoming them are too great.

Will it Take a Pandemic to Make the World Economy Humane?

The coronavirus's onset has highlighted the need for economic changes for humanitarian purposes — changes many economists and many everyday people have been crying for. There is a need for an economic system that can adjust to humanity's needs and eliminate the extremes in wealth between the haves and the have-nots.

The problem is the failure to grasp the fact that each of us, from the poorest person to the richest, are the stakeholders in all the affairs of humanity. We all are in this together. That's why I have spent the past 40 years advocating through my books, talks, and articles that we address the nature of economic problems through spiritual solutions. According to the Baha'i Writings:

The secrets of the whole economic question are Divine in nature, and are concerned with the world of the heart and spirit. In the Baha'i Teachings this is most completely explained, and without the consideration of the Baha'i Teachings, it is impossible to bring about a better state. — Abdu'l-Baha, *The Baha'i World*

How many religious leaders, philosophers, economic experts, and many more have attempted to bring changes to a system that has been built on the idea of promoting self-interest and individualism without any thought given to creating prosperity for the whole of humanity?

Now coronavirus is tearing into those barriers of nationalism, racism, and religious differences, making everyone think, "Oh my God, we all are in this together." This realization weakens those barriers but does not destroy them.

Many experts have explained the need for change and tried to influence those who make and implement the economic system's laws and regulations. In essence, our economic system needs to serve as a means for upholding all its citizens' welfare, not just a small number of wealthy individuals. Yet all these efforts so far have been in vain. Our policymakers don't seem to realize that they have the means to lift millions of people from the misery of poverty or to eradicate diseases that kill millions of poor people.

The question in my mind is, do we need a disaster — like this one that has paralyzed the whole world — to wake us up to the fact that this universe, this earth, has been created by one creator? We are all its occupants, so why don't we act as neighbours or family members? Baha'u'llah, the Prophet-Founder of the Baha'i Faith, wrote that "**The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens**" — Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*

That means we are all members of one family and are like members of one human body:

... the human body, all the members of which are connected and linked with one another with the greatest strength. How much the organs, the members and the parts of the body of man are intermingled and connected for mutual aid and help, and how much they influence one another! — Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*

Why can't we create an economic system so that all the citizens of the world would live fulfilling lives in prosperity?

In this health crisis and other disasters, whether natural or otherwise, it is the poor and the underprivileged who are the ones who suffer the most due to not having the material means to protect themselves. You may ask why? I say because our economic system is set up that way. After all, the economic system is deprived of moral values. This is because we have separated morality and humanity from our economic system and economic activities. This caused the economic system to almost crash in 2008, leading to a financial crisis and a recession. And yet, this system continues to ignore the plight of the poor.

A 2017 letter from the international administrative body of the Baha'i Faith, The Universal House of Justice addresses this issue:

The welfare of any segment of humanity is inextricably bound up with the welfare of the whole. Humanity's collective life suffers when any one group thinks of its own well-being in isolation from that of its neighbours' or pursues economic gain without regard for how the natural environment, which provides sustenance for all, is affected. A stubborn obstruction, then, stands in the way of meaningful social progress: time and again, avarice and self-interest prevail at the expense of the common good. Unconscionable quantities of wealth are being amassed, and the instability this creates is made worse by how income and opportunity are spread so unevenly both between nations and within nations. But it need not be so. However much such conditions are the outcome of history, they do not have to define the future, and even if current approaches to economic life satisfied humanity's stage of adolescence, they are certainly inadequate for its dawning age of maturity. There is no justification for continuing to perpetuate structures, rules, and systems that manifestly fail to serve the interests of all peoples. – Universal House of Justice, March 1, 2017

So many well-intended experts have tried to improve the system, but human-made solutions have not resulted in any improvements and instead have made it worse. As the Baha'i writings tell us:

Economic plans of reconstruction have been carefully devised, and meticulously executed. And yet crisis has succeeded crisis, and the rapidity with which a perilously unstable world is declining has been correspondingly accelerated. A yawning gulf threatens to involve in one common disaster both the satisfied and dissatisfied nations, democracies and dictatorships, capitalists and wage-earners, Europeans and Asiatics, Jew and Gentile, white and coloured. – Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*

The reason for this failure is that our economic system needs fundamental changes. It requires a moral and spiritual overhaul.

... religion alone can, in the last resort, bring in man's nature such a fundamental change as to enable him to adjust the economic relationships of society. It is only in this way that man can control the economic forces that threaten to disrupt the foundations of his existence, and thus assert his mastery over the forces of nature. – Shoghi Effendi, 26 December 1935, letter to an individual believer.

I believe that humanity has reached a high level of maturity. I hope that it won't take crises and disasters to inspire us to better organize our affairs — including economics.

9 Practical Economic Tips for Everyday Moral Living

The whole world faces an economic crisis, the likes of which we've never dealt with before – the great disparity between enormous wealth and grinding poverty keeps getting wider and wider.

In Paris more than a hundred years ago, Abdu'l-Baha, the son of Baha'u'llah, the prophet and founder of the Baha'i Faith, put it this way:

The government of the countries should conform to the Divine Law which gives equal justice to all. This is the only way in which the deplorable superfluity of great wealth and miserable, demoralizing, degrading poverty can be abolished. Not until this is done will the Law of God be obeyed. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris Talks*, p. 154.

Economic crisis, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, grave economic injustice and many more problems that have baffled the experts have forced us to re-examine the entire system and make fundamental changes – before it collapses as it nearly did in 2008. This recent news headline summarizes humanity's economic problems: “A CEO from one of the world's top five global fashion brands has to work for just four days to earn what a garment worker in Bangladesh will earn in an entire lifetime.”

The economic problems started from the beginning when Adam Smith, the father of modern economics, wrote *The Wealth of Nations*. That book became like holy scripture for many economists. Smith described economics as the science of creating wealth – but excluded morality and spirituality in his theories. He made self-interest the engine of every economic system.

According to Adam Smith, everybody naturally tries to maximize his or her satisfaction. That selfish philosophy became the breeding ground for greed, precipitating the causes of so many world economic problems.

But many of Adam Smith's followers fail to consider that Smith was the first to acknowledge the economic importance of morality in his earlier book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, written in 1759, seven years before he wrote *The Wealth of Nations*.

In his earlier book, Smith recognized the inherent danger of wealth, even as he provided ideas for generating it:

This disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and powerful, and to despise or, at least, neglect persons of poor and mean conditions, though necessary both to establish and to maintain the distinction of ranks and the order of society, is, at the same time, the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments. – Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 3.

The Baha'i teachings express a similar point of view, saying that one of the primary principles of Baha'u'llah:

... is the readjustment and equalization of the economic standards of mankind. This deals with the question of human livelihood. It is evident that under present systems and conditions of government the poor are subject to the greatest need and distress while others more fortunate live in luxury and plenty far beyond their actual necessities. This inequality of portion and privilege is one of the deep and vital problems of human society. That there is need of an equalization and apportionment by which all may possess the comforts and privileges of life is evident. The remedy must be legislative readjustment of conditions. The rich too must be merciful to the poor, contributing from willing hearts to their needs without being forced or compelled to do so. The composure of the world will be assured by the establishment of this principle in the religious life of mankind. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 107.

This concept of economics, fundamentally different from the Darwinian idea of the survival of the fittest, is based on spiritual and moral principles. Abdu'l-Baha explained it clearly:

The secrets of the whole economic question are Divine in nature, and are concerned with the world of the heart and spirit. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Baha'i World*, Volume IV, p. 448.

The Baha'i Faith supports the process of the spiritualization of the economic system by injecting moral and spiritual values. Economics is made for humanity and reflects humanity's true aspirations – practical, ethical, moral, and spiritual.

To assess our progress, we must combine spiritual and material civilizations. These two aspects of human development must go hand in hand, the Baha'i teachings say, and complement each other rather than denying each other:

Material civilization has reached an advanced plane, but now there is a need for spiritual civilization. Material civilization alone will not satisfy; it cannot meet the conditions and requirements of the present age; its benefits are limited to the world of matter. There is no limitation to man's spirit, for spirit in itself is progressive, and if the divine civilization be established, the spirit of man will advance. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 101.

The world desperately needs change in all of its outdated systems. The Baha'i teachings call for that change to come about through a spiritual reformation first, a reawakening of humanity's souls.

We may think that we cannot do anything about the emergence of this new, more spiritual economic system, but that's not true. By introducing moral and spiritual values in our everyday economic activities, we can each start making changes in ourselves that will affect others. Those changes and economic actions, guided by a deep sense of morality and service to all humanity, will help build the foundation of a just and unified world commonwealth for the future.

A host of practical economic suggestions can empower us to act and realize the incredible opportunity we each have to transform society. These nine recommendations can help spiritualize our economic lives:

1. Focus on the crucial questions of life, such as “who am I?” “what is the purpose of my life?” and “how much is enough?”
2. Commit to living a simple life, a life free of excess consumption and materialism
3. Be honest in all your dealings
4. If you run a business, be content with a reasonable margin of profit
5. Spiritually justify every expenditure by asking yourself, “Is this necessary? Is it good for me, my family, and the entire human family?”
6. Make your economic decisions with the intent of protecting the Earth’s environment
7. In the spirit of service to others, volunteer whenever possible to help those with fewer economic resources and give to worthy charitable organizations
8. Adopt reasonable financial goals in life by avoiding debt, habitually saving and making your spiritual well-being independent of your material success
9. Finally, in all your dealings with others, create a consciousness that your welfare, well-being and happiness depend on the well-being, prosperity and happiness of every poor, needy and disadvantaged person in the world.

When you implement these nine economic and spiritual steps in your life, you’ll be following Abdu’l-Baha’s trenchant advice: **“Content thyself with but little of this world’s goods! Verily, economy is a great treasure.”** – Baha’i World Faith, p. 374.

Delayed Gratification and the Next Life

Life has gradually taught me the benefits and the joy of delaying my gratification. Why put off enjoying the immediate rewards for my efforts? Allow me to explain.

Delayed gratification didn't come naturally to me—I had to learn it by trial and error. Suppose you're not familiar with the concept. In that case, delayed gratification refers to the ability to put off something mildly fun or pleasurable now to gain something even more fun, pleasurable, or rewarding later. For example, you could relax and watch TV the night before an exam or practice delayed gratification and study for the exam—waiting to relax only after the exam is over. Some say the discipline of delayed gratification creates true success in life:

The ability to discipline yourself to delay gratification in the short term in order to enjoy greater rewards in the long term, is the indispensable prerequisite for success. – Brian Tracy

Everyone wants to enjoy the rewards of their efforts, and there is nothing wrong with that. When we want instant gratification, the problem arises, rewarding ourselves right after half of the work is done and often before the job is finished. In extreme cases, one rewards oneself even before the work begins!

This kind of instant gratification indicates a lack of self-discipline and self-control, an absence of purpose in one's life and the inability to set goals and see them through. It also sets up a self-defeating pattern: if we reward ourselves before finishing a task, we train ourselves not to finish.

Those who practice delayed gratification demonstrate a well-defined purpose in life and the need to accomplish worthwhile goals. Delayed gratification means accepting the awareness of life's journey as a long one and planning for it.

So, as I was thinking about how much I enjoy my quality time after doing everything on my to-do list for the day, I had an “a-ha!” moment: I realized that our lives, with all their complications, present us with a massive exercise in delayed gratification.

Our comfort and progress in the next world depend on sacrificing many human desires. To progress spiritually, we must value our own will less than the will of our Creator. That way, we can enjoy our journey, fully aware that we've delayed receiving the rewards of this physical world for the next one.

This process, in my estimation, represents the greatest delayed gratification one can imagine. The spiritual reward for preparing for the next life and not settling for the material world's distractions serves as an excellent example of delayed gratification. The spiritual gratification in the next world, the Baha'i teachings tell us, goes far beyond our human comprehension:

... a religious individual must disregard his personal desires and seek in whatever way he can wholeheartedly to serve the public interest; and it is impossible for a human

being to turn aside from his own selfish advantages and sacrifice his own good for the good of the community except through true religious faith. For self-love is kneaded into the very clay of man, and it is not possible that, without any hope of a substantial reward, he should neglect his own present material good. That individual, however, who puts his faith in God and believes in the words of God—because he is promised and certain of a plentiful reward in the next life, and because worldly benefits as compared to the abiding joy and glory of future planes of existence are nothing to him—will for the sake of God abandon his own peace and profit and will freely consecrate his heart and soul to the common good. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, pp. 96-97.

The Baha'i teachings give us a constant reminder about the transitory of this world and focusing our thoughts and actions on preparation for the next world:

Therefore in this world, he must prepare himself for life beyond. That which he needs in the world of the Kingdom must be obtained here. Just as he prepared himself in the world of the matrix by acquiring forces necessary in this sphere of existence, so likewise the indispensable forces of the divine existence must be potentially attained in this world. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 226.

In this material world, we spend our lives doing things hoping for the rewards they will generate. We sacrifice mental and physical energy to earn money so that we can acquire the things we need and want. Some of us spend it without much thought for the future. Only a small percentage of people save money to accumulate until the time when they can exchange it for the things they desire the most.

Saving money means delayed gratification. If we do not spend money now and save it to enjoy it later when we need it more, we practice delayed gratification. In the same way, no reward or gratification is greater than entering the next world with a clear conscience, knowing that spiritually we have exerted the spiritual energy and the selfless service to humanity, which will sustain us in the worlds to come:

Know thou that the Kingdom is the real world, and this nether place is only its shadow stretching out. A shadow hath no life of its own; its existence is only a fantasy, and nothing more; it is but images reflected in water, and seeming as pictures to the eye. - Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha*, p.178.

From the moment we are born, our bodies begin the journey toward the end of their existence. We all leave this physical world and enter the spiritual one sooner or later, hopefully realizing that this world was merely a short stopover in the long journey of our soul—which will eventually attain the presence of our Creator. When we forget that ultimate goal, we need reminders:

Just as he advances by progressive stages from the mere physical world of being into the intellectual realm, so must he develop upward in moral attributes and spiritual graces. In the process of this attainment he is ever in need of the bestowals of the Holy Spirit. ... As the babe is born into the light of this physical world, so must the physical and intellectual man be born into the light of the world of Divinity. In the matrix of the mother the unborn child was deprived and unconscious of the world of material existence, but after its birth it beheld the wonders and beauties of a new realm of life

and being. In the world of the matrix it was utterly ignorant and unable to conceive of these new conditions, but after its transformation it discovers the radiant sun, trees, flowers and an infinite range of blessings and bounties awaiting it. In the human plane and kingdom man is a captive of nature and ignorant of the divine world until born of the breaths of the Holy Spirit out of physical conditions of limitation and deprivation. Then he beholds the reality of the spiritual realm and Kingdom, realizes the narrow restrictions of the mere human world of existence and becomes conscious of the unlimited and infinite glories of the world of God. Therefore, no matter how man may advance upon the physical and intellectual plane, he is ever in need of the boundless virtues of Divinity, the protection of the Holy Spirit and the face of God. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 288-289.

Understanding Each Other in these Confusing Times

In our world today, an air of confusion and irritation manifests itself differently in different people.

Baha'is believe that the world is in the process of giving birth to a wonderful new world order that brings a great future. What we are experiencing now is the pain before its birth. In a sense, we are the midwives responsible for preparing and assisting with the birth:

We stand on the threshold of an age whose convulsions proclaim alike the death-pangs of the old order and the birth-pangs of the new. Through the generating influence of the Faith announced by Baha'u'llah this New World Order may be said to have been conceived. We can, at the present moment, experience its stirrings in the womb of a travailing age—an age waiting for the appointed hour at which it can cast its burden and yield its fairest fruit.

The whole earth,” writes Baha'u'llah, “is now in a state of pregnancy. The day is approaching when it will have yielded its noblest fruits, when from it will have sprung forth the loftiest trees, the most enchanting blossoms, the most heavenly blessings. Immeasurably exalted is the breeze that wafteth from the garment of thy Lord, the Glorified! For lo, it hath breathed its fragrance and made all things new! Well is it with them that comprehend. – Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 168.

We all react to this pregnant period in different ways. Still, I'll let you decide where you belong and suggest the course of action Baha'is are taking to survive this period of changes and transformation in the history of humanity.

One extreme is those who show no sign of being affected by these rapid changes and confusion but quietly and with great courage do their best to better the world. Some of them are affiliated with religious beliefs, yet some are believers in science. They have realized their mission in life and do their best without fighting or hating those who take opposing views. They know how to see common ground between people, not differences. They know what they are doing will bear fruit in the future. The Baha'i teachings describe them like this:

Lift up your hearts above the present and look with eyes of faith into the future! Today the seed is sown, the grain falls upon the earth, but behold the day will come when it shall raise a glorious tree and the branches thereof shall be laden with fruit. Rejoice and be glad that this day has dawned, try to realise its power, for it is indeed wonderful! God has crowned you with honour and in your hearts has He set a radiant star; verily the light thereof shall brighten the whole world! – Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris Talks*, p. 69

The other extreme? Those who thrive on confusion seek only their own self-interest and do whatever they can to get what they want. Since people like this think the end justifies the means, they do not consider the morality of their actions—but they lie, destroy, hate and even kill anything opposed to their version of the truth. Many of them are followers of different so-called religious groups—even though no real religion supports violence—or various radical

ideologies. They function as the leading causes of the destruction of the old order, ultimately contributing to change.

Some cannot understand what is happening around them and feel helpless to figure out a course of action. They often give up, and their efforts are limited to complaining and reminding everyone how hopeless the present time is and how they missed the good old days when everything was good and decent. They have forgotten their most important duty as citizens of the world: **“All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.”** – Baha’u’llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah*, p. 214.

That last group of people, who could be you or me, have sincere motives and good intentions. They want to contribute to building a just society—to defend the poor, save the planet from pollution, and bring about a better health care system, education system, government system, and economic policies. They have many other wonderful goals, as well. But instead of changing things for the better, they end up not knowing what to do.

We have a moral obligation to reach out to all these groups and lovingly help them see the possibilities in creating a new world order. Those who already expend their energy selflessly building a better world need our encouragement and support for their sacrificial work. Those confused about what to do also need our help to remove the dark clouds hanging over their lives. Those good-hearted and yet frustrated souls need to be reminded that their anger and impatience are self-defeating so that they do not end up frustrated and hating others. Those on the path of destruction are the most difficult to help, and yet we can always pray for them and make sure that their actions and words do not create feelings of hate in our hearts:

... The world is like the body of man—it hath become sick, feeble and infirm. Its eye is devoid of sight, its ear hath become destitute of hearing and its faculties of sense are entirely dissolved. The friends of God must become as wise physicians and care for and heal this sick person, in accord with the divine teachings, in order that—God willing—it may perchance gain health, find eternal healing and that its lost powers may be restored; and that the person of the world may find such health, freshness and purity that it will appear in the utmost beauty and charm. – Abdu’l-Baha, *Baha’i World Faith*, p. 356.

Baha’is believe that we should be like physicians for humanity's healing—physicians who recognize the symptoms and then prescribe the correct medicine. That medicine, the Baha’i teachings say, is embodied in the cause, the principles and the spiritual remedies brought by Baha’u’llah.

We Live in an Age of Miracles

We live in an age of miracles—and we don't even know it.

I've often wished I lived in the times of some of my heroes who participated in great historical events and fought beside them in their battles. How I admired and idealized them. How I would have wanted to be with them and help them any way I could see in their battles with ignorance and injustice, and by doing that, take part in an important event in human history.

We all have some heroes from the past that we admire. For me as a Baha'i, I've wanted to live in the earliest days of my Faith's dramatic history, with those great men and women who risked everything, including their lives, for their deepest beliefs. They were tormented and put in the worst prisons to persuade them to recant their faith, but that made them more determined and braver. Most of them suffered and died for their beliefs. Those stories of bravery inspire me.

Recently, though, I've become more focused on what is happening now. The news concentrates on the negative events, but I try to see our present-day's positive side. As I continue doing that, I realize our modern-day world's wonders are totally overlooked because of the negative slant prevalent in much of the news.

I found it fascinating as I searched more and observed with an investigating eye. I am from the generation that did not grow up with the many amazing gadgets that are so commonplace today, so I see them not with a jaded eye but with a sense of wonderment. I don't take them for granted, so you can imagine why I call the present time an age of miracles.

These days—promised by religions and people of vision in the past—are truly miraculous. When Abdu'l-Baha, the son and successor of Baha'u'llah, the prophet and founder of the Baha'i Faith, came to North America to speak about and spread the Baha'i ideals more than a century ago, he said:

From every standpoint the world of humanity is undergoing a reformation ... scientific ideas and theories are developing and advancing to meet a new range of phenomena; invention and discovery are penetrating hitherto unknown fields, revealing new wonders and hidden secrets of the material universe; industries have vastly wider scope and production; everywhere the world of mankind is in the throes of evolutionary activity indicating the passing of the old conditions and advent of the new age of reformation. —
Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 439.

After thinking about it, I realized how my heroes would have loved to experience the present, not just because of new inventions and discoveries, but rather to see how much closer we are to the promised day when humanity becomes united and establishes a new world commonwealth.

It may sound too optimistic to write about these things at a time when it looks as if the world is falling apart when numerous wars and conflicts rage—but Baha'is believe these events, both positive and negative, are all part of a bigger plan:

The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this greatest, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed. – Baha'u'llah, *The Most Holy Book*, p. 85.

Look at it this way: to build your dream house, you must dismantle the old and build a new, well-designed, beautiful structure. Similarly, the Baha'i teachings say that the old order—with its failing theories, systems, and structures in the economic, political, education, health and other realms—cannot satisfy the needs of the present generation of humanity. All of these upheavals are the signs of its malfunctioning and the sounds of its destruction. This doesn't signal the end of the world; instead, it signifies the coming of a beautiful new world. The Baha'i teachings say we are on the edge of these profound changes. Most people now agree that things are not working today and don't require convincing that we need a better system.

Now, with the Baha'i teachings pointing the way toward a more unified, peaceful and loving future civilization, we can devote our energy to laying the foundation:

This commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system. A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity. A world metropolis will act as the nerve center of a world civilization, the focus towards which the unifying forces of life will converge and from which its energizing influences will radiate. – Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 203.

Who from the past generations would not want to witness the advent of a new age? We are witnessing the old structure crumbling down, and a new tool is invented every day. We have the blueprint of the new structure in hand and are preparing our equipment as we eagerly wait to start construction. Thanks to Baha'u'llah's new revelation, we now have the design for that future structure—but first, humanity as a whole needs to join hands to participate in this venture because this new world belongs to every single person on Earth.

Seeing Money Through Spiritual Eyes

As a student of economics and as part of the educational system, I have marvelled at our society's lack of financial knowledge.

As a Baha'i, my Faith puts a great deal of importance on education and always emphasizes both spiritual and material education:

The primary, the most urgent requirement is the promotion of education. It is inconceivable that any nation should achieve prosperity and success unless this paramount, this fundamental concern is carried forward. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 110.

Progress is of two kinds, material and spiritual. The former is attained through observation of the surrounding existence and constitutes the foundation of civilization. Spiritual progress is through the breaths of the Holy Spirit and is the awakening of the conscious soul of man to perceive the reality of divinity. Material progress insures the happiness of the human world. Spiritual progress insures the happiness and eternal continuance of the soul. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 142.

Education has one primary goal: to prepare young students for adult life. In my experience, our educational system usually manages to entirely ignore one of the most critical aspects of their lives—financial literacy. Since “material progress ensures the happiness of the human world,” we’re failing our students if we leave them uneducated about life's material and monetary aspects.

I am not sure why those who design educational systems do not think that managing finances is essential. Whatever the reason, the fact is that many of my ex-students come to me and say, “I was cheated out of years of my life because nobody taught me how to manage my finances.”

Students today often leave school with mountains of debt, which can cripple their futures. They don't know how to manage or save, so many spend whatever they earn and in most cases, spend way beyond their earnings, which can soon lead them to bankruptcy. If they don't leave school with massive indebtedness from student loans, chances are they've run up major credit card debt during high school and college. A recent study in *The Journal of Applied Social Psychology* concluded that we need to educate students in financial literacy:

The issue of credit-card debt among college students has received increasing attention. This study explored factors hypothesized to be causes and effects of credit-card debt in 448 students on five college campuses. Students reported an average of \$1,035 ($SD=\$1,849$) in debt, including students without credit cards or credit-card debt. Lack of financial knowledge, age, number of credit cards, delay of gratification, and attitudes toward credit-card use were related to debt. ... Students reporting greater debt reported greater stress and decreased financial well-being. Results highlight the need for comprehensive financial literacy education among college students.

Our educational system aims at arming students with the tools to make them successful materially—but they rarely teach the real meaning of that success. Yes, business schools teach the concept of competition and eliminating rivals as means of success—but without mentioning the virtues of cooperation.

On a broader scale, much of our higher education follows the old, materialistic notion that having more money is the highest goal of success, without ever mentioning the spiritual or moral side of life. If we began to teach students more about financial and spiritual literacy, they could learn how to turn material wealth into spiritual success:

Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual's own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes. Above all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement, for such a benefactor would supply the needs and ensure the comfort and well-being of a great multitude. Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy. If, however, a few have inordinate riches while the rest are impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability to its possessor. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, pp. 24-25.

If we teach our students and our children about the basic value of money and how to manage and spend it responsibly, they can learn about the importance of planning for the long run and saving for a rainy day. If we teach our students and children about love for humanity, they can learn about the fact that they can use money for good causes:

If, on the other hand, it is expended for the promotion of knowledge, the founding of elementary and other schools, the encouragement of art and industry, the training of orphans and the poor—in brief, if it is dedicated to the welfare of society—its possessor will stand out before God and man as the most excellent of all who live on earth and will be accounted as one of the people of paradise. – Ibid., p. 25.

Whatever the reason for this shortfall in financial literacy in our education system or our society, we need to begin making it clear that by our actions, we can set an example for others about how our material possessions can be used for the betterment of humanity. We can face and conquer the cancer of materialism through education and make a lasting contribution to humankind's welfare.

Spirituality: The Surprising Solution to Our Economic Problems

Everyone knows we have bodies—but many aren't so sure about the existence of the soul.

Of course, the body has needs—food, clothing, shelter, health care—and it has traditionally been the job of economics to satisfy those needs.

Consider this: what if the soul and the body are both equally valid realities? Even further, what if the soul lives eternally? If that's true, shouldn't we prioritize the eternal needs of the soul over the body's temporary needs or make them equal in importance?

With these assumptions, the needs of the soul do become a priority. The body's role—to support the soul by living longer in a healthy manner, so the soul gets the chance to achieve more in this lifetime—means we can't ignore our bodies. We need to take care of them because the body supports the soul; it is the soul's temple. This basic assumption, from a Baha'i perspective, needs to underpin all economic systems:

The inordinate disparity between rich and poor, a source of acute suffering, keeps the world in a state of instability, virtually on the brink of war. Few societies have dealt effectively with this situation. The solution calls for the combined application of spiritual, moral and practical approaches. A fresh look at the problem is required, entailing consultation with experts from a wide spectrum of disciplines, devoid of economic and ideological polemics, and involving the people directly affected in the decisions that must urgently be made. It is an issue that is bound up not only with the necessity for eliminating extremes of wealth and poverty but also with those spiritual verities the understanding of which can produce a new universal attitude. Fostering such an attitude is itself a major part of the solution. – The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, pp. 10-11.

Adam Smith, considered the father of modern economics, also made some basic assumptions to provide more goods for man's needs. Based on his observations, Smith built his theoretical economic system. One of his assumptions was that man always acts in his own interests and wants to maximize his satisfaction, so he believed that unfettered self-interest in free-market economies leads to economic prosperity.

In his famous book *The Wealth of Nations*, the other assumptions Smith mentioned included using the term “invisible hand,” a metaphor to describe the self-regulation of capitalist markets. He also advocated “laissez-faire economics,” which meant that governments should not interfere and economic markets should be left alone to take care of any problems. He expounded upon how rational self-interest and competition can lead to economic prosperity.

Other economists adopted these two fundamental principles of the economic system introduced by Adam Smith. The focus on maximizing satisfaction created a sense of individualism, praise and the source of inspiration for many. But this economic thought trend, without any interference from governments or other agencies, created a breeding ground for greed and exploitation. It resulted in societies that lacked empathy and ignored the plight of

the poor and needy. In those societies, the spirit of giving and sharing waned, and gradually the gap between the rich and poor grew greater. Accumulating wealth began to be considered as the highest achievement in a person's life. Becoming rich became the goal of every man, and the cost of achieving this goal was not questioned.

But if the body and its needs become a barrier or hindrance to the soul's progress, then there is a serious problem. These days, in humanity's economic life, the body and its wants have taken over the soul's needs and desires. The servant has become the master, and precious human lives are wasted in pursuing the body's desires. The Baha'i teachings explain:

The soul of man is the sun by which his body is illumined, and from which it draweth its sustenance, and should be so regarded. – Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 155.

Because we've prioritized the body's needs over the needs of the soul, the world's economic situation has spun out of control. Because of the great economic disparities this over-emphasis on the body has caused, we must admit that only spirituality can deal with this disease of greed and self-centeredness worldwide. Because of the poor's massive suffering, we have to find ways to bring a new sense of justice to the world.

To do all that, we need to take a few steps back and define the purpose and the nature of economics and then try to find remedies for its problems:

The secrets of the whole economic question are Divine in nature, and are concerned with the world of the heart and spirit. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Baha'i World*, Volume IV, p. 448.

In the past, we've looked in the wrong direction to solve the world's economic problems. But as the economic situation gets worse and more desperate for so many people worldwide, we can start to consider spiritual and moral solutions to our civilization's economic problems. The soul knows, and it can guide us to build a new economic system that can accommodate all aspects of human life—for all humans. The Baha'i teachings say:

Through the power of the rational soul, man can discover the realities of things, comprehend their properties, and penetrate the mysteries of existence. All the sciences, branches of learning, arts, inventions, institutions, undertakings, and discoveries have resulted from the comprehension of the rational soul. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, newly revised edition, p. 219.

Where do we start? Maybe by accepting the fact that there is more to humanity than our physical needs and that our spiritual needs have to be recognized and become the focal point of our attention. By recognizing our inner spiritual needs and combining them with physical needs, we will have the impetus and the insight to create a balanced economic system that covers all aspects of our lives and allows us to attain our souls' desires.

The history of economics has shown us that a system without spiritual guidance can lose its effectiveness and eventually become oppressive and cruel. The Baha'i teachings provide the guidance the world needs to remedy the injustices done to society's poor and underprivileged people. We can resolve those injustices by implementing spiritual solutions to our economic problems.

God, Please Put it on My Account

Sometimes we're very hard on ourselves and can't forgive our mistakes in certain areas of life. Many of us lack self-esteem and consequently lose sight of life's big picture.

When that happens to me, I often forget that life represents a collection of my good and bad actions—sort of a balance sheet that keeps track of my good and bad deeds. The negative side or the bad deeds are like an open account at a store or with a credit card company that keeps track of my purchases and payments. The expectation? Payments must be made by the end of the week or month at the most.

Our life's open account is no different—because we are spiritually brought to account by the end of our physical existence. So when we know this tab is open, and understand that we will make many mistakes till we die, why do we suddenly pick one mistake and become obsessed with it to the extent that we cannot forgive ourselves? Why one, when many could be singled out and made to be the stumbling block on the way of our human journey?

Forgiving others for what they have done is much easier for me than forgiving myself. The Baha'i teachings have a wealth of insight and knowledge on this subject to help us to forgive others—and ourselves. But my problem has always been being unable to forgive myself. For whatever reasons, my self-esteem has rarely been high enough to take me to the happier side of self-forgiveness. Even after finding out some great people too felt like me, not feeling worthy did not help me with my struggles. But when I read the holy scripture of many different Faiths, they take away some of the pain.

Even the great apostle Paul looked at his past with great regret: “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” – 1 Corinthians 15:9.

Maybe we need to be reminded that our account with the Creator remains open and not let one mistake stop us from moving on with our lives. He has not given up on us, so why are we writing ourselves off? We will eventually balance our account.

As a result of doing so many wrong things in my life, I sometimes feel unbearable and paralyzed, filled with deep regret. This negativity reaches so high that I have to find ways not to deal with it, postponing that intense and difficult reckoning to some future time so that hopefully, by then, I am better equipped to face it and deal with it. So when those intense guilt attack moments occur, I repeat this to myself: “Please God, put it on my tab.”

That way, I buy myself some time to deal with it later—to pray, silently ask God for forgiveness, and find the inner strength to resolve to be a better and more spiritual soul.

By using this method, I have survived many moments of utter despair. It also proved to me that God's account with us is very flexible. He is kind because he sees our weaknesses and gives us opportunities to try again. Were it not for His flexibility; we would have had to give up trying.

The Baha'i teachings say that the coming of Baha'u'llah can wash our consciences clean if we let it:

Now hath the Truth appeared, and falsehood fled away; now hath the day dawned and jubilation taken over, wherefore men's souls are sanctified, their spirits purged, their hearts rejoiced, their minds purified, their secret thoughts made wholesome, their consciences washed clean, their inmost selves made holy: for the Day of Resurrection hath come to pass, and the bestowals of thy Lord, the Forgiving, have encompassed all things. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 38.

Later in life, I finally resolved this inner problem when I made a pilgrimage trip to the Holy Land's Baha'i World Centre. There I met a very wise Baha'i who noticed my troubles when I could not find myself worthy enough to go to the Baha'i Shrines. This wise person asked me if I believed God is forgiving, and I said yes. He said do you think he has forgiven you for the bad things you have done? I said I am sure He has. Then he looked at me with a look of disappointment and said, "then who the hell do you think you are? Are you higher than God? Forgive yourself! He has!"

At that moment, my spiritual eye opened for the first time, and I could clearly see my life.

When we obsessively occupy our minds and souls with negative thoughts, we lose sight of the big picture and forget who runs the show. If God has forgiven all your shortcomings, please do yourself a favour and accept it with gratefulness. After all, our lives are God's gift to us, and He wants us to live wisely, cheerfully and free from guilt and regrets.

The Baha'i Concept of a "Good Loan"

As an economist, I get this question fairly often: What's a fair rate of interest?

The rate of interest is an essential concept in the economic field. Sadly, it has become more of a method of exploitation than a means of help—particularly for those who struggle to survive in a materialistic world.

Student loans are a good example. Some student loans charge outrageous interest rates, putting poor students in tremendous debt. The average student loan debt in the United States, for example, is \$20,000 per student. Paying those debts off can mean returning more than twice that amount to predatory lending companies.

But the world's whole economic and banking system relies on interest to operate, so the question is: what is its origin, and why has it become such a dominant factor in the economic system?

Governments, banks, pawnshops and money marts all charge a rate of interest. Some of those rates are so high that they are immoral and should be illegal. Interest has become one of the means of enslaving people. In some rural areas of our planet, it is still being used to control others' lives and force work out of them instead of paying wages. Even though we live in industrialized countries, those of us who have had to deal with student loans or personal loans often feel a sense of entrapment. Interest can be a weapon with amazingly destructive powers in terms of control. But it can also be an angel of mercy to help the poor.

Governments use interest in their loans to other countries—generally the underdeveloped countries—to help them build infrastructure, support their military and feed their people. History is full of examples of how developing countries were exploited with these loans and how the governments of wealthy debtor nations took advantage of the situation to force decisions in their favour and for their own benefit. These loans were used as extortion, and rather than freeing developing nations economically; their high-interest loans kept them in bondage. If you think this was only done in the past, you may be surprised to know how prevalent this practise still is today.

In most developed countries, the rate of interest is regulated by law, but private banks have charged huge, usurious rates of interest in places where there is no regulation or supervision.

Unregulated money lenders have had no mercy on people and often prey on the poor. In the absence of any regulation, they have charged as high a rate of interest as benefited them. Lenders like pawnshops and "payday lenders" often profit from the poorest and uneducated segments of society. They are fully aware of the vulnerability of the people who come to them in times of great need when there is no other option for help—and some pawnshops see their misfortune as an opportunity to make a great amount of money from the poorest of the poor.

All of these predatory practices produce a profit at any cost, without any other consideration. The bottom line is making money, and it does not matter who is being hurt or destroyed in the process. There is no consideration or room for morality in these actions.

What has religion done about these practices? It should come as no surprise that the Jewish Faith, Islam and Christianity did not encourage the practice of charging interest. Christ famously drove the moneylenders from the temple. Sadly, though, each of these religions' followers eventually ignored the moral and spiritual principles and began to charge interest to their fellow believers.

The Baha'i teachings allow the practice of charging interest—but apply certain conditions that must be considered. The most important condition is that it should be a “good loan:”

One can seldom find a person who would manifest such consideration towards his fellow-man, his countryman or towards his own brother and would show such tender solicitude for him as to be well-disposed to grant him a loan on benevolent terms ... [Such loans as bear no interest and are repayable whenever the borrower pleases]. – Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, pp. 132-133.

Baha'u'llah wrote that charging interest was lawful but said:

However, this is a matter that should be practised with moderation and fairness ... We exhort the loved ones of God to observe justice and fairness, and to do that which would prompt the friends of God to evince tender mercy and compassion towards each other. – Ibid., p. 133.

The Baha'i teachings recognize that a high-interest rate on any loan is unfair because it puts a heavy burden on the individual or the nation's economic life, which, in turn, diminishes the quality of life.

Baha'u'llah emphasized the concept of a good loan, meaning that the interest rate had to be such that it did not unduly burden the borrower and benefited everyone. With a good loan, the person or firm lending the money gets an adequate amount of interest, and the person borrowing is happy because he can afford to pay it.

A good loan charges a fair, moderate and reasonable rate of interest, using the Baha'i principles of kindness and moderation to help our fellow human beings prosper materially and enjoy the necessities of life—and to put an end to extreme financial hardship for individuals and countries. We should decide the rate of interest by sympathy for others and not greed.

Becoming a Mystical Economist

Have you ever heard of a mystical economist? Seeing these two words side by side seems strange since they represent two entirely different universes.

Can they be combined? Are they really the opposite? Can we have both? The gap between the two seems so great.

Mysticism symbolizes our lives' higher or spiritual aspects—detachment from the material world and anything that would distract from attaining the Beloved presence's goal. Mystics believe that if we want to attain spirituality, then what we need in our lives is more of Rumi, Kahlil Gibran, the great poets and inspiring philosophers, and less of Adam Smith, Karl Marx and other economists. Mystics have more interest in traversing the Seven Valleys in our spiritual journey and less computing data to navigate our economic lives.

Life's journey is short, and every moment is very precious, so the question becomes: why spend more time on the material side of our lives rather than the spiritual side? After all, we cannot take our material possessions with us to the next world.

A mystic sees death in living and living in death. He sees the beginning in the end and the end in the beginning. He has learned through experience in life that everything in this world is transitory, like a mirage. The compass of his soul is directed straight towards the Beloved, and nothing can distract him from reaching his heart's desire. Jewels and gold are like the twinkling of the stars and nothing more. They just sparkle and have no use for him on his journey. His soul wants him to spend his time and energies serving his fellow human beings. It wants him to give praise and gratitude to his Beloved and be lost in His love.

Economists and the field of economics represent what the world has to offer for the sustenance, pleasure and comfort of the body and the senses. Economics reminds us that no one has seen the next world, so why not be happy and enjoy everything the material world has to offer, to earn more money so that we can afford to acquire all the luxuries and comforts: the best house, the best cars, and eating the best food. We can have the latest and the best the world can offer to us; after all, the whole world with all its splendours was created for us. Why not enjoy the glitter of jewels and gold, the comforts, the pleasures that all one's senses can enjoy? The economist in us wants to master the art of accumulating wealth.

The Baha'i teachings, and the teachings of every great Faith, remind us about the danger in possessing and acquiring wealth:

It is easier for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. – Matthew 19:24, Mark 10:25, and Luke 18:25

... wealth is a mighty barrier between the seeker and his desire, the lover and his beloved. – Baha'u'llah, *The Hidden Words*, p. 41.

Here's a thought: although it may be difficult, spiritual beings do not need to avoid the world for fear of being drowned in materialism:

To view the worth of an individual chiefly in terms of how much one can accumulate and how many goods one can consume relative to others is wholly alien to Baha'i thought. But neither are the teachings in sympathy with sweeping dismissals of wealth as inherently distasteful or immoral, and asceticism is prohibited. Wealth must serve humanity. – The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017.

The Baha'i teachings remind us, as individuals or as a civilization, that we need a balance between mysticism and economics:

Material civilization is like unto the lamp, while spiritual civilization is the light in that lamp. If the material and spiritual civilization become united, then we will have the light and the lamp together, and the outcome will be perfect. For material civilization is like unto a beautiful body, and spiritual civilization is like unto the spirit of life. If that wondrous spirit of life enters this beautiful body, the body will become a channel for the distribution and development of the perfections of humanity. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 12.

The history of the separation of these two throughout the ages does not mean that the future has to follow the same way.

We have come a long way—but we have to start a new way of life that allows us to use both of these gifts to advance ourselves and our society. As we grasp the spiritual implications of combining the two kinds of insight and wisdom, we will build the capacity to handle both the material and the spiritual. We will learn and educate ourselves through the tests that money can bring and prepare ourselves to avoid unknown factors that can hamper our goal of combining them. We will develop a vision that allows us to see the two as one.

Both of these wonderful tools can help us grow and develop spiritually and materially. The man or woman of the future does not have to escape from the material world. Awareness of the reality and purpose of spirituality in the material world will allow humanity to utilize material possessions to benefit our collective spiritual journey. There should not be a conflict between the material side and the spiritual side of our lives—they both have their place and their importance:

We must care for man's two natures; for as the material man makes certain demands for food and raiment and if not looked after suffers, even so his spiritual reality suffers without care. This is why the divine messengers come to the rescue—to care for the reality, that man's thoughts may unfold and his aims become realized, that he may inherit a new field of progress, for the spiritual side should be cared for as much as the corporeal; the help that comes is through the resuscitating breath of the Holy Spirit. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Divine Philosophy*, p. 96.

The new race of man will see God in everything, including money and possessions so that he can give freely for the betterment of the world.

Finding the Right Home for the Seniors in Our Lives

As I get older, I am more mindful of the end of my physical life. There are so many things that I am grateful for: I do not worry about work and money, and I live the retired life of my dreams. No matter how comfortable and content I am, I am also aware of the eventual fading of my bodily powers and my effectiveness and that I will be looked upon as someone who needs to be taken care of and in need of help.

For a long time, I have thought of elders in the senior homes who, even though they are still capable, are just passing the time before their next journey comes.

I believe that the integration of elders has to be each community's goal since the treasures of the elders' experience and wisdom will serve the young generation who need it so desperately. That is why I want to build a home for the elders and try to make it a place where integration and collaboration between different age groups become commonplace rather than merely a dream.

Growing up in the Middle East and living in Iran, India, and China, I was exposed to different cultures and witnessed how the elders were viewed and treated. They were looked upon with respect and reverence. As children, we were taught how to behave in the elders' presence because that was a sign of the proper upbringing of the children. I am surprised to see the approach that the West has taken toward our elders. Even in North America, except in Native American culture, elders are often seen as a burden on social programs.

Our culture — especially social media — gives the impression that the whole world revolves around young people. Hollywood reinforces an unspoken reality that the world is the playground for the young. It is so hard to imagine a productive place for the elders in modern society. It often seems like every movie, television show, and commercial caters to the young. Frankly, it feels like the only thing left for older people to do these days is to take their medicine and wait for their turn to die.

This is such a contrast to my awareness as a Baha'i that our souls never age. The body's condition should not distract us from nurturing the soul, no matter how old we are. Our elders have been separated from society to efficiently take care of their physical needs and their spiritual and human needs have been overlooked.

Baha'u'llah, the prophet and founder of the Baha'i Faith, wrote:

“Know thou that the soul of man is exalted above, and is independent of all infirmities of body or mind. That a sick person showeth signs of weakness is due to the hindrances that interpose themselves between his soul and his body, for the soul itself remaineth unaffected by any bodily ailments.”

We should approach older people as spiritual beings and ignore their physical frailties. There is so much that can be accomplished through our elders' resources and wisdom — if only society could begin to see them in the right light. Rather than allowing them to waste away in

sanitized homes where dreams die faster than bodies, we should provide them with the means to achieve goals they may have set for their golden years.

In 1982, at the first United Nations World Assembly on Ageing, the Baha'i International Community, an international non-governmental organization representing the members of the Baha'i Faith at the UN, offered some suggestions that I recently came across. They wrote:

“That there must be full integration of the aging in the human community, since the community should be an extended family in which everyone, of any age, is an essential part, and not only allowed, but encouraged, to make the fullest possible contribution to the wellbeing of the whole; and that in considering the needs of the aging in the process of development we must take into account the wholeness of the human being, the moral and spiritual dimension, besides his emotional, intellectual, and physical nature when discussing the special contributions of older persons to development and their sharing in the resulting benefits.”

In recent years the cancer of materialism has eroded some of the old traditions of respect and care for the elders but not entirely. My visit to India was proof. Before I visited, I had never considered building a home for the elders there because I thought that the rich Indian culture with its deep roots in tradition would reinforce the idea of taking care of elders. I was shocked to be informed by friends that this was not the case anymore. Also, adding to the elders' sad plight was that there were insufficient funds to help from the government.

I can picture myself in a home with limited interaction with the outside world. No matter how physically comfortable I would be, my soul would be starving for other generations' companionship. I have spent a lifetime of learning, travelling to different places, and doing amazing things in my life. I've gained so much experience that I would love to share, and I have many stories to tell.

My dream, which is based on the goal of full integration, is a home where there will be classes for children, youth activities, art classes, and visitors coming from near and far to see the vegetable garden and flowers that the elders have helped grow. I see each elder spiritually adopted by a family who takes care of them and includes them as members of their families. I see a home of creative activities where classes are taught by the young and the elders according to their interests. Yes, it is a dream, but it is a sweet dream that is worth our energy and resources. After all, without dreams, so many of humanity's achievements would not have happened.

We must consider integrating elders into day-to-day life not just for the sake of respect and love for them but because in no time, we each will be an elder experiencing loneliness and isolation. We have to change our mindset to see the elders as a source of untapped wisdom and knowledge. For the benefit of society, we can create an environment of comfort with an emphasis on integration so that before their final flight, none of their dreams are unfulfilled.

Why the World Needs Meaningful Conversation

When is the last time you had a deep, meaningful conversation with somebody? Wouldn't you like to have more of those?

We sometimes spend hours talking to people without it amounting to anything concrete. Those conversations can build community and friendships, and we need to have them feel we are part of society. Small talk helps us connect with people safely without offending or contradicting them. That is why people talk about the weather in many countries — which to visitors seems strange, irrelevant and a waste of time.

As people get used to making meaningless small talk to connect, they're also forced to tolerate and observe hateful, divisive, and hurtful conversations. These harmful conversations are mostly based on the supremacy of one political view, ideology, race, religion, and nationality over others. These subjects and many more have been used to put one set of people down by criticizing them so that they feel good about themselves. Observing these conversations is so painful that I'll take meaningless conversations about the weather at any time.

At present, the art of meaningful conversation is being gradually forgotten and has become a rare commodity. Humanity seems to be losing its way of communicating with each other and is choosing confrontation instead. Hurtful words are often used to inflict the most harm to the opposite views. The Baha'i Writings remind us about the importance of being courteous and sensitive in choosing our words while addressing others, especially those whose ideas are different from ours. Baha'u'llah, the prophet and founder of the Baha'i Faith, wrote:

“Every word is endowed with a spirit, therefore the speaker or expounder should carefully deliver his words at the appropriate time and place, for the impression which each word maketh is clearly evident and perceptible. The Great Being saith: One word may be likened unto fire, another unto light, and the influence which both exert is manifest in the world.”

Social media, with all its benefits, has given a new dimension to this problem. It provides an avenue for anyone to say whatever comes to their mind under the pretext of “Freedom of Speech.” As a result, some people have replaced logic and common sense with erratic emotional outbursts that achieve nothing except create pain and hate.

This phenomenon's other side effect is when people reject any logical and scientific idea that does not coincide with their views by labelling it “fake.” Though misinformation and propaganda have been part of media since the beginning of newspapers, it has only recently reached their highest peak. It has entered areas of life that were untouched before.

Sometimes people don't want to spend the energy investigating the truth, so they outright reject it since there is the danger of learning they could be proven wrong. So, by calling other points of view “fake,” we escape the chance of learning something new or finding a new way of looking at the issues, and that will lead to a war of words. These warring parties fight a

bitter battle of conversations as if they are on the battlefield having one goal: the destruction of the other's point of view at any cost.

We can't continue to tread this path of inability. Instead, we need to have a meaningful conversation so that humanity can choose a united way to build the future. The world needs to go back to the basic principles of communication. Learning the art of meaningful conversation and consultation will help us solve the matters that are tearing our society apart. We need to see each other not as enemies but rather as fellow human beings and be forgiving in dealing with one another. Abdu'l-Baha, the son of Baha'u'llah, wrote:

“Be in perfect unity. Never become angry with one another... Love the creatures for the sake of God and not for themselves. You will never become angry or impatient if you love them for the sake of God. Humanity is not perfect. There are imperfections in every human being, and you will always become unhappy if you look toward the people themselves. But if you look toward God, you will love them and be kind to them, for the world of God is the world of perfection and complete mercy

Truth is essential to a just, equitable society. Indeed, Abdu'l-Baha wrote, **“The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions.”**

However, the problem lies when we bring the ego into the conversation. Then it becomes a clash of egos rather than ideas. That, in turn, leads us to conflict and hatred. Instead, we need to learn the basic principles of consultation. Abdu'l-Baha gave us a few points to keep in mind. He wrote:

... must take counsel together in such wise that no occasion for ill-feeling or discord may arise. This can be attained when every member expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument. Should anyone oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed.

The lack of meaningful conversation and consultation is the absence of moral and spiritual guidelines for proper interactions. Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, provides us with the fundamentals. He wrote:

They must when coming together turn their faces to the Kingdom on High and ask aid from the Realm of Glory. They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views. They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden.

Here is more advice from Baha'u'llah: He wrote that we should speak **“with words as mild as milk”** and **“with utmost leniency and forbearance so that the sweetness of his words may induce everyone to attain that which befitteth man's station.”**

Although meaningful conversation looks like a simple statement, its influence and potential are immense. After all, building a communication system to resolve the ever-increasing and complicated problems facing humanity is the foundation for building a communication system.

The Spiritual Meaning of Wealth

One of the world's greatest driving forces is the desire for wealth. So many wars have been fought for money, and millions of lives have been lost in pursuing it. Every aspect of modern life is under its spell, yet we cannot define it. Wealth and money mean different things to different people, and they serve different purposes.

Investopedia defines wealth as: “the value of all the assets of worth owned by a person, community, company or country. Wealth is determined by taking the total market value of all physical and intangible assets owned, then subtracting all debts. Essentially, wealth is the accumulation of resources. Specific people, organizations, and nations are said to be wealthy when they can accumulate many valuable resources or goods.”

A simple language means all the worldly possessions a person has accumulated. In economic terms, wealth is explained in many ways — net worth for individuals and gross national product “GNP” for countries.

Before money was introduced, different societies had their exchange systems to create wealth and used wheat, rice, salt, cattle, and livestock. Silver and gold were used before currencies came to being, and since then, money has become the most common means of measuring wealth.

Considering all that, I've been thinking about defining wealth from a Baha'i point of view. Baha'u'llah, the prophet and founder of the Baha'i Faith, wrote:

The essence of wealth is love for Me; whoso loveth Me is the possessor of all things, and he that loveth Me not is indeed of the poor and needy. This is that which the Finger of Glory and Splendour hath revealed.

This is the spiritual definition of true wealth. I understand it to mean that we acquire spiritual wealth when we work to develop virtues such as trustworthiness, truthfulness, assertiveness, compassion, honesty, honour, prayerfulness, etc.

If we spend our lives developing virtues, we will have something to show for it when our time in this world of material existence comes to an end, as these developed qualities will assist us in our next stage of existence.

Developing these virtues will naturally affect our financial and material lives. For example, as it relates to trustworthiness, Baha'u'llah said:

Trustworthiness is the greatest portal leading unto the tranquility and security of the people. In truth the stability of every affair hath depended and doth depend upon it. All the domains of power, of grandeur and of wealth are illumined by its light.

When it comes to a Baha'i perspective on wealth and money, several different ways of thinking about materialism come to mind. For one, Abdu'l-Baha, the son of Baha'u'llah and

his designated successor, tells us that is nothing wrong with being rich or wanting to be wealthy.

Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual's own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes. Above all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement, for such a benefactor would supply the needs and insure the comfort and well-being of a great multitude. Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy.

Baha'u'llah reminded us of the purpose of wealth and how it should be utilized in these words:

O CHILDREN OF DUST!

Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.

Based on my understanding of these quotations, I see wealth as an amazing tool for service to humanity, and I have not shied away from using my God-given abilities to strive to create wealth with this in mind.

However, in striving to earn money, I also work on detaching myself from it and continually call to mind my purpose of seeking spiritual wealth. Baha'u'llah cautioned us:

“O SON OF BEING!

Busy not thyself with this world, for with fire We test the gold, and with gold, We test Our servants.” –

The materialistic and capitalistic world that we live in tries to convince us that there is no higher goal in life than buying and consuming. In these confusing times where “the cancer of consumerism” has taken hold of humanity, the Baha'i teachings tell us to look at wealth and life differently. Rather than living solely to maximize our pleasure, we can try our best to love the Creator, seek God's pleasure, and therefore love His creation — humanity. Instead of focusing only on personal satisfaction, we can turn away from ourselves and focus on a higher purpose. In this sense, we will be truly wealthy.

Abdu'l-Baha suggested how to prepare for the end of our lives. He said we should be passengers packed and ready for the spiritual journey by becoming more detached from the material world. At that end of life, wealth loses its glitter and charm, and the only thing that will satisfy our soul is that we understand the true meaning of wealth and use our material wealth for the good of others.

Small Town's Simple Approach To Peace

Nineteen years ago, one of the churches in our little town started organizing a Peace Walk on each year's first day. They invited everyone to join, and as a Baha'i, I welcomed the invitation.

Baha'is all over the world actively work for the oneness of humanity and peace on Earth, so with great joy, I attended the first Peace Walk and have participated in each one since the beginning.

The Peace Walk's route takes us through the center of town, and the cars on the road mostly honk in support of peace. Each of my fellow peace walkers from different groups hold homemade signs quoting sayings from their religions or ideologies.

I made a sign quoting Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Baha'i Faith: **"The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."**

After the walk, we all go to a cozy hall in a senior housing facility's basement. There is no set program since we all know why we're there. We come from different religions, and some of us have no faith at all, but we each know that peace is essential to all of us. That shared conviction creates a feeling of togetherness sensed by everyone. We spontaneously sing religious and non-religious songs, recite poetry and give short talks on peace. After that, everybody is invited to go for lunch at a Sikh temple nearby to enjoy the delicious homemade food prepared by the Sikh community.

I like many aspects of the Peace Walk but mainly appreciate its practical, simple approach to creating peace and oneness by sharing ideas, prayers, music and food with people from different backgrounds. This unity in diversity appeals to me immensely. It feels like a small family, with each member representing a different country and religion, sitting down to eat and enjoy each other's company together.

This year, one of the participants said this Baha'i prayer about peace and unity:

O Thou kind Lord! Thou hast created all humanity from the same stock. Thou hast decreed that all shall belong to the same household. In Thy Holy Presence they are all Thy servants, and all mankind are sheltered beneath Thy Tabernacle; all have gathered together at Thy Table of Bounty; all are illumined through the light of Thy Providence. O God! Thou art kind to all, Thou hast provided for all, dost shelter all, conferrest life upon all. Thou hast endowed each and all with talents and faculties, and all are submerged in the Ocean of Thy Mercy. O Thou kind Lord! Unite all. Let the religions agree and make the nations one, so that they may see each other as one family and the whole earth as one home. May they all live together in perfect harmony. O God! Raise aloft the banner of the oneness of mankind. O God! Establish the Most Great Peace. Cement Thou, O God, the hearts together. O Thou kind Father, God! Gladden our hearts through the fragrance of Thy love. Brighten our eyes through the Light of Thy Guidance. Delight our ears with the melody of Thy Word, and shelter us all in the

Stronghold of Thy Providence. Thou art the Mighty and Powerful, Thou art the Forgiving and Thou art the One Who overlooketh the shortcomings of all mankind. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 100.

After a few songs, we all listened to a talk about the need to take care of the refugees coming to our country from different war-torn places. After that, a 12-year-old Muslim boy sang a very heartwarming song about peace. Then came the turn of one of the Baha'is, a refugee himself, who talked about the biggest hindrance to peace—prejudice. He paid particular attention to the harm religious prejudice can inflict on society. His talk gave the audience a chance, primarily religious, to take stock of their feelings about other religions.

He quoted the Baha'i teachings, which tell us about the importance of the removal of all kinds of prejudices:

Prejudices of religion, race or sect destroy the foundation of humanity. All the divisions in the world, hatred, war and bloodshed, are caused by one or other of these prejudices. The whole world must be looked upon as one single country, all the nations as one nation, all men as belonging to one race. Religions, races, and nations are all divisions of man's making only, and are necessary only in his thought; before God there are neither Persians, Arabs, French nor English; God is God for all, and to Him all creation is one. We must obey God, and strive to follow Him by leaving all our prejudices and bringing about peace on earth. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris Talks*, p. 131.

Baha'is believe that one of the main hindrances preventing us from attaining peace today has involved only talking about peace and not taking real, substantive actions. We have many talks, books, conferences, treaties and high-minded thoughts about this subject—but not enough actual effort to achieve true peace:

Love ye all religions and all races with a love that is true and sincere and show that love through deeds and not through the tongue; for the latter hath no importance, as the majority of men are, in speech, well-wishers, while action is the best. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 69.

Baha'is make an effort to participate in projects and processes that ensure peace by actions and not only words. Peace can sometimes seem like an unattainable dream, but it should not be that way. People on our Peace Walk have simplified it to small steps of coming out, being visible and being heard—then showing that we can peacefully unite despite any differences we may have. There is no reason why we all cannot do the same by reaching out to like-minded people or organizations and facilitating similar events. In this way, we can be the active catalysts of peace and not just passive bystanders on the sidelines.

What Does the “Oneness of Mankind” Really Mean?

I have always thought that I understood the significance of humanity's oneness as our ultimate goal since, to me, the world's survival depends on it.

Moreover, as a Baha'i, I grew up hearing about that central Baha'i principle all the time, so the concept was imprinted on my psyche early in life.

Since I was interested and thought that I had learned the meaning and implication of humanity's oneness, I began to read more and more of the writers, poets, philosophers, and great thinkers who talked about this concept. I slowly realized that their ideas often took the hollow form of a slogan or a cliché. They said and wrote very inspiring things about global unity, no doubt, but lacked any practical suggestion or plan for how to achieve it.

Recently, as I was reading about the nature of man and his purpose in the Baha'i writings, I realized there is more to this concept than I had imagined. After those spiritual readings, I began to understand that the Creator made our Earth for human beings, thus giving us our ultimate destiny—to achieve the unity of humankind, establishing God's kingdom on Earth. We are meant to live a life that God has desired us to live—to nurture our spiritual nature and live as spiritual beings, united in the way He intended us to ultimately live:

The successive Founders of all past Religions Who, from time immemorial, have shed, with ever-increasing intensity, the splendor of one common Revelation at the various stages which have marked the advance of mankind towards maturity may thus, in a sense, be regarded as preliminary Manifestations, anticipating and paving the way for the advent of that Day of Days when the whole earth will have fructified, and the tree of humanity will have yielded its destined fruit. – Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 166.

Can you believe that from the inception of the universe, all these billions of years, this goal has driven our destiny?

After that realization, I tried to examine this discovery's implications with new insight and have attempted to understand what I missed all these years and need to relearn. I came across this quotation from the Baha'i teachings that enabled me to look at God's plan's details. It clearly pinpoints the areas that we have to work on to get to our ultimate goal:

Let there be no mistake. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind—the pivot round which all the teachings of Baha'u'llah revolve—is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations. Its implications are deeper, its claims greater than any which the Prophets of old were allowed to advance. Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. It does not

constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence. It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced ... It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world—a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units. – Ibid., pp. 42-43.

There is no doubt in my mind that the unity of humankind is inevitable, but the question of how and where the changes have to happen to achieve it has yet to be answered. To create a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, there must be a fundamental transformation in all areas of human life.

You may ask how it can be done. I have simplified the whole concept for me. As I understand it, the practical way of doing it—or at least the first step in its achievement—is to introduce spirituality and humanity into every aspect of life. For me, there are two ways of working towards this goal: first, internally, which means working on learning more, meditating more, purifying my life and becoming more spiritual each day. Second, externally, which means offering whatever I have learned or gained to contribute in all my life's activities to the advancement of civilization. In this small, individual way, I try to play my part.

We all have a part to play.

As just one example, our present economic system is sick and dying. It cannot meet the needs of humanity. The gap between rich and poor grows wider, increasing the suffering of the masses. It is time to re-examine the fundamental assumptions that this system was built on and replace them with humane, moral and spiritual ones. A shift in thinking is needed. By introducing spirituality into our economic activities, we can take steps to lay the foundation for a better economic future. We have the solutions and the technology to build a new system; we need the resolve and the will. Everyone has an inherent power—and responsibility—to contribute.

Introducing more spiritual qualities in our lives lays the foundation for a new society and economic system. Some of those goals may seem idealistic, but Baha'is are idealists, dreaming of a better world and then actively working to make it happen. No great achievement can take place without a goal or dream. Without those aspirations, civilization would not have progressed from the Stone Age to where we are now.

We are all privileged to live in a time when the oneness of humankind grows nearer, even though we have to deal with the chaos and confusion related to the disintegration of the old order it is destined to replace. We have all the tools and the blueprint for the unity of humankind. As people come closer in physical connection and the degree of the separation of humanity shrinks, the challenge now is to bring the hearts and minds of the people closer through spirituality.

Millennials and Generation Z- Thank God They Are Not Like Me

In most societies, it's common for older people not to trust the judgement of younger people. The reason usually given is that youth lack experience. And this is true — young people *don't* have the same amount of experience. But this reasoning never satisfies me because it ignores some of the insight and courage of younger generations.

Working with young people most of my professional life, I've observed an increase in criticism of millennials and the generation after them. Generation Z. I see this on social media and hear it in my conversations, and I feel this attitude has become more extreme.

As the world's confusion and problems have increased in recent years, younger generations are getting more than their share of criticism. Many Baby Boomers wonder if there will be enough workers to take care of them when they have to depend on the services they should see through the rest of their lives. At the same time, millennials and Generation Z wonder if there will be any future at all for them.

When I was young, I also had my share of older people saying I lacked experience. But within the Baha'i community, I was so proud to hear adults say, "Youth can move the world."

It's a quote that comes from the Universal House of Justice, the global governing body of the Baha'i Faith:

Undoubtedly, it is within your power to contribute significantly to shaping the societies of the coming century; youth can move the world. -The Universal House of Justice, Baha'i Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program

I think millennials are not following in the footsteps of older generations because the world's problems have led them to believe that they alone understand the gravity of the situation. After all, it directly affects them. They are the ones who have to solve it. In that way, I say, thank God they are not like my generation.

My aim is not to discredit the Baby Boomers, my generation, or the generations that came before. We worked hard and attained some significant achievements, but sadly it often feels like those were mostly material achievements, and some of them came at a great price. The mistake that was made was an overemphasis on achieving wealth at any cost, believing that wealth signified progress.

What previous generations missed — and we are still missing — are the spiritual and moral goals to offset the damage created by excess material progress.

For man two wings are necessary. One wing is physical power and material civilization; the other is spiritual power and divine civilization. With one wing only, flight is impossible. Two wings are essential. Therefore, no matter how much material civilization advances, it cannot attain to perfection except through the uplift of spiritual civilization. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*

This lust for material progress has brought us to such a critical state that younger generations feel there will be no future left for them to enjoy. Their cries and protests can now be heard all over the world.

The Baha'i teachings uphold the belief that the young generation will bring about a new order and maintain its governance. So I am very clear about my attitudes toward young people and have devoted my energies to encouraging and supporting them in any way possible.

The world's present problems are overwhelming and beyond our generation's capacity because our solutions are outdated and ineffective. The world needs a new and fundamental change in its outlook and approach to tackling the ever-increasing crisis of the world:

The present condition of the world — its economic instability, social dissensions, political dissatisfaction and international distrust – should awaken the youth from their slumber and make them inquire what the future is going to bring. It is surely they who will suffer most if some calamity sweep over the world. They should therefore open their eyes to the existing conditions, study the evil forces that are at play and then with a concerted effort arise and bring about the necessary reforms — reforms that shall contain within their scope the spiritual as well as social and political phases of human life. – Shoghi Effendi, March 13, 1932, to an individual believer, published in “Baha'i News” 68 (November 1932), p. 3.

I believe the recent challenges of our time have awakened the youth and brought forward many individuals who have exemplified passion, wisdom and devotion to such an extent that they inspire admiration in all. Our future depends on the tender shoulders of the millennials and Generation Z. They can certainly use all the help and support they can get from my generation to undo the mistakes that we have made.

Fasting the Time of Spiritual House Cleaning

Those who know me are aware of my love for fasting. I have participated in the Baha'i Fast, 19 days in March of abstaining from food and drink between sunrise and sunset, every year since the age of 15. Please don't misunderstand me. Even with all these years of experience, my body has never liked it and has made it clear to me that it does not share my enthusiasm.

Baha'i fasting is both a physical and spiritual exercise, which is why I am so attracted to it. The Baha'i teachings explain that fasting:

...is the cause of awakening man. The heart becomes tender, and the spirituality of man increases. This is produced by the fact that man's thoughts will be confined to the commemoration of God, and through this awakening and stimulation surely ideal advancements follow. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Star of the West*

I love fasting because I know it as a human being during my daily life. I unknowingly subject my soul to many impurities. With this awareness, fasting has become my annual "House Cleaning."

In the same way that people clean their houses in the West before Christmas or in Iran before the New Year (Naw-Ruz), I do the cleaning with my soul.

My friends who are from different religions can't understand why I put myself through this hardship. They think the Baha'i Fast is not a good idea, but their concern allows me to inform them that fasting has been a part of most religions. When food is always available in modern life, people have forgotten about fasting to the extent that now they find it a strange practice. However, history gives us evidence of the existence of fasting in most cultures and religions.

Fasting has been part of coming-of-age preparations for adulthood. Boys from native cultures in North America would fast in the wilderness, seeking a vision of a guardian spirit. Hindus have some form of fasting, which is an avoidance of a particular food. Generally, the ladies fast for the sake of their husbands. The Sadhus of India and Sufis fast and meditate for enlightenment. Modern Jews fast for 24 hours as a penance.

Fasting is also very much part of priests' life — holy men of various societies would fast in preparation for particular rituals. In most mystical and monastic traditions, fasting is practiced as a means of purification. Roman Catholics traditionally abstain from meat on days associated with the passion of Christ. Added to that list are the Manifestations of God, who fasted and meditated to commune with God.

Islam is one religion that strictly tries to observe the law of fasting. In addition to obligatory prayer, fasting is the Muslim's essential ritual obligation; it is one of Islam's five pillars. Fasting in Islam consists of deliberately abstaining from all food, drink, and sexual relations from the first light before dawn until the last light. The Qur'an explicitly states that fasting is an obligation and has been central to earlier religions.

It is important to remember that the essence of fasting is the spiritual part of fasting. If depriving oneself of food was a sign of spirituality, then all the food insecure people in the world would be holy men and saints.

For this material fast is an outer token of the spiritual fast; it is a symbol of self-restraint, the withholding of oneself from all appetites of the self, taking on the characteristics of the spirit, being carried away by the breathings of heaven and catching fire from the love of God. –Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha*

I believe that all the spiritual laws of God are for humanity's benefit, and the direct gain is for the individual who obeys them and follows them.

Each year I pretend that I do not know anything about fasting and read the Holy Writings with an eager soul to uncover their mysteries and, combined with meditation, to try to get rid of the filth that has attached itself to my soul. In a way, it is a time of self-examination, and as I get older, I find more benefits in fasting.

Science has now found that intermittent fasting is very beneficial for our bodies. It maintains that the body gets to direct its energies towards repairs by not eating for a length of time. This does not surprise me at all because I am discovering its wisdom and physical benefits of it. I am waiting for the day when humankind gets the chance to experience the sublime feeling of detachment from the body's need for food and focuses on cleansing the spiritual aspect of their lives to start the process of the unification of humanity.

It may look strange to connect fasting with unity, but if we think deeply, we realize that most conflicts and problems are caused by the lack of a spiritual approach to the issues. That makes fasting and praying the most effective tools. Souls are linked together with a string of divinity.

The Baha'i Writings tell us:

The Fast is essentially a period of meditation and prayer, of spiritual recuperation, during which the believer must strive to make the necessary readjustments in his inner life, and to refresh and reinvigorate the spiritual forces latent in his soul. – Directives from the Guardian

This year, I hope to introduce my mind and soul to fasting and experience a sense of purification by following this instruction for my spiritual betterment.

We Need to Replace Money as a Measure of Success

Humanity needs a new yardstick to measure achievement—today, we quantify it with money and material gain, the worst possible way to evaluate real success in life.

Money serves as an inadequate way to measure life's achievements. How can a solely materialistic tool pass judgment and render a verdict on our life's attainments?

We need to replace money as a measure of success with a more spiritual or humane one. However, that would necessarily involve a revolution in our current system of values, in fighting the cancer of materialism that has eaten into every fabric of our lives and endangered the future of humankind and the planet.

One of the world's most significant driving forces is traditionally the desire for money. So many wars have been fought for it, and millions of lives have been lost for it. No aspect of modern life seems immune from its spell.

Accordingly, we have to look for a better place to invest our God-given gift of life with all its talents and abilities. This gift of life—meant to be spent on acquiring spiritual qualities, knowledge, and the sciences and arts—does not focus on transitory achievements and material goods. Life serves a higher cause than money.

So the time has come to create and define a new and comprehensive yardstick covering all areas of our lives, reflecting our spiritual and human achievements alongside the material ones. This new yardstick will help us understand and work on all aspects of our lives—not just material prosperity. Then we can rationally decide the importance of money or lack of money in our lives and to what extent we have to invest our energies in it.

The Baha'i teachings say there is nothing wrong with money as a tool, as long as we're aware of its use and its danger in relation to our lives' total goals. It can be given value for measurement, then, as long as it serves its purpose:

Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual's own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes. Above all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement, for such a benefactor would supply the needs and insure the comfort and well-being of a great multitude. Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 24.

If we move our measurement of achievement away from money, what should our yardstick measure? Since the spiritual and human qualities aren't always tangible, we might want to change our focus to the many inner human character virtues accepted in most religions and moral codes. Here are just a few:

Trustworthiness, truthfulness, assertiveness, caring, cleanliness, compassion, confidence, consideration, courage, courtesy, creativity, detachment, determination, enthusiasm, excellence, faithfulness, flexibility, forgiveness, friendliness, generosity, gentleness, helpfulness, honesty, honour, humility, idealism, joyfulness, justice, kindness, love, loyalty, mercy, moderation, modesty, obedience, orderliness, patience, peacefulness, prayerfulness, purposefulness, reliability, respect, responsibility, reverence, self-discipline, service, steadfastness, tact, thankfulness, tolerance, trust, unity ...

The list could go on and on, but some of these virtues have been emphasized in the Baha'i writings and other religions—truthfulness and trustworthiness, to name just two. These important qualities are good starting points. But first, we have to change our way of thinking and accept that our human and spiritual qualities are more important than our material possessions. We have to expand our minds and souls to grasp the importance of spiritual and moral attributes over tangible gains. That process can start by reviewing what the Baha'i writings have to say about these valuable qualities:

Trustworthiness is the greatest portal leading unto the tranquility and security of the people. In truth the stability of every affair hath depended and doth depend upon it. All the domains of power, of grandeur and of wealth are illumined by its light. – Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, p. 37.

Truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues. Without truthfulness progress and success, in all the worlds of God, are impossible for any soul. When this holy attribute is established in man, all the divine qualities will also be acquired. – Abdu'l-Baha, quoted by Shoghi Effendi in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 26.

Suppose we adopted trustworthiness and truthfulness as moral measuring tools to reflect our spiritual progress more than money. In that case, that new yardstick could become a source of encouragement for many people who think they have failed in life. This would create a new way of getting rich in a real sense and leaving the rat race of material acquisition—a step in the right direction that leads towards transformation into a new race of more spiritual human beings.

We cannot readily visualize such a yardstick now, but this will become clearer to us as we progress spiritually. If humankind sets the right course to survive, it has to shed some of the old values and criteria used to measure its progress in the past. New measures have to be adopted—like finding a new yardstick to replace the money. Money has played its part in the past, but it renders us a great disservice and has become the creator of great miseries worldwide. The sooner we start this adjustment, the sooner we'll get on course to prepare the world for true progress.

Ditching the ‘Survival of the Fittest’ Mentality

Most people think that human beings are fundamentally competitive, and they may be right if we look at human history. Industrialists and economists believed that Darwin’s theories justified an economy of vicious competition and inequality. This has left us with a legacy that says that the corporate economy — where wealth stays in the hands of a few — is best for humanity. This was always a distortion of Darwin’s ideas. Darwin, in his book “The Descent of Man,” states that the human species had succeeded because of qualities like sharing and compassion:

Those communities, which included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members would flourish best, and rear the greatest number of offspring. – Charles Darwin

He was not an economist, but wealth-sharing and cooperation have always looked more consistent with his conclusions.

Studies and research have been done on animals and humans to highlight the benefits of cooperation. One of them was done by Michael Tomasello, who has done years of studies and concluded that the result in the study of animals showed that social selection had favoured cooperation. He wrote:

Individuals who attempted to hog all of the food at a scavenged carcass would be actively repelled by others, and perhaps shunned in other ways as well.

Humanity began its existence in the Stone Age, where survival of the fittest was the rule of the time. It had to compete with the elements and hunt for food for its survival. Unfortunately, as man’s intellect developed and his economic circumstances improved, he did not have to be the fittest to survive, but he behaved similarly. It is an accepted philosophy that competition is praiseworthy at any cost and in all manners without considering the consequences. Economic theories are constructed on this philosophy, and it has become the second nature in most capitalistic societies. Baha’i Writings do not agree with this philosophy.

In a talk in Washington, D.C. in 1912, Abdu’l-Baha, the son of Baha’u’llah, the prophet and founder of the Baha’i Faith, said:

In the world of nature we behold the living organisms in a ceaseless struggle for existence. Everywhere we are confronted by the evidences of the physical survival of the fittest. This is the very source of error and misapprehension in the opinions and the theories of man who fail to realize that the world of nature is inherently defective in cause and outcome and that the defects therein must be removed by education.

In another talk at Stanford University that same year, Abdu’l-Baha explained:

In nature there is the law of the survival of the fittest. Even if man be not educated, then according to the natural institutes this natural law will demand of man

supremacy. The purpose and object of schools, colleges and universities is to educate man and thereby rescue and redeem him from the exigencies and defects of nature and to awaken within him the capability of controlling and appropriating nature's bounties.

Although collaboration is getting more recognition nowadays, it is still entirely ignored in the economic field. The recent pandemic has highlighted both sides. We have seen the ugly side when different countries and states compete to buy the equipment to fight the virus, which led to skyrocketing prices that the developing countries can never afford. We can find countless examples of collaboration between individuals, communities, nations, and companies. People went out of their way to cooperate and share their resources. I read a social media statement that caught my attention: "Collaboration is our world's most essential value right now."

It briefly explains the importance of collaboration instead of competing. It looks to me and many others that humanity's survival depends on this essential human quality instilled in our soul's DNA by the creator.

This is how Abdu'l-Baha described cooperation:

Regarding reciprocity and cooperation: each member of the body politic should live in the utmost comfort and welfare because each individual member of humanity is a member of the body politic and if one member of the members be in distress or be afflicted with some disease all the other members must necessarily suffer. For example, a member of the human organism is the eye. If the eye should be affected that affliction would affect the whole nervous system. Hence, if a member of the body politic becomes afflicted, in reality, from the standpoint of sympathetic connection, all will share that affliction since this (one afflicted) is a member of the group of members, a part of the whole. Is it possible for one member or part to be in distress and the other members to be at ease? It is impossible! Hence God has desired that in the body politic of humanity each one shall enjoy perfect welfare and comfort.

The time has come to do away with old habits of competition that have stayed with us from our primitive days. Even though the scenario has now changed, we still compete for territory instead of hunting and fighting; firms, businesses, and corporations compete in the same spirit of destruction. The big fish eats the small fish, and this is considered to be a success. But it is time for the fish to live and collaborate. We have to educate ourselves to get rid of this remnant of Stone Age behaviour, which has no place in modern society.

There is nothing wrong with competing. We have seen even in the writings that encourage competing in the service to humanity. If we want to compete, it should be in the spiritual realm; we should strive to be the most generous person and kind. That is the real competition.

That is a healthy and spiritual competition that creates no harm and just increases the level of service to God and humanity. I am waiting for the day when the phrase "Survival of the Nicest" becomes more popular and appreciated.

Should We Fear God or Love God?

The phrase “fear of God” creates strong feelings in most people's hearts. Yet, it has been used in the writings of religions throughout history.

According to Wikipedia, fear of God “refers to fear or a specific sense of respect, awe, and submission to a deity.” People subscribing to prevalent monotheistic religions might fear divine judgment, hell, or God’s omnipotence.

Growing up, my knowledge of the fear of God was very elementary. Like most people, I had a fear of going to hell and suffering for eternity. When I did something terrible, God, the all-seeing, I used to think that He would see my actions and think of a punishment sooner or later. And then I would pay for my sins. Gradually I came to understand it better.

I am sure people who do not believe in a higher power see the whole concept of God's fear as a gimmick to control the ignorant. I do not blame them for thinking that since sometimes, I struggle to understand it.

After referring to the Baha’i writings, however, my vision has changed. First, I realized that God is not someone who is waiting for us to make a mistake and punish us.

Abdu’l-Baha, the son of Baha’u’llah, the prophet and founder of the Baha’i Faith, explained that **“God is the Father of all. He educates, provides for and loves all; for they are His servants and His creation.”**

A recent personal experience also made me think differently. I have a beautiful garden with wide varieties of flowers and fruit trees. It has been my prize material possession and a source of fantastic pleasure. I share the fruits with everyone in the community. Flowers attract birds and insects, and among them are a few families of hummingbirds who enjoy the flowers that I have planted for them. I have put out a feeder specifically for them. I was not surprised to see that they enjoyed the feeders so much that they decided not to migrate. Instead, these hummingbirds have stayed the winter with me for the past few years. I put out the feeders for the whole winter since there are no flowers or other food sources.

Last year was extremely cold, and the temperature went below zero for more than a month. The feeder would freeze at night, so I had to defrost it every morning and put it out again. They knew the routine and were always waiting for me, chirping to tell me to hurry up.

One day, as I was putting out the feeder for them and watching their happiness, it dawned on me that they would die if I did not feed them. Then I realized how much I loved them and how sad I would be without them. I had even cancelled a trip to take care of them. How I wished that they knew how much I loved them. They didn’t realize that their life was in my hands — or that I made sure they were provided for — because of my love for them. Nobody asked me to do that.

At that moment, I felt how God must think about us. He loves us, and because of that love, he created us. He did not have to do it, but he created the whole universe, and all he wished was that we try to know him and show our love to him.

That opened my spiritual eye, and the fear of God disappeared. I thought about how all I have to do is follow his teachings that have been given to humanity by his manifestations. Humanity cannot find the right path to spiritual progress without divine guidance. Abdu'l-Baha explains:

Some imagine that an innate sense of human dignity will prevent man from committing evil actions and insure his spiritual and material perfection. That is, that an individual who is characterized with natural intelligence, high resolve, and a driving zeal, will, without any consideration for the severe punishments consequent on evil acts, or for the great rewards of righteousness, instinctively refrain from inflicting harm on his fellow men and will hunger and thirst to do good. And yet, if we ponder the lessons of history it will become evident that this very sense of honor and dignity is itself one of the bounties deriving from the instructions of the Prophets of God. We also observe in infants the signs of aggression and lawlessness, and that if a child is deprived of a teacher's instructions his undesirable qualities increase from one moment to the next. It is therefore clear that the emergence of this natural sense of human dignity and honor is the result of education.

In life, we have our role models — someone we love, respect, and admire immensely. They could be our parents, coaches, teacher, or mentor. We do everything to please them, and disobeying them is the last thing in our minds. We do that because we know they love us, and listening to them is our benefit.

Baha'u'llah tells us to “Adorn your heads with the garlands of trustworthiness and fidelity, your hearts with the attire of the fear of God.”

In my spiritual immaturity and limited brainpower, I see God's love and the fear of God as the same. So, in my mind, when I read the Baha'i writings on this subject, I replace the word “fear” with “love,” and then it all makes sense to me.

Baha'u'llah wrote of “the fear of God, a fear that encompasseth all things, and reigneth over all things,” and he wrote that “We have admonished Our loved ones to fear God, a fear which is the fountain-head of all goodly deeds and virtues.”

Again, in my mind, I replace the word “fear” with “love.” You can try replacing the word “fear” with “love,” too.

My fear of God is the fear of me not measuring up to his expectations, knowing that by not following his teachings, I have deprived myself of his limitless blessing — his love — and that creates great fear in my heart. I believe that fear of God is an essential policing tool to help keep my conscience in check. It serves to remind me of the consequences of not following the right path.

Profit-Sharing: Does it Make Economic and Spiritual Sense?

Sharing the profit of any business with its employees pleases my economic side—and my mystic side.

Profit-sharing makes perfect sense to me to share my understanding from an economic point of view and a spiritual perspective, as an economist and as a Baha'i.

First of all, profit-sharing is such a generous action. It demonstrates sympathy, fairness, caring, unity, and the recognition of equality since everyone in the business has a sense of ownership when management shares profits with the workers.

The Baha'i teachings strongly support sharing profits with employees. When owners and management take care of workers, it allows them to be of service, and of course, it is an incentive and a privilege for workers to share in their organization's profits:

It is preferable, then, that some measure of moderation be achieved, and by moderation is meant the enactment of such laws and regulations as would prevent the unwarranted concentration of wealth in the hands of the few and satisfy the essential needs of the many. For instance, the factory owners reap a fortune every day, but the wage the poor workers are paid cannot even meet their daily needs: This is most unfair, and assuredly no just man can accept it. Therefore, laws and regulations should be enacted which would grant the workers both a daily wage and a share in a fourth or fifth of the profits of the factory in accordance with its means, or which would have the workers equitably share in some other way in the profits with the owners. For the capital and the management come from the latter and the toil and labour from the former. The workers could either be granted a wage that adequately meets their daily needs, as well as a right to a share in the revenues of the factory when they are injured, incapacitated, or unable to work, or else a wage could be set that allows the workers to both satisfy their daily needs and save a little for times of weakness and incapacity. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 316-317.

... the owners of properties, mines and factories should share their incomes with their employees and give a fairly certain percentage of their products to their workmen in order that the employees may receive, beside their wages, some of the general income of the factory so that the employee may strive with his soul in the work. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 43.

One of the other benefits of profit-sharing is the reduction or elimination of strikes. Sharing the earnings creates a sense of togetherness and unity so that the workers will resist the temptation of strikes in favour of friendly negotiations. The employees will have less reason to strike, knowing that as a result of a strike, they will lose, too.

Now let's examine the concept of profit-sharing from an economic viewpoint. Many studies have been done in this field, and those studies have found benefits in terms of loyalty,

productivity and taxation. Owen E. Richardson, in his essay “The Advantages of Profit-Sharing Plans,” breaks these down:

- **Loyalty:** Loyalty significantly increases with remuneration. Employees that are offered an opportunity to participate in a profit-sharing plan invest more devotion to their position because of the direct reward associated with it. In addition, it shows the company is invested in the employees and creates a sense of parity rather than a composition of titles and ranks; employees envision themselves as transcending associate status and tend to see themselves as co-owners.
- **Productivity:** Employees invested in a profit-sharing plan begin to take ownership of the business as their work role becomes more defined by their contribution. “**A plan that rewards employees with a share of the fruits of their labour draw a direct connection between work and reward,**” writes Stu Watson for the Edward Lowe Foundation. Productivity maintains higher levels when employees are given the opportunity to share in the profit margin they are creating through their efforts rather than being merely compensated for time on the job.
- **Tax Benefits:** Employees can use a 401k as a tax deduction tool on their personal income taxes, reducing their adjusted gross income by sheltering profit-sharing contributions in a tax-deferred plan. Contributions to a 401k are only taxed at the time of withdrawal, allowing the employee’s contributions to grow tax-deferred until the funds are withdrawn or dispersed in payments.

For those who want to study more on this subject, the Harvard Business Review published an interesting article called “Huawei: A Case Study of When Profit Sharing Works.”

But I’m convinced that profit-sharing’s emotional, psychological and spiritual benefits—such as unity, harmony, a happy working environment, a sense of belonging, having a common interest and a reduction of stress levels—exceed even the economic benefits.

Baha’is believe we should recognize and study these factors and eventually give them paramount importance in any economic system.

With its combination of spirituality and economics, this approach satisfies my belief that science and religion must coexist in harmony, just as the employer and employee relationship should exist in a state of harmony. If the unity of humanity is a goal for you, then profit sharing can help bring that goal much closer.

An Alternative Approach to Prevent Mass Shootings

“There was another shooting in a school today,” a teacher friend of mine said. “What about writing an article relating to these terrible tragedies?”

My field is economics, so I initially felt hesitant—but I reminded myself about the many years I worked in the school system. My first and foremost responsibility was protecting my precious students from the usual dramas and bullying.

I told my friend that I would try, so this is my attempt to share what’s in my heart about these horrible mass shootings.

At the outset, I admit that I don’t have all the solutions. I’m uncomfortable even tackling the subject due to its explosive and political nature, the polarization of emotions it evokes, and my personal experience with violence. Also, as a Baha’i, I will not insert myself into the party politics that have become so tied up in this issue.

But these horrific killings must stop, so we need to start somewhere.

We have to remember these mass shooters—these killers of children—did not come from the moon or some other planet. These disturbed individuals were and are our kids, our students, our neighbours, our cousins, and even our friends. Many of them were almost invisible to us, yet they existed, and most of us missed the signs of their struggles. We failed to see how ill-equipped they were to deal with the realities around them; consequently, we did not help them. Instead, we shunned them, disenfranchised them or ignored them.

As you can already see, I want to take a self-examining approach to the problem instead of pointing the finger at the usual people and organizations. Rather than looking elsewhere, let’s look at ourselves first. I believe we spend very little time exploring our own roles in this crisis. Consequently, we don’t do enough to discover how we can empower ourselves and others to avoid these tragedies.

We can all do things that may lead to preventing more disasters. We can pay attention to those who are ignored or bullied, or ostracized. We can show them that we care, build alternative activities that allow them some respite from their negative environments, and connect them to positive, welcoming people, courses, and group activities. For example, we can connect them with Baha’i youth activities that focus on spiritual and moral education and serve the community. We could do countless things if we cared enough and loved enough.

The Baha’i teachings ask us to love everyone because God, in His wisdom, knows that love is the real solution. Abdu’l-Baha, who exemplified love all his life through his actions, said:

Love gives life to the lifeless. Love lights a flame in the heart that is cold. Love brings hope to the hopeless and gladdens the hearts of the sorrowful. In the world of existence, there is indeed no greater power than the power of love. – *Paris Talks*, p. 179.

When I worked in the educational system, I had some sleepless nights worrying about some of the kids I knew, who were so full of anger and frustration that I was afraid that they might do some harm to themselves or others. Many staff members in just about every school have felt these experiences.

You might ask: Why were those students so hurt and angry? I would say because they were not getting enough love, care and attention. Most were deeply lonely, believing that nobody understood them or cared about them. They craved love, but they were getting anger, punishment and disciplinary rules that aimed to set them right without addressing the root cause of their problems.

However, I am not trying to portray mass shooters as victims. I am fully aware that some had serious issues and needed professional help. Yet, in some ways, they too are, as you and I, victims of a disease that we all are subjected to, and that is living in societies where we don't receive enough love and understanding. I call the cause of this disease vitamin L deficiency—the absence of love. In most cases, the essentially spiritual remedy of love can work much more effectively than many other legal prevention solutions.

Alternatively, we could arm more guards to protect our schools, shopping malls and public places; we could install metal detectors everywhere, and we could do more body searches to confiscate weapons—but since those things aren't very practical or effective, ultimately, I wish we would spend our time and resources on how, as a society, we can reach out to those angry and hurting individuals before they do something wrong.

How can we, as human beings, lessen the emotional burden of people breaking down under the pressure of life's problems, which will lead them to an awful path, and guide our children into grave danger? The Baha'i teachings say we can take action to truly begin to address the Vitamin L deficiency so many people suffer from: **“Love manifests its reality in deeds, not only in words—these alone are without effect.”** – Ibid., p. 36.

If we cared for and loved all human beings and did so with deeds rather than words, I believe many of those disturbed, angry shooters might choose a different path. I know this well since I witnessed the drastic change that loves and caring made for many of my students, who I thought might do some harm. In all my years of dealing with troubled kids, I learned to look beyond their anger, bad behaviour, and all the negative barriers they put up in order not to get hurt—because behind all that hostility was usually a scared little person crying out for attention, who just wanted to be accepted and loved as we all do.

So we can take the usual route of blaming our governments for lack of proper gun control, gun makers, violent video games, and all the rest of the players in this sad affair. Still, I strongly suggest we first look at ourselves, accept some of the responsibility, and resolve to befriend the sad, alienated, and potentially explosive.

By being aware of our potential power as a preventive agent in these mass shootings, with proper legal prevention measures and reasonable safety precautions, we can dream of a day when these tragedies will be a bizarre footnote in a very sad and dark period of human history.

How to Spend Your Money—Spiritually

Do we have to justify our spending to anyone? Most people would answer, “No—my money is mine, I earned it, and I can spend it any way I want!”

Some people consider themselves hedonists, a school of thought that argues that pleasure and happiness are the primary or most important intrinsic goods and the proper aim of human life. Hedonists strive to maximize net pleasure, so for them spending any amount of money in the pursuit of pleasure would seem justifiable.

Entire life philosophies have been built around this idea, including one called ethical hedonism—the idea that all people have the right to do everything in their power to achieve the greatest amount of pleasure possible. Ethical hedonism maintains that every person’s pleasure should far surpass the amount of pain. Started by Aristippus of Cyrene, a student of Socrates, ethical hedonists hold the idea that pleasure constitutes the highest good.

The Baha’i teachings look at life differently. Rather than living solely to maximize our own pleasure, Baha’is try their best to love the Creator, seek God’s pleasure, and therefore love His creation—humanity. Instead of focusing solely on personal pleasure, the Baha’i writings say, we should turn away from ourselves and focus on a higher purpose:

If thou lovest Me, turn away from thyself; and if thou seekest My pleasure, regard not thine own; that thou mayest die in Me and I may eternally live in thee. – Baha’u’llah, *The Hidden Words*, p. 5.

So try this: take a look at your personal spending in that light.

In one way, our spending reflects our values. “You are what you buy,” as one writer put it. Spending primarily on yourself and your own pleasure may indicate a lack of empathy for or awareness of other people’s needs.

On the other hand, if most of your spending goes to help others, it is obvious that you have come to recognize the extreme poverty in the world and the fact that not much has been done to remedy it. If you’re fully aware of the great poverty in the world today, you soon recognize that you’ll have to answer to your conscience for any unnecessary or selfish spending. That compassionate awareness, and the actions that accompany it, can make our material choices into spiritual decisions:

Certainly, some being enormously rich and others lamentably poor, an organization is necessary to control and improve this state of affairs. It is important to limit riches, as it is also of importance to limit poverty. Either extreme is not good. To be seated in the mean is most desirable. If it be right for a capitalist to possess a large fortune, it is equally just that his workman should have a sufficient means of existence.

A financier with colossal wealth should not exist whilst near him is a poor man in dire necessity. When we see poverty allowed to reach a condition of starvation it is a sure

sign that somewhere we shall find tyranny. Men must bestir themselves in this matter, and no longer delay in altering conditions which bring the misery of grinding poverty to a very large number of the people. The rich must give of their abundance, they must soften their hearts and cultivate a compassionate intelligence, taking thought for those sad ones who are suffering from lack of the very necessities of life. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris Talks*, p. 152.

No power in the world can force people to re-examine or justify their spending habits, except the power of our own realization and awareness of the level of poverty of our fellow human beings who are barely surviving. By reconsidering your spending ways, you may soon find it hard to spend on unnecessary pleasures and desires. Instead, you might find yourself spending your resources on your essential needs so that you can have enough left over to help the poor and needy.

The Baha'i teachings gently remind us that we human beings are one—that every individual is part of the human family. In other words, we're all relatives. Would you want your relatives to live in abject poverty, hunger and want, while you spent your resources on luxuries and pleasures for yourself?

Know ye that the poor are the trust of God in your midst. Watch that ye betray not His trust, that ye deal not unjustly with them and that ye walk not in the ways of the treacherous. Ye will most certainly be called upon to answer for His trust on 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. – Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 251.

Baha'is believe that humanity is gradually waking up to the fact that we have a very important responsibility and duty to look after the poor and needy, to make sure that they are cared for and live happily. This is a God-given duty. They have been entrusted to us, and by caring for them, we take a step towards the unity of humanity and a future society in which there are no poor.

Evolution: The Human Race, Maturing Past Materialism

The popular evolutionary belief declares that we have been created like all other animals and have evolved to become human beings.

From a Baha'i perspective, that scientific conclusion doesn't tell the whole human story.

In fact, that view can be understood in a way that undermines humanity's spiritual station and destiny. It sets the bar low for working towards our goals and creates the expectation of violence, wars and other destructive forces as acceptable behaviour.

That view basically asks: If we're animals, shouldn't we act like animals?

However, the Baha'i teachings and all other religions have a very different view—that we, in essence, are spiritual beings and have been created to gain human experience. We come from the Creator, which means we have a spiritual destiny—a spiritual journey to traverse to transform our souls so that we gain the presence of God:

God in his wisdom has created all things. Nothing has been created without a special destiny, for every creature has an innate station of attainment. This flower has been created to mirror forth a harmonious ensemble of color and perfume. Each kingdom of nature holds potentialities, and each must be cultivated in order to reach its fulfillment. The divine teachers desire man to be educated that he may attain to the high rank of his own reality ... – Abdu'l-Baha, *Divine Philosophy*, p. 110.

History proves that humanity has not lived a very humane life so far and has acted too often on its animal impulses. So, in that sense, human history has not yet begun. The so-called human history to date records a welter of wars, conflicts, aggression, destruction and misery. To achieve our destiny—to fully mature into our spiritual reality—humanity must first discover its true nature and then take steps to begin a spiritual transformation in all aspects of its collective life.

In order to accomplish that transition, we will need to find ways to subordinate our lower natures, then find the true purpose of our creation and move towards it.

At this time in our history, it is almost impossible to imagine the qualities and abilities of that new, spiritual race of human beings. Because our understanding is limited and we do not have the spiritual insight to picture it, all we can do at this time is to continue on our path of personal growth by relying on the spiritual guidance given to us by Baha'u'llah, keeping in mind what our Creator intended for our existence:

O Son of Spirit! Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created. – Baha'u'llah, *The Hidden Words*, p. 9.

Once we begin the transformation process, we must redefine many of our past concepts. The definitions of such concepts as success, wealth and possessions need to reflect their true meanings, connecting our material achievements and aspirations with spiritual ones:

Then it is clear that the honour and exaltation of man cannot reside solely in material delights and earthly benefits. This material felicity is wholly secondary, while the exaltation of man resides primarily in such virtues and attainments as are the adornments of the human reality. These consist in divine blessings, heavenly bounties, heartfelt emotions, the love and knowledge of God, the education of the people, the perceptions of the mind, and the discoveries of science. They consist in justice and equity, truthfulness and benevolence, inner courage and innate humanity, safeguarding the rights of others and preserving the sanctity of covenants and agreements. They consist in rectitude of conduct under all circumstances, love of truth under all conditions, self-abnegation for the good of all people, kindness and compassion for all nations, obedience to the teachings of God, service to the heavenly Kingdom, guidance for all mankind, and education for all races and nations. This is the felicity of the human world! This is the exaltation of man in the contingent realm! This is the eternal life and heavenly honour! – Abdu’l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, newly revised edition, pp. 89-90.

Past generations have spent so much energy gaining material possessions, believing them to represent the ultimate goals in life, and, as a result, have neglected their spiritual needs and growth. Humanity’s vision of itself and its destiny has been misguided and in the end, led to nothing of real value in the eyes of God:

The All-Merciful hath conferred upon man the faculty of vision, and endowed him with the power of hearing. Some have described him as the “lesser world,” when, in reality, he should be regarded as the “greater world.” 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. – Baha’u’llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah*, p. 340.

As we move forward, both as individuals and as the human race, we have to change our external tools and replace them with spiritual tools and concepts to guide us to our true destiny. We need to shed our animalistic tendencies and acquire virtues that will allow us to follow a spiritual path toward peace and unity.

That means many of the criteria we have used to measure our achievements, such as money and wealth, have to be transformed into spiritual ones. We are on a spiritual journey, and our lives should reflect that powerful reality.

In Search of a Moral Economy

The Baha'i teachings advocate for humanity and morality in our economic activities and incorporate them into our economic systems.

But how does humanity and morality—spirituality, really—fit into an economic system? To most people, those subjects sound completely separate.

I'm an economist, so it surprised me when I learned that the first book written by 18th Century Scottish economist Adam Smith was *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. It was published seven years before his magnum opus, *The Wealth of Nations*, which founded modern economic theory and virtually invented the free market idea. Moral values and modern economy? It never occurred to me that morality might be part of his philosophy.

But the Baha'i writings also speak of a fundamentally spiritual solution to the world's economic problems:

No religious books of the past prophets speak of the economic question, while this problem has been thoroughly solved in the teachings of Baha'u'llah. Certain regulations are revealed which insure the welfare and well being of all humanity. Just as the rich man enjoys his rest and his pleasures surrounded by luxuries, the poor man must likewise have a home, be provided with sustenance, and not be in want. Until this is effected happiness is impossible. All are equal in the estimation of God; their rights are one and there is no distinction for any soul; all are protected beneath the justice of God.
– Abdu'l-Baha, *Star of the West*, Volume 6, p. 5.

Every economist studies *The Wealth of Nations*, and most will tell you that Adam Smith's work is all about the science of making wealth. His ideas have formed the guidelines for so many economists, and his words are still the accepted authority on the subject. His influence is still felt, and his assumptions are still the foundation of economics.

But Adam Smith certainly recognized the inherent danger of wealth, even as he provided ideas for generating it:

This disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and powerful, and to despise or, at least, neglect persons of poor and mean conditions, though necessary both to establish and to maintain the distinction of ranks and the order of society, is, at the same time, the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments.

The Baha'i writings make a very similar point:

... the happiness and greatness, the rank and station, the pleasure and peace, of an individual have never consisted in his personal wealth, but rather in his excellent character, his high resolve, the breadth of his learning, and his ability to solve difficult problems. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 23.

One of the most prevalent concepts in the economy, and one of Smith's most significant assumptions, was the concept of the "Invisible Hand," which brooked no interference from the government in the economic marketplace—because Smith's invisible hand would magically solve the problems, balance supply and demand and also fix prices in an unregulated economy. Thus, Smith has been called the founder of "laissez-faire capitalism" and denigrated for his lack of a moral component in his economic theories.

But suppose you combine this "invisible hand" idea with Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments, where he says that human beings naturally tend to care about others' well-being. In that case, you get a different picture of this conceptual framework:

The administration of the great system of the universe ... the care of the universal happiness of all rational and sensible beings, is the business of God and not of man. To man is allotted a much humbler department, but one much more suitable to the weakness of his powers, and to the narrowness of his comprehension: the care of his own happiness, of that of his family, his friends, his country But though we are ... endowed with a very strong desire of those ends, it has been entrusted to the slow and uncertain determinations of our reason to find out the proper means of bringing them about. – Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 3.

Smith's quotations indicate that he strongly believed in morality. He discussed the welfare of the individual, saying it depends on the welfare of all: "No society can surely be flourishing and happy," he wrote in *Moral Sentiments*, "of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable."

The Baha'i teachings explain how crucial it is to bridge the gap between extremes of wealth and poverty:

God is not partial and is no respecter of persons. He has made provision for all. The harvest comes forth for everyone. The rain showers upon everybody, and the heat of the sun is destined to warm everyone. The verdure of the earth is for everyone. Therefore, there should be the utmost happiness, the utmost comfort, and the utmost well-being for all humanity.

But if conditions are such that some are happy and comfortable and some in misery, some are accumulating exorbitant wealth and others are in dire want — under such a system it is impossible for man to be happy and impossible for him to win the good pleasure of God. God is kind to all. The good pleasure of God consists in the welfare of all the individual members of mankind. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 312.

The Universal House of Justice recently reminded us of the same essential point:

The welfare of any segment of humanity is inextricably bound up with the welfare of the whole. Humanity's collective life suffers when any one group thinks of its own well-being in isolation from that of its neighbours' or pursues economic gain without regard for how the natural environment, which provides sustenance for all, is affected. -March 1, 2017.

Smith said, **“To feel much for others and little for ourselves; to restrain our selfishness and exercise our benevolent affections, constitute the perfection of human nature.”**

I am so grateful that I discovered the moral side of economics—and how I wish more economists would, too. We need to talk about this in our universities and make it an essential part of economic studies to learn the relationship between morality and economics.

If the economic system were to serve humanity truly, it should reflect the human, moral and spiritual values of the people who created it.

A person through his own actions and deeds makes himself loved or disliked by the people; or through his own unselfish conduct and behaviour, refined morality and selfless intention, trustworthiness and rectitude he suffers himself to become favoured and beloved at the threshold of God. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Star of the West*, Volume 4, p. 168.

A Way Out of Extreme Wealth

“82% of the wealth generated in 2017 in the world went to the richest 1%.” That headline led the news today, and it made me feel horrible.

The article said, “The economic lives of 3.7 billion poor did not improve from last year.”

The news report, seen on TV, in newspapers and all across social media, said: “A CEO from one of the world’s top five global fashion brands has to work for just four days to earn what a garment worker in Bangladesh will earn; in an entire lifetime.”

This is not the first time we’ve seen such numbers highlighting the world’s sad economic situation. As I stared at these statistics, my mind tried to imagine the plight of the poor, and I couldn’t help but wonder how even a small fraction of that 82% would change the lives of billions of poor people.

It was the only way I could interpret these tragic statistics, and that made me extremely sad. Then the thought came to me that the hyper-rich 1% also see this news, which they have seen before, and yet it has not sufficiently changed their ways. That thought made me feel helpless. I felt hopeless, too, that this widening gap between the rich and the poor would continue growing and that no one could stop it. I even questioned our very humanity, which allows these deep disparities to continue.

Then I decided that I would try to make this story not go away so fast. I decided to write about it, hoping to bring it to the attention of as many people as I can reach.

When I see these kinds of grim numbers, they bring to mind the words of Baha’u’llah:

Why, then, exhibit such greed in amassing the treasures of the earth, when your days are numbered and your chance is well-nigh lost? Will ye not, then, O heedless ones, shake off your slumber? – Baha’u’llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah*, p. 127.

O Ye Rich Ones on Earth! The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust, and be not intent only on your own ease. – Baha’u’llah, *The Hidden Words*, p. 41.

One of the central principles of the Baha’i teachings—the elimination of the extremes of wealth and poverty—directly addresses this disturbing trend:

The inordinate disparity between rich and poor, a source of acute suffering, keeps the world in a state of instability, virtually on the brink of war. Few societies have dealt efficiently with this situation. The solution calls for the combined application of spiritual, moral and practical approaches. A fresh look at the problem is required, entailing consultation with experts from a wide spectrum of disciplines, devoid of economic and ideological polemics, and involving the people directly affected in the decisions that must urgently be made. It is an issue that is bound up not only with the necessity for eliminating extremes of wealth and poverty but also with those spiritual

verities the understanding of which can produce a new universal attitude. Fostering such an attitude is itself a major part of the solution. – The Universal House of Justice, October 1985, *The Promise of World Peace*, p. 3.

Not much can be said about what this news and these statistics indicate. To me, they indicate a sick economic system that favours the rich and ignores the plight of the poor while humanity stands on the sidelines and watches it continue.

But the Baha’i teachings recommend a solution:

The fundamentals of the whole economic condition are divine in nature and are associated with the world of the heart and spirit. This is fully explained in the Baha’i teaching, and without knowledge of its principles no improvement in the economic state can be realised. The Baha’is will bring about this improvement and betterment but not through sedition and appeal to physical force—not through warfare, but welfare. Hearts must be so cemented together, love must become so dominant that the rich shall most willingly extend assistance to the poor and take steps to establish these economic adjustments permanently. If it is accomplished in this way, it will be most praiseworthy because then it will be for the sake of God and in the pathway of His service. For example, it will be as if the rich inhabitants of a city should say, “It is neither just nor lawful that we should possess great wealth while there is abject poverty in this community,” and then willingly give their wealth to the poor, retaining only as much as will enable them to live comfortably. – Abdu’l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 238-239.

I hope we soon wake up to the reality that we could be the instruments of the change the Baha’i teachings call for—and begin to act to make it a reality. Even small actions can instill this change by creating empathy for the poor in our hearts and then doing all we can to remedy this grave injustice.

So here’s a suggestion: don’t let your social or economic class limit your horizons, your thinking or your relationships. Whether you’re poor or rich, find a way to cross those economic barriers to meet and get to know people from other classes and conditions.

We all can make a difference by our actions, big or small. To stop this trend, we have to do some soul-searching and come to a course of action. We cannot close our eyes to these kinds of statistics and do nothing.

Are Economic and Political Changes Leading Us Towards a Global Government?

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the world around us and our way of life has totally changed. New attitudes and a new way of thinking must be adopted. What is happening has highlighted the plight of the poor and the need for the governments and other agencies to step up and do all they can to help — because this epidemic is killing more of the underprivileged and people living in poverty.

Many celebrities, sports figures, and other wealthy people have got their wake-up call and realized that there is more to life than accumulating wealth. Financial institutions have relaxed their lending rates and brought credit card interest to zero. There is a sense of unity even with some warring parties across the world. They have ceased fighting because they found a bigger virus enemy. Though these attitudes have not come organically, they welcome changes, and they make me happy in these stressful times.

It makes me happy because these are steps toward the right path. As Abdu'l-Baha, the son of Baha'u'llah, the Prophet-Founder of the Baha'i Faith, said in a speech in London in 1911:

The arrangements of the circumstances of the people must be such that poverty shall disappear, and that every one as far as possible, according to his position and rank, shall be comfortable. Whilst the nobles and others in high rank are in easy circumstances, the poor also should be able to get their daily food and not be brought to the extremities of hunger. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Abdu'l-Baha in London*

It is not just the ordinary and the rich who have re-examined their priorities. From the local to the international level, the leaders of all levels of government have started to see the world differently. They're changing their ideas and, more importantly, their vision to correspond with communities' new demands.

These changes have necessitated the need to do away with the old and narrow view of the past. Many people are instead sensing a need for an international body to coordinate the efforts and resources to ensure the welfare of the whole of humanity that has been so drastically affected.

To Baha'is, the world government has been foreseen, and its need is emphasized since it is an essential means of unifying humankind. Baha'u'llah wrote that:

The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace amongst men. Such a peace demandeth that the Great Powers should resolve, for the sake of the tranquility of the peoples of the earth, to be fully reconciled among themselves. Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him. If this be done, the nations of the world will no longer require any armaments, except for the

purpose of preserving the security of their realms and of maintaining internal order within their territories. This will ensure the peace and composure of every people, government and nation. – *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah*

The concept of world government has been envisioned by religions, philosophers, poets, writers and great enlightened men and women, but it has been a hard sell to the politicians. However, recent events have made experts and seasoned politicians raise the alarm for a need for universal efforts to deal with what we are experiencing.

“We face a crisis unlike any other. To overcome it, we must unite,” António Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, said in a statement. Also, Guterres asked “for a global ceasefire to focus on our common enemy — the virus” and called for collective action. “Together, we will defeat this virus and rebuild a fairer world — as united global citizens and united nations.”

Gordon Brown and Tony Blair, both ex-Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom, have called for a global fund to fight coronavirus spread and highlighted the need for a universal body to deal with it. Brown also called for a temporary global government to manage the medical and economic crises caused by the pandemic.

“We need some sort of working executive,” Brown said. Recalling efforts to tackle the 2008 financial crisis, he added: “If I were doing it again, I would make the G20 a broader organization because in the current circumstances, you need to listen to the countries that are most affected, the countries that are making a difference and countries where there is the potential for a massive number of people to be affected — such as those in Africa.”

For me, based on the Writings of the Baha’i Faith, there is only one solution: the unification of the world because united, we are stronger to face the challenges that the future has stored for us. May these challenges eventually lead us to a brighter future. As the Baha’i Writings tell us:

God grant that the people of the world may be graciously aided to preserve the light of His loving counsels within the globe of wisdom. We cherish the hope that everyone may be adorned with the vesture of true wisdom, the basis of the government of the world. – Baha’u’llah, *Tablets of Baha’u’llah*

Making Economics Serve Humanity

The recent pandemic has highlighted the glaring disparities in the economic system between the rich and the poor. On the one hand, we have the plight of poor people living under the poverty line and trying to survive the onslaught of miseries caused by financial hardship. In contrast, a small percentage of people continue to add billions to their already colossal wealth.

It upsets me because it looks like humanity has lost consciousness and become numb to the poor and underprivileged sufferings. I see the ever-widening gap between the poor and the rich getting wider and wider, yet there seems to be no solution in sight. That makes me more determined than ever to keep this issue alive and continue to address it.

I like to use the word “humanomics” to describe the solution to the inequalities in our economic system because a lack of humanity has been with the system since its inception and has had devastating effects on millions of lives.

Baha’u’llah, the prophet and founder of the Baha’i Faith, taught us how to treat the poor. It is no wonder that he was called “Father of the Poor.” He wrote:

Know ye that the poor are the trust of God in your midst. Watch that ye betray not His trust, that ye deal not unjustly with them and that ye walk not in the ways of the treacherous. Ye will most certainly be called upon to answer for His trust on 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.

The Baha’i Writings remind us to be aware of our role in taking care of the poor since our moral and spiritual duty is to protect and care for them. Baha’u’llah also wrote:

“O Son of Man! Bestow My wealth upon My poor, that in heaven thou mayest draw from stores of unfading splendour and treasures of imperishable glory. But by My life! To offer up thy soul is a more glorious thing couldst thou but see with Mine eye.

In addition to helping on an individual level, we need to change the economic system to make it more sensitive to people’s needs and inject morality and spirituality into it to serve humanity rather than humanity being sacrificed to make the system work. We need Humanomics: a human system with human values and less economics.

This can only be done by practicing truthfulness, trustworthiness, and other moral values in our actions, especially in our economic activities. These activities are not just economical but spiritual. In a talk in Boston in 1912, Abdu’l-Baha, the son of Baha’u’llah and his designated successor, explained that **“The fundamentals of the whole economic condition are divine in nature and are associated with the world of the heart and spirit.”**

In 1935, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha’i Faith, further explained Abdu’l-Baha’s meaning:

... By the statement ‘the economic solution is divine in nature’ is meant that religion alone can, in the last resort, bring in man’s nature such a fundamental change as to enable him to adjust the economic relationships of society. It is only in this way that man can control the economic forces that threaten to disrupt the foundations of his existence, and thus assert his mastery over the forces of nature.

The world's economic problems will not be solved if we do not change the system. The present financial system is a by-product of the old order and was built on wrong assumptions. It is assumed that people only think of their interests and do not concern themselves with others' plight. This assumption has been the engine for driving the system, and it has become a fertile ground for greed to spread in every aspect of human life; and we can see the result is the present economic injustices in the world.

The sad part about this is that every single day that this continues, thousands of people in the world will be dragged into a life full of economic challenges without any hope of remedy.

The essential element missing in the present economic system is justice, which has to be its foundation. Economic justice these days is the scarcest commodity in the world. In a talk in Montreal in 1912, Abdu’l-Baha told the audience:

We ask God to endow human souls with justice so that they may be fair, and may strive to provide for the comfort of all, that each member of humanity may pass his life in the utmost comfort and welfare. Then this material world will become the very paradise of the Kingdom, this elemental earth will be in a heavenly state, and all the servants of God will live in the utmost joy, happiness and gladness.

I feel that every individual is responsible for trying to do their utmost to lessen the burden of poverty from the shoulders of our fellow humans so that every person in the world has the economic means to live a comfortable and fulfilled life — which is fundamental human right.

Though the possibility of the economic system becoming more humane looks like a far-fetched dream, if we desire it and strive to attain it by playing our small part, we can transform this rigid system, which is currently devoid of spirit fantastic tool for the prosperity of humanity.

The Spiritual Cost of a Higher Standard of Living

Undoubtedly, the standard of living has improved since the industrial revolution, particularly for many in the West.

Time not long ago, phones, colour TVs, and cars were only for the rich, and the poor could only dream of having them. But now, even poor people in developed nations own cell phones, colour TVs and computers.

Even children from poor or rich families have cell phones and assorted sophisticated electronic toys as early as the age of three or four. The adults also have their toys: airplanes, ride-on lawnmowers, boats and motorcycles.

The sad part about all these expensive toys: you do not have to have money to buy them because you can get a loan. With all our material possessions, we have come to believe we are better off than before and that we have improved the material quality of life. We think that acquiring more possessions will make us feel happier and more comfortable—but unbridled acquisition only starves the soul and makes us less and less happy. Our souls feel trapped in the clutter of material goods. The Baha'i teachings tell us:

All around us today we see how man surrounds himself with every modern convenience and luxury, and denies nothing to the physical and material side of his nature. But, take heed, lest in thinking too earnestly of the things of the body you forget the things of the soul: for material advantages do not elevate the spirit of a man. Perfection in worldly things is a joy to the body of a man but in no wise does it glorify his soul. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris Talks*, pp. 62-63.

If we use happiness as a criterion, many of us have begun to realize that we are less happy despite our higher living standards than before. Why?

Perhaps because the more we have, the harder we have to work to maintain that standard of living—and the more we work, the less time and energy we have to nurture our minds and our souls through meditation, reading books, playing music, painting, spending time with family and friends, and helping others. Those things can bring us true happiness, as Abdu'l-Baha explains:

If man is bereft of the divine bestowals and if his enjoyment and happiness are restricted to his material inclinations, what distinction or difference is there between the animal and himself? In fact, the animal's happiness is greater, for its wants are fewer and its means of livelihood easier to acquire. Although it is necessary for man to strive for material needs and comforts, his real need is the acquisition of the bounties of God. If he is bereft of divine bounties, spiritual susceptibilities and heavenly glad tidings, the life of man in this world has not yielded any worthy fruit. While possessing physical life, he should lay hold of the life spiritual, and together with bodily comforts and happiness, he should enjoy divine pleasures and content. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 335.

Almost all agree that our current economic system provides more goods and money—but having more may not necessarily be the best. The philosophy of “more is better” has led to a mentality of acquiring as many material goods as possible. That mentality has created a sickness in society that measures achievements based on having more possessions and disregards the emotional and spiritual aspects of one’s life.

This lack of spirituality is the root cause of most of the world's problems, and Baha’is are encouraged to introduce spirituality in any way possible into their economic activities. This can be as simple as saying a prayer for the poor or as grand as initiating a multi-billion dollar project to eliminate poverty or eradicate the disease. It could be by paying fair prices, avoiding wastage, being honest in insurance claims or giving to charitable funds.

Some mistake a higher standard of living for prosperity. To have more does not translate into being happier. According to the Legatum Prosperity Index, prosperity:

- Is a home to grow, to raise a family, a community where we belong, is people who care.
- Is compassion and generosity, is health, is education, is truth and integrity, in politics, in media, in business. Is peace and safety.
- Is in opportunity to work, to earn, to save, to get ahead, to innovate, to take risks, to succeed (or fail).
- Is freedom from hunger, disease, slavery, poverty, conflict, to speak our minds, to vote, to follow our beliefs. Is hope, space to breath and time to recharge and re create.
- Is becoming the best I can be and helping others to be the best they can be.

Baha’is believe in true prosperity and are aware of its greatest threat:

... true prosperity, the fruit of a dynamic coherence between the material and spiritual requirements of life, will recede further and further out of reach as long as consumerism continues to act as opium to the human soul. – The Universal House of Justice, 2 March 2013.

The question remains: do we want a higher standard of living at any cost, or do we want true prosperity for ourselves and for all? The decision is ours, and the price to pay is ours, too.

How Much Profit Margin Do You Need, Anyway?

The world of economics is based on profit. Without it, there would be no motivation to start a business or company—the whole system would fail.

After all, why would anyone exert so much effort for no profit? Sure, a few people work for free, but their motivation is not to earn a livelihood. In today's world, competition has become so stiff that most companies employ consultants, research firms, agencies and even psychologists to guide them to increase their profits.

That's all well and good—but with the pressures in this materialistic world, the desire for profit can easily get out of hand and devolve into greed. When that happens, those in business want more and more and to get more, they lose their sense of reality and forget to ask themselves this question: “How much is enough?”

Most entrepreneurs and business owners can recall how little they expected when they started their business as a return on their investment. But sadly, as their businesses grew, their greed often grew with it, to the point that there was no limit to their desire for more profit. Unfortunately, as greed increases, it overshadows many of our human values and morals.

The Baha'i teachings uniquely recognize the concept of greed:

In the innate nature of things there is no evil—all is good. This applies even to certain apparently blameworthy attributes and dispositions which seem inherent in some people, but which are not in reality reprehensible. For example, you can see in a nursing child, from the beginning of its life, the signs of greed, of anger, and of ill temper; and so it might be argued that good and evil are innate in the reality of man, and that this is contrary to the pure goodness of the innate nature and of creation. The answer is that greed, which is to demand ever more, is a praiseworthy quality provided that it is displayed under the right circumstances. Thus, should a person show greed in acquiring science and knowledge, or in the exercise of compassion, high-mindedness, and justice, this would be most praiseworthy. And should he direct his anger and wrath against the bloodthirsty tyrants who are like ferocious beasts, this too would be most praiseworthy. But should he display these qualities under other conditions, this would be deserving of blame. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, newly revised edition, pp. 248-249.

Baha'u'llah warns us not to waste our lives on those blameworthy aspects of greed:

Why, then, exhibit such greed in amassing the treasures of the earth, when your days are numbered and your chance is well-nigh lost? Will ye not, then, O heedless ones, shake off your slumber? – Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 127.

These Baha'i teachings clearly demonstrate how dangerous greed can be and how important it is to be aware of this danger and resist it. This task becomes more significant because where there is greed, there is also envy—these two are closely related. To combat them, we need to increase our awareness by drawing strength from the world's great Faiths' spiritual teachings.

What's the opposite of greed? Contentment. The Oxford dictionary defines contentment as “a state of happiness and satisfaction.” When you're content, you evince a mental or emotional state of satisfaction with life—you're at ease in your situation, body, mind, and soul.

A contented life is characterized by thanksgiving for what we have, rather than moaning about what we don't have or what the advertisements or comparison to our neighbours tell us we ought to have. Contentment directs our attention towards gratitude for what we have. If you have a house, a car or a business, be happy that you have them—since the millions dream of having them. If you have a business that provides you with sufficient profit to live a comfortable life, be happy with that, rather than thinking you need more profit and more things. No matter how many possessions you accumulate or how much profit you make, if you are not satisfied with them, then your efforts will not give you peace of mind or peace in your heart:

Contentment is real wealth. If one develops within himself the quality of contentment, he will become independent. Contentment is the creator of happiness. When one is contented, he does not care either for riches or poverty. He lives above the influence of them and is indifferent to them. – Abdu'l-Baha, quoted in the diary of Ahmad Sohrab, *Star of the West*, Volume 5, p. 17.

Be content with what you have; rejoice in the way things are. When you realize there is nothing lacking, the whole world belongs to you. – Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Ch. 44.

So if you run a business, be content with a reasonable margin of profit. Being satisfied with earning a just enough profit will create a sense of contentment and provide an example to others. It will also gradually increase your business volume because those who are satisfied with a lower profit margin typically can offer lower prices.

It takes great strength and inner conviction to be satisfied and content with a set amount of profit—but doing so leads to a peaceful heart and the heavenly feeling of contentment that greed can never offer.

Why the Lessons of COVID-19 Give Me Hope for Global Unity

When I was a child, my parents taught me that the goal of my faith, the Baha'i Faith, was the oneness of humanity, and my primary duty was to serve humanity in achieving that goal. Even as a child, I understood it was important to work and thought everyone would see it that way.

To motivate me, I memorized quotes about unity from Baha'u'llah, the prophet and founder of the Baha'i Faith, such as these:

‘Ye are all the leaves of one tree and the drops of one ocean.’

“Be ye as the fingers of one hand, the members of one body.”

Soon society taught me that these ideas were just for dreamers who do not understand people's lives and real problems in the world. As I grew older, though, I never questioned my goal. I became more and more aware of the obstacles. I knew that there were serious problems, but I believed that solutions could be found if humanity would really try.

There are many reasons humanity has chosen to ignore poverty and eradicate diseases, just to name two. The main reason is the lack of willingness, even though all the great religions, poets, and thinkers have advocated the need throughout the ages. I saw this reasoning as an excuse for not even attempting to change things.

Without getting into its politics, I've been focused on the will to find a cure. The way the world has dealt with COVID-19 by finding a vaccine in a short time has proved that when we want something badly, we will find a way to get it no matter how hard it is.

Despite serious problems finding a cure for COVID-19 and manufacturing a vaccine, it was amazing to observe the efficiency with which different governments communicated and shared information. How quickly all the barriers and obstacles were removed! How the world's governments cooperated and, more importantly, worked willingly with vaccine-making companies.

Governments went out of their way to be at the service and wishes of the vaccine manufacturers. They cut red tape on the part of manufacturers, streamlined all their processes, and swiftly came up with an effective vaccine. It is historical what they have achieved and how quickly they have produced and tested it.

As the vaccines were being developed, the most impressive deliberations were discussions about how the world's developing nations should not be left behind in terms of access to the vaccine and the need for its affordability. That demonstrated a consciousness and sympathy for the nations that do not have the technology or the financial resources. We have proven that humankind can deal with huge problems and overcome them when we tap into our humanity and solve the issues that threaten the world.

As Abdu'l-Baha, the son of Baha'u'llah and his designated successor explained during a talk in 1912 in New York City:

It is self-evident that humanity is at variance. Human tastes differ; thoughts, native lands, races and tongues are many. The need of a collective center by which these differences may be counterbalanced and the people of the world be unified is obvious. Consider how nothing but a spiritual power can bring about this unification, for material conditions and mental aspects are so widely different that agreement and unity are not possible through outer means. It is possible, however, for all to become unified through one spirit, just as all may receive light from one sun. Therefore, assisted by the collective and divine center which is the law of God and the reality of His Manifestation, we can overcome these conditions until they pass away entirely and the races advance.

The time has come to understand that humanity's oneness is not a dream or empty slogan but instead an essential element for facing our problems. We need to continue to unite using an international approach rather than a narrow view of nationalism. This pandemic, like the issue of the environment, made boundaries between countries irrelevant. If we widen our horizons, it will not be at the cost of love for our country. It shows that we love our country and want it to prosper and thrive along with the rest of the world. As Baha'u'llah wrote nearly 150 years ago, **“Glory not in love for your country, but in love for all mankind.”**

The urgent task now is to bring the world's attention to the importance and urgency of uniting as one human family so that we can deal with the challenges facing us with our collective energies. Clearly, many world problems would not have started if there had been unity and cooperation between people and the world's governments.

The Universal House of Justice, the democratically elected global governing body of the Baha'i Faith, beautifully explains it:

The welfare of any segment of humanity is inextricably bound up with the welfare of the whole. Humanity's collective life suffers when any one group thinks of its own well-being in isolation from that of its neighbours' or pursues economic gain without regard for how the natural environment, which provides sustenance for all, is affected. A stubborn obstruction, then, stands in the way of meaningful social progress: time and again, avarice and self-interest prevail at the expense of the common good.

Unconscionable quantities of wealth are being amassed, and the instability this creates is made worse by how income and opportunity are spread so unevenly both between nations and within nations. But it need not be so. However much such conditions are the outcome of history, they do not have to define the future, and even if current approaches to economic life satisfied humanity's stage of adolescence, they are certainly inadequate for its dawning age of maturity. There is no justification for continuing to perpetuate structures, rules, and systems that manifestly fail to serve the interests of all peoples.

The Creator of the universe wishes its people to live in harmony and peace. The time has come to accept this vital fact that the world's survival and prosperity depend on its people's unity. Science and technology have created the tools for the unification of the world, and this

pandemic proved how closely we are connected and how we are in it together. Technology has removed the physical barriers, and now we need to remove the barriers in our hearts and minds and see ourselves as one race, one people, and one family.

Is ‘Fighting’ a Problem the Best Way to Deal with it?

There comes a time when, as human beings, we are powerless to solve some of our problems. The question remains, how do we want to deal with them? Having seen my loved ones going through cancer, the words “fighting cancer” have really struck a chord.

We tend to use the same language when we talk about ending the world’s injustices — poverty, racism, and sexism. We often say we are “fighting” these things. And we absolutely should do everything we can to end these social and spiritual ills and ensure humanity's unity, peace, and prosperity. Indeed, the Baha’i writings tell us, “**The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice.**”

The question in my mind is, is “fighting” the only way to face the problems given to us??

I understand that anger can be the first reaction in grasping the reality of what has happened, and it is natural to react with rage for a short time. But scientific research shows that allowing this emotion to dominate for long periods has a negative effect on the body.

Common sense and the law of karma (for those who believe in it) encourage us to live with a positive view since whatever energy we put into the universe will eventually come back to us. You are what you think. Fighting needs anger, and when we are sick, we need peace more than anger because there is so much that needs our attention. The Baha’i writings tell us, “**Let nothing grieve thee, and be thou angered at none.**” But that, of course, does not mean being passive in the face of illness or injustice.

I wonder if there are other ways of approaching these situations rather than dealing with them with so much anger, especially since anger and high anxiety are the last things that the body and soul need.

When one of my most cherished friends got cancer, she was given little chance of surviving. She deliberately used the words “dealing” rather than “fighting” when discussing her condition.

Humanity has had to face many difficulties throughout the ages, such as fighting big animals in the Stone Age or enemies during the great wars in our history. We needed a fighting mentality that gave us motivation or the force to overcome adverse situations.

We live in a different world now, and our awareness has improved dramatically, and we know what our bodies and souls need to gain the strength to overcome or deal with difficult situations in life.

We know that peace of mind through meditation and prayers is essential for solving life-threatening problems. They give us guidance and strength to empower ourselves to follow a healthy diet of food and exercise and research other medical treatments that will help us to overcome the disease. A wealth of writing guides us to approach tests and deal with them.

Baha’u’llah, the prophet and founder of the Baha’i Faith, tells us to see the tragedies of life with a spiritual eye. He wrote: “**My Calamity is my providence, outwardly it is fire and vengeance, but inwardly it is light and mercy.**”

I know so many cancer survivors (including my dear friend) and survivors of accidents and other tragedies. When asked what helped them, mostly they mentioned prayer and their family and friends' good wishes that gave them the strength to deal with these challenges.

This logic helps me see the situation with a better frame of mind and soul to face the challenges that will always be part of our lives. Sometimes our language reflects our mentality. When we want to fight, we are angry. It may reflect a sense of serenity and acceptance when we want to do the best we can.

We can also consider the "Will of God" and whether we should learn about it. I believe that it is a critical approach that some have found useful to help them do things within their powers and be detached from the outcome. Following this practice has created great contentment in me since I am satisfied that I have played my part and acknowledged that my efforts are not the only deciding factor. It can enable us to continue our efforts to serve humanity by relying on a higher power for assistance. As Baha'u'llah wrote:

“Wert thou to consider this world, and realize how fleeting are the things that pertain unto it, thou wouldst choose to tread no path except the path of service to the Cause of thy Lord. None would have the power to deter thee from celebrating His praise, though all men should arise to oppose thee.”

I hope we can become more aware of our limited powers and use them wisely with a more mature and peaceful approach. The world is full of wars and can do without my declaration of war on a disease or ideology. We need a new race of men and women who will do everything to bring about justice and unity and spend those energies to educate themselves and others.

3 Spiritual Ways to Avoid Financial Regrets

As I get older, I spend more time reflecting on my life—on the right choices I’ve made and the regrets about the wrong choices I could have avoided.

This reflection often takes me back to my youth's innocence and ignorance and what I could have done differently, knowing what I know now. How deeply I wish someone had guided me to the ideas that would have helped me have fewer regrets.

So I’ll try to reach out here with a reminder and a few tips that will hopefully help reduce the percentage of your regrets in those later years:

1. Know Yourself—then Plan for Your Economic Needs

To have a plan or a goal, one has to know for whom they are planning. When we plan for ourselves, we should first know who we are—and ask ourselves: What is the purpose of our lives? The Baha’i writings are very clear about those fundamental questions:

... man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty. – Baha’u’llah, *Tablets of Baha’u’llah*, p. 34.

One must remember that the purpose of this life is to prepare the soul for the next. – The Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 359.

After answering those fundamental questions, you’ll need to find the answer to a second big question: What do I want? Examining who you are will help you answer what you want.

We want to apply to our spiritual needs and aspirations and decide the financial needs we require to live a fulfilling life. Contrary to popular opinion, because our materialistic culture has convinced them that you can never have too much money, many people accumulate wealth thousands of times more than their needs. They spend all their energies to get more, while the spiritual elements of life pass them by due to their preoccupation with gathering and managing wealth. Can you imagine a sadder tragedy when we know we do not live on this Earth forever and our days are numbered? The wisdom of the Baha’i teachings advises us to:

Live then the days of thy life, that are less than a fleeting moment, with thy mind stainless, thy heart unsullied, thy thoughts pure, and thy nature sanctified, so that, free and content, thou mayest put away this mortal frame, and repair unto the mystic paradise and abide in the eternal kingdom for evermore. – Baha’u’llah, *The Hidden Words*, p. 37.

2. Make a Sound Financial Plan—Spiritually

With the pressure of the world’s many problems weighing on us, we all need financial and spiritual guidance. People are looking everywhere to find the solutions to problems that have

baffled them and have made the experts confused and helpless too. Even economics can't escape this problem because so many economists have completely removed all moral and spiritual values from the economic system. The Baha'i teachings clearly explain where to look for the solutions:

The secrets of the whole economic question are Divine in nature, and are concerned with the world of the heart and spirit. In the Baha'i Teachings this is most completely explained, and without the consideration of the Baha'i Teachings, it is impossible to bring about a better state. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Baha'i World*, Volume 4, p. 448.

When we recognize that economics is not simply material but “divine in nature,” as Abdu'l-Baha said, we can then construct a sound financial plan for our lives. To do so, we must plan for financial goals that support our physical existence and smooth the path of spiritual growth.

3. Plan, not Only for Yourself but for the Poor

Baha'u'llah's message of the oneness of humankind implies the prosperity of all human beings, along with the continuing prosperity and stewardship of the Earth that supports us all. That was his wish and his command, and he entrusted taking care of the poor and needy to all of us:

O ye rich ones on earth! The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust, and be not intent only on your own ease. – Baha'u'llah, *The Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah*, p. 41.

Reducing the sufferings of the poor whose welfare has been entrusted to us may seem a small task, and this task should have been easily achieved by now, yet every day, more and more people are becoming poor, destitute and homeless. Why? Because an insufficient number of people plan beyond their own self-interests and think of others. Some, of course, think about the poor but do nothing about their plight:

We know that to help the poor and to be merciful is good and pleases God, but knowledge alone does not feed the starving man, nor can the poor be warmed by knowledge or words in the bitter winter; we must give the practical help of loving-kindness. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Abdu'l-Baha in London*, p. 60.

The end result: the global problem of the great extremes of poverty and wealth threatens our civilization's foundation. If we do not try to take care of the trust that God has given to us, how can we have peace of mind?

The feeling of reaching out to others and considering them as members of one's family changes our outlook, and that process leads to a better view of the world and our role in it. This gives the mind and soul a sense of peace. If everyone in the world yearns for peace of mind, then helping the poor can help you get there. You don't have to be wealthy to help; everyone can contribute, no matter how small.

On our next journey, none of us will need money. The material world dies the moment we die. The only reality left at that point is the inner spiritual qualities we have been able to gain through our hard work, meditation, service and sacrifice.

That's the essence of true planning for the future—not only ensuring you have sufficient material resources for retirement but also the spiritual resources you'll need for your eternal existence. How sad to reach the end of our physical journey and realize that we have not accumulated enough for the next one because we were distracted, overwhelmed and obsessed by the material world and forgot to put away something for our spiritual journey:

Ye are even as the bird which soareth, with the full force of its mighty wings and with complete and joyous confidence, through the immensity of the heavens, until, impelled to satisfy its hunger, it turneth longingly to the water and clay of the earth below it, and, having been entrapped in the mesh of its desire, findeth itself impotent to resume its flight to the realms whence it came. Powerless to shake off the burden weighing on its sullied wings, that bird, hitherto an inmate of the heavens, is now forced to seek a dwelling-place upon the dust. Wherefore, O My servants, defile not your wings with the clay of waywardness and vain desires, and suffer them not to be stained with the dust of envy and hate, that ye may not be hindered from soaring in the heavens of My divine knowledge. – Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings From the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, pp. 327-328.

The Baha'i teachings guide us toward finding the true purpose of our lives. They constantly remind us to stay on course, not be distracted by the temptations of this transient world, and prepare our souls for the moment of our birth into the next stage of our spiritual life.

Trauma: How Can We Heal Our Wounded Souls?

You've likely heard of PTSD – post-traumatic stress disorder – but have you heard yet about PCSD? That acronym stands for post-Covid stress disorder, a newly-emerging effect of the pandemic.

Increasingly, mental health professionals recognize that the global Covid-19 pandemic has wounded the entire world's emotions. Our souls suffer from that trauma. That seems logical since millions have died from the disease, and billions are at risk, causing severe stress, anxiety, depression, and fear.

Do you feel it? Most people do, and it has led to a wider recognition of the role trauma plays in

Many societies around the world have begun to recognize the impact of mental trauma, no matter the cause. Athletes who have recently withdrawn from the Olympics and other events emphasize the importance of their emotional health and well-being by highlighting the stress they feel. This is a healthy sign – their withdrawal from these events sends a signal that emotional health is more important than fame, medals, and trophies and gives more people permission to recognize their own trauma.

Some religions claim that psychological injury or illness can only be addressed and treated by spiritual teachings and even discourage or prohibit their followers from seeking medical or psychological advice – but the Baha'i principles encourage everyone to obtain and follow guidance from competent medical and psychiatric professionals. In accordance with the core Baha'i teaching of the agreement of science and religion, Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'u'llah's son and successor wrote that everyone should **“maintain your health by consulting with a highly-skilled physician:”**

According to the explicit decree of Bahá'u'lláh one must not turn aside from the advice of a competent doctor. It is imperative to consult one even if the patient himself be a well-known and eminent physician. In short, the point is that you should maintain your health by consulting a highly-skilled physician.

Medical science has made tremendous achievements in curing our physical diseases, but sadly we have little advanced understanding of the causes of mental and emotional ills. However, with greater knowledge of the brain's functioning in the future, we will hopefully have a better chance of receiving the correct remedies for the myriad of mental illnesses and traumas people experience.

Humanity has long dealt with emotional issues at every level in every profession, but the general advice so far has been to “toughen up.” That approach, which means failing to recognize and then forcibly moving on through the pain and stress, simply doesn't work. Of course, to achieve a goal in life, one must expend effort, go through some difficulties and stress, and make sacrifices. The question is, to what extent do the limits of emotional endurance have to be pushed to achieve those goals?

We have made heroes of people who ignored extreme stresses and pains to achieve their goals, but few cared enough to find out later about the emotional and psychological cost of that course of action. What price did those people pay with their bodies and their emotional health?

Medicating Emotional Problems

One of the few currently-available alternatives to just ignoring the inner pain of trauma – psychoactive medications – has helped many. So far, in our fairly limited knowledge of how to treat psychological and emotional trauma, the remedies have generally involved pills of different varieties for every disorder. In many instances, individuals consult professionals who prescribe medications along with their counselling sessions. Some of these medications work well, but others have significant side effects and may ultimately create more problems than they solve.

During my work in the public school system, it surprised me that many students who could not cope with the system were given medicine to calm them down. Sadly, many of them behaved like zombies after taking those medications, which left them without sufficient energy or drive to accomplish anything.

The reality: emotional health is very complicated. Many experts are looking for solutions, but we have not yet progressed to the point that we know how to determine the root cause of emotional issues, so, in the meantime, we resort to medicines that may be band-aid solutions. Thankfully there is increased awareness in this field, more books have been written, and more support groups are created every day. There have been significant improvements in finding new ways to discuss and tackle these issues.

Based on this Baha'i quotation, though, some people may be better served by treating them spiritually rather than medically:

Illnesses which occur by reason of physical causes should be treated by doctors with medical remedies; those which are due to spiritual causes disappear through spiritual means. Thus an illness caused by affliction, fear, nervous impressions, will be healed more effectively by spiritual rather than by physical treatment.

So far, Western medicine has mostly avoided treating these kinds of afflictions with anything but medication. However, we need to further explore the spiritual methods and solutions for these problems, like counselling, consultation, and other kinds of more spiritually-based therapies. If we do not approach these challenges with the right tools, the present solutions may end up as good attempts but failures nevertheless.

There is no doubt that medical sciences have made significant progress, and the result is the increase in the life span and eradication of many diseases that in the past would lead to death or a life of great pain. There are now so many ways to make every part of the body function better and correct difficulties, and, in some cases, even replace afflicted body parts.

But it is time to face trauma and the emotional issues it produces with a new and different approach – to acknowledge that the root cause of many of these issues is spiritual and then introduce spiritual methods to deal with them permanently. For example – we now have countless proven and effective methods of relaxation and meditation in every corner of the world based on some ancient philosophies, traditions and religions. New techniques are also

being invented every day. Thanks to social media, they are easily accessible in the comforts of our homes.

In many Indigenous cultures, this sort of spiritual healing is an accepted part of any treatment plan for trauma. In Navajo culture, for example, a spiritual healing ceremony called a sing is often held for returning war veterans to heal their spirits from what they encountered in combat.

Prayers are essential for any healing. The Baha'i teachings offer many different prayers for physical and psychological healing. This one, from Baha'u'llah, comes from a tablet he wrote to a physician:

Thy name is my healing, O my God, and remembrance of Thee is my remedy. Nearness to Thee is my hope, and love for Thee is my companion. Thy mercy to me is my healing and my succor in both this world and the world to come. Thou, verily, art the All-Bountiful, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

Sometimes, it helps to trust our faith in a higher power, do the best we can, and detach ourselves from the outcomes. This process can create a higher level of contentment essential to appreciating our blessings of the things that we have rather than the things that we do not have and desire.

Physical and emotional illnesses require great effort to overcome, and having patience is a great asset in facing these challenges. Improvements in health or life take time, and patience helps survive the difficulties one day at a time.

Most emotional problems can be remedied temporarily with the help of medicine, but the question remains whether they sufficiently address the origin or the causes of these issues. The future direction of solutions to mental and emotional challenges is essential for humanity's happiness, well-being, and progress. We have to widen our horizons in search of the most effective answers, and that search deserves wholehearted and earnest striving on everyone's part.

Why Can't We Combine the Best of Socialism and Capitalism?

Lately, I've been surprised at our culture's heated discussions over socialism and capitalism. Mostly, the arguments seem politically motivated – so let's try to get past the political spin to the actual facts.

At the outset, I should mention that I do not take part in or interfere with partisan politics as a Baha'i. From a Baha'i perspective, which emphasizes the unity of humanity, it bothers me to see that many valid and beneficial elements of these two economic systems have been ignored, due mostly to differing political views.

As an economist, I see some good in each system. As a Baha'i, I would love to see humanity combine the best elements of socialism and capitalism in the interests of re-adjusting the world's economic systems, as Abdu'l-Baha, the son and successor of Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Baha'i Faith, suggested:

The readjustment of the economic laws for the livelihood of man must be effected in order that all humanity may live in the greatest happiness according to their respective degrees.

In my opinion, a combination of the two would provide a workable solution for a healthy economic system where individual freedom is respected, and at the same time, social issues such as poverty are approached more effectively.

Socialism and Capitalism: the Conventional Wisdom

Here's the conventional wisdom: from a capitalist point of view, socialism is evil and against the spirit of human rights, suffocating individual initiative and freedom. Those who support socialism, on the other hand, blame corruption, extreme wealth, and greed, as the products of capitalism and their root cause, for much of human suffering.

The truth must sit somewhere in the middle of those polarized viewpoints since no ideology or concept is without its merits. So let's examine the two ideologies in a different way: by looking at their benefits.

For those who don't fully understand what capitalism and socialism stand for, very briefly and in a simple way without getting technical, I'll attempt to explain these two systems by drawing attention to their main features. Hopefully, by throwing a little light on these concepts, we can all be in a better position to judge them without depending on the misinformation supplied by opposite parties.

Socialism

Simply put, socialism is a populist economic and political system based on public ownership, like collective or shared ownership of the means of production. Socialists believe that shared ownership of resources and central planning provides an equitable distribution of goods and

services and a more equal society. Governments' role and control of the system's workings is a vital feature of the socialistic pattern of an economic system.

The Baha'i writings support the idea and importance of socialism – if done in a democratic way and in a voluntary spirit, without involuntary wealth redistribution, force, or compulsion. History shows that the use of force achieved some socialist ideals of equality but at the cost of individual rights. Abdu'l-Baha, in a speech he gave in the United States in 1912, explained:

The question of socialization is very important. It will not be solved by strikes for wages ...In the Bolshevistic principles equality is effected through force. The masses who are opposed to the people of rank and to the wealthy class desire to partake of their advantages.

But in the divine teachings equality is brought about through a ready willingness to share. It is commanded as regards wealth that the rich among the people, and the aristocrats should, by their own free will and for the sake of their own happiness, concern themselves with and care for the poor. This equality is the result of the lofty characteristics and noble attributes of mankind.

Socialism puts great emphasis on social programs and services for society's poorest people. The original teachings of most religions encourage some form of socialism.

Capitalism

In the simplest terms, capitalism is an economic system in which private individuals own and control property according to their interests. Demand and supply freely set prices in capitalist markets in a way presumed to serve the best interests of society. The main feature of capitalism is self-interest, which impels each person to make a profit. In that system, governments are expected not to interfere with the economic system's functioning.

A pure capitalist system gives freedom to all and seeks only to maximize profits. This has led to some individuals achieving unprecedented financial success and extreme wealth – but has also become a breeding ground for greed, with no concern for the less fortunate people, leading to a system of “haves” and “have-nots” that tends to produce great extremes of wealth and poverty.

The Baha'i teachings again support some aspects of capitalism, provided that some of its elements are changed to make it more effectively serve society. The Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, Shoghi Effendi, said **“There is nothing in the [Baha'i] teachings against some kind of Capitalism; its present form, though, would require adjustments to be made.”**

Seeking Truth and Moderation in Economics

The independent investigation of the truth, one of the fundamental principles of the Baha'i Faith, compels me to try to find the merits of these two economic systems and see the possibility of combining these two ideologies that are so important for the progress of humanity – all while recognizing the need for moderation, as Abdu'l-Baha expressed:

... the best course is therefore to seek moderation, which is for the wealthy to recognize the advantages of moderation in the acquisition of profits and to show regard for the welfare of the poor and the needy ...

It does not matter what religion or political party we belong to; most of us want to reduce poverty, increase opportunity, and solve other economic issues. The capitalists have their solutions, and socialists have theirs, yet the problems remain unresolved – and have even worsened. Today, the widening gap between the rich and the poor threatens us all.

I hope that one day we can put the differences aside and return to the fundamental needs of humanity by focusing on the welfare of all, regardless of the method.

The Baha'i teachings can guide us to combine the best concepts, discard the negatives, and use them to satisfy the world's needs. The capitalist can have the freedom to build businesses and factories and successfully generate wealth. The rest of the society can play its part and contribute, as long as every community member can live in comfort and share the benefit of each other's efforts.

Maybe after the bitter experience of the pandemic, humanity has reached an excellent time to re-examine the definitions of these two systems and remove the misunderstanding and political prejudices that have labelled them. Perhaps we can accept the merits of both systems and combine them into a highly efficient system that will remedy the economic ills afflicting humanity.

Five Ways to Optimize the Powerful Tool of Baha'i Consultation

Baha'i consultation – an essential tool for reaching an agreement or consensus and deciding a course of action – asks every participant to master a set of communication skills based on spirituality.

The Baha'i writings offer a treasury of insight and meaning on the complex subject of consultation – including this quotation from the writings of Baha'u'llah, the prophet and founder of the Baha'i Faith:

Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude. It is a shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.

Baha'i consultation is an acquired skill, so I try to visualize it in a way that I can understand. I imagine a filtration system where impurities come through the system and the water that carries them is filtered, cleansed, and purified. The outcome: something beautiful.

My metaphor for consultation oversimplifies the concept – entire books have been written on it, and many will be written about consultation's vital toolkit for the progress of humanity. I'll attempt to explain it briefly.

What Is Baha'i Consultation?

Baha'is use the tool of consultation to conduct discussion, discourse, and even administrative meetings. Essentially, it's a decision-making tool that relies on seeking many people's views rather than just one. Those who consult together attempt to build a sense of fellowship, mutuality, love, harmony, and unity rather than simply expressing personal views. Together they resolve to search out the truth by freely expressing their opinions, then weighing all the views dispassionately. Once an idea is put forth, it becomes the property of the group, not an individual's. No one belittles the thoughts of anyone else.

The Baha'i teachings say that decisions made during the consultation, with harmony, purity of motive, and love, will attract divine assistance and, in the words of Abdu'l-Baha, “**causeth the living waters to flow in the meadows of man's reality...**”

But to my simple mind, consultation represents a unique filtration system, a spiritual filter for those “living waters” in which we bring all our strengths and weaknesses as input. When we consult, we enter the discussion from different backgrounds, with differing baggage, quirkiness, cultures, attitudes, and knowledge.

Of course, the ideas come from our different approaches, which, when first examined, rarely look like they match each other. Still, as the consultative process continues, the impurities get left behind, just like a filtration system. When that happens, people start seeing the validity of each other's points of view and discarding the inadequacies unrelated to that topic. If spiritual

Baha'i consultation is done correctly, it becomes that unique filtration system that takes all impurities and harmful elements and makes the outcome pure.

However, the purity of this consultation and its result depends on the purity of motives and our approach to the task. We can do many things not to tax this system and hinder its efficiency and make the process efficient and easy. Preparation, both spiritually and materially, are essential for a consultation to work.

I'll suggest a few ideas that have made the consultative process more efficient for me – and have increased the purity of the consultation's filtration system:

1. Dealing with the ego – the “Insistent Self”

No matter how we succeed spiritually, intellectually, or materially in science, arts, sports, business or any other field, the greatest enemy within us presents a constant danger – our own ego.

It can manifest itself in the form of a gesture, a look, a word, or an action, but the result is often the same. Our egos are always with us, like a volcano ready to erupt. They need to be constantly supervised by our higher nature.

The Baha'i Faith has numerous teachings and writings to prepare us to face this daily test and handle it. The writings differentiate between our two selves: our animal, material or lower nature and our spiritual, divine or higher nature. In consultation, nothing can pollute the process of the discussion more than the lower nature's ego – than its attachment to its own viewpoints, ideas, and preconceptions. When we work on our egos and keep them in check with the oversight of our higher spiritual natures, our attachment to our opinions and ideas will gradually diminish. In his mystical book *The Hidden Words*, Baha'u'llah wrote, **“Loose thy soul from the prison of self.”**

2. Prayers

Consultation requires preparing spiritually by saying prayers and meditating before any discussion takes place. There are so many writings and books on its powers, effects and benefits. Abdu'l-Baha, the son and successor of Baha'u'llah, gave us the gist of it, when he said that prayer and meditation: **“... creates spirituality, creates mindfulness and celestial feelings, begets new attractions of the Kingdom and engenders the susceptibilities of the higher intelligence.”**

3. Self-knowledge

Knowing ourselves can produce many benefits, both material and spiritual. When we know why we do things, we understand our actions. Besides helping us manage our ego, self-knowledge can help us be aware of our strengths and weaknesses. Baha'u'llah wrote, **“True loss is for him whose days have been spent in utter ignorance of his self.”**

4. Love

Love is the best lubricant for the practice of true consultation. Love is the link that connects us to God, to ourselves and to others. Love makes its functions effortless. There is no end to love's powers and usefulness. In a talk he gave in Paris, Abdu'l-Baha said: **"... in the world of existence there is indeed no greater power than the power of love. When the heart of man is aglow with the flame of love, he is ready to sacrifice all – even his life."**

5. Humility

We sometimes misunderstand humility, thinking of it as a lack of determination, but really it is the freedom from pride and arrogance. True humility – an extension of self-awareness and self-knowledge – gives us a powerful way to connect with others and see our own opinions in the proper perspective. Baha'u'llah wrote **"Humility exalteth man to the heaven of glory and power, whilst pride abaseth him to the depths of wretchedness and degradation."**

If consultation is understood and carried out effectively, then we can be confident that we cannot find a better filtration system for conducting our discussions. Baha'i consultation combines the best of human abilities and our spiritual values, all gifted to us by the Creator, to solve the problems challenging humanity.

Why We Can't Forget the Pandemic's Hard-Earned Lessons

Some countries are gradually lifting COVID-19 restrictions, and soon, we hope, life will get back to normal – but what will that new “normal” look like?

As painful and challenging as the pandemic is, it has brought many issues to the forefront for humanity to ponder and resolve. We obviously haven't adequately dealt with those issues in the past. But as people speak about going back to “business as usual” when we can fully stop fearing COVID-19, I worry that the lessons the pandemic brought will be soon forgotten.

Human Fragility — and Our Spiritual Resilience

The COVID crisis has shown us that we are not invincible. No matter how many inventions and discoveries or gadgets we create to make life more convenient, we cannot protect ourselves from future pandemics that will kill millions of people if we do not come together and overcome our differences. A tiny virus, we now know, could jeopardize the survival of humanity. That stark fact has created a rude awakening for many.

However, the pandemic also proved the ingenuity and resilience of the human spirit gifted to us by God, as we rushed to heal the sick, create and distribute vaccines, and support each other through a global economic crisis.

This resilience has helped humanity progress since the very beginning of our species, when we faced fierce animals, survived famines, and endured wars. The human spirit can solve problems no matter how difficult and complex they are. Abdu'l-Baha, the son and successor of the prophet and founder of the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah, wrote:

Do ye not look upon the beginning of the affairs; attach your hearts to the ends and results. The present period is like unto the sowing time. Undoubtedly it is impregnated with perils and difficulties, but in the future many a harvest shall be gathered and benefits and results will become apparent. When one considers the issue and the end, exhaustless joy and happiness will dawn.

The Beauty and Tenderness of Humanity

We took many things for granted until the pandemic reminded us how vital they are for our emotional and physiological well-being.

For me, the biggest loss was the smiles. I love smiling and joked about how my smiles were wasted since nobody saw them under my mask. It was such a tragedy not to touch or hug our loved ones, and I hope that we never forget how essential that is for our happiness.

As we realized that there are other things in life, money became less important. We became less concerned with physical appearances. Seeing so many singers that I admired sing in virtual concerts without the tools to enhance the quality of their voices was interesting. I could listen to

their natural voices and appreciate them more than the professionally produced versions. Hopefully, this time has helped us accept ourselves and others as we are.

The Importance of Nature

This lesson was interesting for two reasons: one, it affirmed the benefits of nature's healing powers for humans' psyche and happiness; two, it reminded us of the power of nature to heal itself. During the pandemic, nature made a remarkable recovery, proving that we can solve our environmental crisis if we take steps to reduce our carbon footprint.

I hope that seeing these changes has made us more sensitive to nature's needs and motivated us to try to protect our environment before it is too late. The Baha'i writings say:

The elements and lower organisms are synchronized in the great plan of life. Shall man, infinitely above them in degree, be antagonistic and a destroyer of that perfection?

“We're In This Together”

Ordinary people and politicians repeated this phrase time and again. Some used it as a slogan without fully understanding its implications.

The pandemic exposed to a greater degree the disparities in opportunity, healthcare, and financial security between communities of different races and genders in the workforce. People of color suffered a greater infection rate and the greatest economic devastation, on top of a new wave of racially-motivated violence in the United States, while women were forced to abandon the workforce at a greater rate than men. While we should have all been in this together, many found themselves at a disadvantage. Supporters of change convey that the time of talking has passed, and we need to take action to correct past errors.

We also learned that we could not depend on national boundaries to solve the problem of the pandemic. Although we put in place restrictions on movement, they exist because we all know that as long as the whole world isn't vaccinated, the problem will not be solved.

We have lost so much during this pandemic. Millions of lives were cut short. Billions of dollars have been spent, and more will be spent for economic recovery. There are emotional scars to heal. It would be even more tragic if all the suffering went for naught and the lessons were forgotten.

The Importance of Prayer and Meditation

During the toughest moments of the pandemic, many of us found solace in prayer and reconnected with our meditation routines. Many adopted meditation into their daily lives or strongly felt the need for prayers for their spiritual health — even those who had not considered prayer as an option for their spiritual health before.

For me, meditation and prayer became an essential part of my daily routine. These words by Abdu'l-Baha reassured me and helped me see the light at the end of the tunnel as I strived to function with a positive attitude:

The darkness of this gloomy night shall pass away. Again the Sun of Reality will dawn from the horizon of the hearts. Have patience, wait but do not sit idle; work while you are waiting; smile when you are wearied with monotony; be firm while everything around you is being shaken; be joyous while the ugly face of despair grins at you; speak aloud while the malevolent forces of the nether world try to crush your mind; be valiant and courageous while men all around you are cringing with fear and cowardice ... Continue your journey to the end. The bright day is coming.

The suddenness of the pandemic and the speed with which it spread made us realize how uncertain life is and how, in no time, our world can drastically change. It has given us a hint of the problems that could develop if countries do not work together to solve problems, leaving behind political and financial greed, and showed us how we might prepare for such events in the future.

I hope that, even if we fully return to “normal” soon, we can carry these lessons with us so that tragedy may be averted and we can create a more peaceful, unified world.

Are We Responsible for the Sufferings of Humanity?

This vital question has to be asked by all of us, and we should answer it to our conscience and our Creator. The answer lies with our role and responsibility as lowly individuals in the ocean of humanity. No matter how insignificant we feel, we still have a duty to perform for our fellow human beings. This spiritual duty was given to us the day we were born, but sadly the distractions of the material world made us forget it.

Humanity, confused and devoid of spirituality, is stuck in its ignorance facing a crossroads and has to choose a path forward. The world is hungry for solutions and is searching desperately for them in every outdated and archaic theory and philosophy while we are sitting on a treasure chest of remedies. It is time for us to arm ourselves with these remedies and share them with the high and low of our society and fulfill our duty.

One of the solutions explained in the Baha'i Writings deals with solving our economic problems that have reached a critical level where thousands of our brothers and sisters are dragged into a life of poverty every day.

I have always felt that we are partly guilty for our indifference and inaction to change. My feelings have not changed since I wrote in 2015 the dedication of my book, "The Economics of the Future Begins Today":

"Dedicated to all the poor and underprivileged people of the world who our economic system has ignored. Their suffering is our failure to make a change."

I was delighted to come across this quote that confirmed my belief:

"There is so much suffering, such a great and desperate need for a true remedy and the Bahá'ís should realize their sacred obligation is to deliver the message to their fellowmen at once, and on as large a scale as possible. If they fail to do so, they are really partly responsible for prolonging the agony of humanity." -Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 127

Since my field of interest is economics, I concentrate on the sufferings caused by the mismanagement of the world's economic resources, which has left billions of people in misery, not having enough to eat – and others who have billions and find ridiculous ways of hoarding it or wasting it.

The rest of us, who are neither rich nor poor, can feel powerless about this unjust disparity. We may think we cannot do anything to bring about a change and must wait for the arrival of a new system. I do not accept this excuse and believe we can gradually change the economic system by injecting morality and humanity into it, all while participating in our own economic activities. The global, democratically-elected administrative body of the world's Baha'is, the Universal House of Justice, recently wrote:

Every choice a Baha'i makes — as employee or employer, producer or consumer, borrower or lender, benefactor or beneficiary — leaves a trace, and the moral duty to lead a coherent life demands that one's economic decisions be in accordance with lofty ideals, that the purity of one's aims be matched by the purity of one's actions to fulfil those aims.

My book on spiritual solutions to the world's economic problems has a chapter called "Practical Economic Suggestions for Everyday Use." Here are 9 of them:

1. **Changing our mindset.** The first action we call all take is internal – by changing our mindset and recognizing that the Baha'i concept of economics is fundamentally different and is based on spiritual and moral principles. Abdu'l-Baha explained it clearly: **“The secrets of the whole economic question are Divine in nature, and are concerned with the world of the heart and spirit.”**
2. **Pay a fair price.** If you feel that the price of something is too low, pay more than the asking price. One of the most beautiful things related to economic activities is the commitment of fair-minded people to disregard existing prices and pay more because they believe their estimate of the price to be just.
3. **Share profits with employees.** The workers need to have a share of the profits. Besides profit-sharing, there are many ways to help. Get medical coverage for employees. Support the emotional and physical well-being of employees. Taking care of workers is a privilege and an opportunity to serve people. Looking for such opportunities is a beautiful act.
4. **Pay fair wages,** not based on what society dictates. We do not need to follow the minimum wage guidelines. Society's wage guidelines should not prevent us from paying more if we think that is fair.
5. **Require reasonable interest rates.** If you lend money, ask for a reasonable interest rate, not the maximum one. The interest rate has to be fair and reasonable. Banks should not be the only ones setting interest rates.
6. **Participate in social and economic projects.** We can help change the world for the better by getting involved in these kinds of projects – they can represent a valuable way of learning and contribute.
7. **Create a consciousness of the human family.** Your welfare, well-being and happiness ultimately depend on the welfare, prosperity and happiness of every poor, needy, and underprivileged person in the world. The real meaning of the oneness of humankind will come into being when we see

others as members of our family. The Universal House of Justice wrote:
“The welfare of any segment of humanity is inextricably bound up with the welfare of the whole. Humanity's collective life suffers when any one group thinks of its own well-being in isolation from that of its neighbours' or pursues economic gain without regard for how the natural environment, which provides sustenance for all, is affected.”

8. **Give generously to those working for minimum wage or earning very little.** We can find ways to pay more to all those working for a minimum wage, be it in the form of a generous tip or giving more than the asking price to street sellers who earn a pittance from their sales. How can we otherwise reduce the gap between the rich and the poor if we do not make selfless contributions?
9. **Be considerate to those who rent from you.** Be sensitive to the situation of everyone. If they are in trouble, be flexible with their rent payments. Let them miss a payment or part of a payment. Besides the spiritual satisfaction you feel, you also gain a tenant who cares for you and your property and will use it as if it's theirs. It makes economic sense since you will probably lessen the cost of repairs.

Each of these tips can help us apply Baha'u'llah's spiritual counsel to prefer his brother above himself. First, though, we all must evolve to the point where we see the oneness of the human family and see all people as our brothers and sisters.

Can We Have a Flag for Our Planet?

Lately, I've wished that we had a flag for our planet, along with our national flags. Wouldn't it be great to have one universal banner that offers the Earth our commitment, allegiance, respect, and love?

Actually, the topic of flags has been occupying my mind and soul for a long time, but I have to start with a disclaimer to avoid misunderstanding or accusations of being unpatriotic: I am not against any flag or country and have nothing against loving one's motherland or fatherland. I think that kind of patriotism shows the existence of passion, gratefulness, and loyalty.

But I have a problem when those feelings of patriotism come at the cost of forgetting our love for our bigger home and the whole Earth.

This feeling is very personal. While watching the Olympics or other sports, I sometimes feel like I have divided loyalties since I have lived in Iran, India, China, Latin America, and Canada. Wherever I lived, I felt that it was my country and home to me.

As a Baha'i, I've taken it as my spiritual duty to obey the laws of those countries where I lived. That experience taught me to realize the true meaning of Baha'u'llah's powerful passage from the Baha'i writings:

It is incumbent upon every man, in this Day, to hold fast unto whatsoever will promote the interests, and exalt the station, of all nations and just governments. ... Whatsoever hath led the children of men to shun one another, and hath caused dissensions and divisions amongst them, hath, through the revelation of these words, been nullified and abolished. ... It is not his to boast who loveth his country, but it is his who loveth the world ...

With that Baha'i ideal of the oneness of the entire planet, how I wish we had a flag for the whole Earth – to show our love for it, salute it and even shed tears for its sad situation. By doing that, in reality, we show love for our individual countries, too.

How I wish we would not kill in the name of a small portion of the planet or wouldn't hate people who live on the other side of a borderline drawn, not by God, but by man.

How I wish some of those tears shed when the national anthems are played would be shed for a flag that represented our entire planet. It saddens me to see so much love being misplaced. I fear that these strong national sentiments block our love for the wider world and humanity itself. They may stop us from expanding our minds and souls to see how we need each other, no matter which side of a border we live on.

How I wish humanity had not divided our God-given planet into different pieces, which have changed throughout human history due to conflict, violence, and bloodshed.

My feelings, like all Baha'is who consider humanity as one family and the whole Earth as one country, try to expand our horizons beyond our national and religious allegiances. In a speech he gave in the United States in 1912, Abdu'l-Baha put it like this:

A fundamental teaching of Baha'u'llah is the oneness of the world of humanity. Addressing mankind, He says, "Ye are all leaves of one tree and the fruits of one branch." By this it is meant that the world of humanity is like a tree, the nations or peoples are the different limbs or branches of that tree, and the individual human creatures are as the fruits and blossoms thereof.

There is no shame in loving our home country, but not at the cost of making that a reason to dislike or hate or make war against others from other parts of the planet.

Sadly, those ready to kill and die for their homeland ignore the needs of our real home, the Earth. Due to our narrow view of nationalism, our home is in danger of being destroyed. This statement from the Universal House of Justice, the democratically-elected administrative body of the world's Baha'is, points out that fact:

Unbridled nationalism, as distinguished from a sane and legitimate patriotism, must give way to a wider loyalty, to the love of humanity as a whole. Baha'u'llah's statement is: "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens". The concept of world citizenship is a direct result of the contraction of the world into a single neighbourhood through scientific advances and of the indisputable interdependence of nations. Love of all the world's peoples does not exclude love of one's country. The advantage of the part in a world society is best served by promoting the advantage of the whole. Current international activities in various fields which nurture mutual affection and a sense of solidarity among peoples need greatly to be increased.

Baha'is everywhere heed these words of Baha'u'llah, who wrote: "... **obliterate differences, and quench the flame of hatred and enmity, so that the whole earth may come to be viewed as one country.**"

Humanity has come a long way. I hope that soon we will reach our collective maturity and accept that we are all citizens of mother Earth. She is our true country. Then we can direct our energies and resources to the world's unification and healing of the damages our ignorance and conflict have caused.

I hope that the next time we look at all the world's flags proudly displayed, we notice that our planet's flag is flying high. After all, as Abdu'l-Baha said:

Every one can live in any spot on the terrestrial globe. Therefore all the world is man's birthplace ... Every limited area which we call our native country we regard as our motherland, whereas the terrestrial globe is the motherland of all ...

Butter Chicken and Oneness of Religions

I am very blessed to still be in touch with my ex-students. It is mainly because our town is small. They are from all walks of life, and most of them now have children of their own. A few are the lifeguards at the pool I go to regularly, and a few swim with me and keep me company in the sauna. One of them is Derek, who has the purest heart and regularly visited me in my office during his school years, and we kept in touch after my retirement.

He has been to my house helping me with my garden work, and I have cooked food for him. He told me that he wanted to cook for me and bring it to my home. I said that would be wonderful.

I asked what he was planning to cook, and he said, "butter chicken." I was surprised since that is an East Indian dish, and he is not East Indian. I said that it is good if he does not make it too spicy and hot. On my part, I told him that I would cook rice and make the salad.

On the appointed date, Derek called to say that his father had come to visit him from another town and asked if he could come too. I said that he was very welcome.

It so happened that on that day, I had promised an Iranian Muslim lady that she could come to my house to pick some fruits. She is new to town, and her work has brought her here. When she found out that I had some Iranian fruit trees, such as persimmons and medlars, she was eager to come and get some of them that I had put away for her. She had not eaten them since she had left Iran, so I invited her too.

After eating the food, we started to talk about the sad situation of the world and all the crises. Both the Muslim lady and Derek's father are staunch in their beliefs.

The Iranian lady was furious at the situation in Iran and how the mullahs had lied to people and misled the public. She believed that they had done things that had damaged Islam.

Derek's father, a Catholic, was not happy about the role of the clergy in his church which made him leave the church. He felt the same as the Iranian lady and said that he was disappointed with what had happened in the name of Christianity.

They agreed about the negative role of priests and mullahs (they called them God's middlemen) in creating hatred and divisions.

As they were talking about this subject, I was thinking of this quote:

It seems both strange and pitiful that the church and clergy should always, in every age, be the most bitter opponents of the very truth they are continually admonishing their followers to be prepared to receive! They have become so violently attached to the form that the substance itself eludes them! -Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 419

In my turn, I mentioned that there is no clergy in the Baha'i Faith, and the Baha'is believe that all religions are fundamentally one and differ only in their social laws. I used the metaphor that religions are like pure healing water streaming down the mountain, and clergies use it as a political means, polluting it to the extent that it becomes hazardous to drink. That is why Baha'is do not interfere with politics.

At the end of our two-hour discussion and sharing our feelings and ideas, we agreed that the only solution for solving the world's problems is for all nations to become united in their efforts and find a religion that combines all the religions in one.

After they left and I did the dishes, I realized what an amazing thing had happened. A Muslim, a Baha'i and Christians of different ages agreed on the need for a universal and all-inclusive religion.

It was a miracle that three different people who did not know each other and with solid religious beliefs expressed views respectfully and lovingly. There was harmony and friendliness in the air.

I tried to analyze how this happened and what caused it. I could not reach any conclusion. I had not planned this. It all started with Derek and me trying to have a meal together.

What made all of us with different age groups and views experience this? As if a mysterious force took over the discussion and led us to that conclusion. As if "The Spirit of the Age" we live in took over. Maybe it is because of helplessness felt worldwide due to overwhelming crises that highlighted the need for a solution. With all its unsolved issues and barely recovering from the pandemic, the world has been forced to reflect and do some soul-searching to counter the dangers ahead.

As a Baha'i, I could not reach any other conclusion except that the spirit of unity and oneness released by Baha'u'llah's revelation is at work with full force. All we can do is try to add to its strength, and if not possible, do not be an obstacle in its path. The unity of humankind is not an ideal or slogan. It is the only way out left for the survival of the wayward humanity.

Shoghi Effendi clarifies this further:

"Let there be no mistake. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind—the pivot round which all the teachings of Baha'u'llah revolve—is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations. Its implications are deeper, its claims greater than any which the Prophets of old were allowed to advance. Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. It does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence. It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced ... It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world—a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units."

– Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of*

Baha'u'llah, pp. 42-43

Maybe now is the time for humanity to take the path of reaching maturity by accepting that oneness and unity are the next logical and necessary stage for its advancement.

I am so happy that I am left with the memory of that beautiful night when both my body and soul relished the delicious food.

The Beauty and Benefits When East and West Meet: My Experience

I have spent precisely half of my life in the global East and the other half living in the West. East and West functioned as schools of learning for me, educating me in unique ways.

I feel like a lucky plant rooted in the soil of the East, watered and nurtured by the West, and the recipient of the best of both worlds.

History is full of records of the past contributions of the East in culture, art, music, architecture, sciences and literature. The physical evidence of some of the East's rich cultures can still be seen today. The East is the birthplace of Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity and many more religions. However, in recent centuries it has fallen behind the West in scientific discoveries and innovations.

On the other hand, the West has been the birthplace of many scientific discoveries that have advanced humanity and led to a better and more prosperous standard of living. Western science has discovered the smallest parts of atoms, mapped the DNA of the human body, and sent spaceships to distant planets looking for signs of life.

If I could describe the relation between East and West simplistically, I would use the metaphor of the heart and brain in the human body. The East, with its deep roots in spirituality, functions like the heart, pumping the lifeblood of guidance and values; and the West, with its advancements in science and finance, functions as the brain.

Ultimately, they need and complement one another. The health of the body rests on them both. The brain sends signals to the heart to pump, and the heart supplies the brain with oxygen.

In his numerous talks and writings, Abdu'l-Baha mentioned the need for East and West to reach out to each other, as he did in this speech he gave in Paris:

In these days the East is in need of material progress and the West is in want of a spiritual idea. It would be well for the West to turn to the East for illumination, and to give in exchange its scientific knowledge. There must be this interchange of gifts.

The East and the West must unite to give to each other what is lacking. This union will bring about a true civilization, where the spiritual is expressed and carried out in the material. Receiving thus the one from the other the greatest harmony will prevail, all people will be united, a state of great perfection will be attained, there will be a firm cementing, and this world will become a shining mirror for the reflection of the attributes of God.

I don't think I fully understood the implications of this concept until my local Baha'i community in Canada decided to adopt the Baha'i community of Jaipur in India (where I spent many years) as its sister community. We wanted to join forces and share experiences.

When I suggested the idea to my community and my Baha'i friends in Jaipur, they were delighted and wholeheartedly welcomed it.

So we had an initial online meeting to get to know each other better. A few individuals decided to communicate directly and think of ways to connect some of the youth of the two communities.

I was so surprised to hear that some of the Indian Baha'is in Jaipur thought they would never see a Baha'i from the West in their lifetime and how fortunate they were to have this blessing. Our Baha'i friends here in British Columbia were in awe of seeing the friends from the East and spending a little time together. This confirmed, for all of us, what the Baha'i teachings say about uniting the East and the West, as in this talk from Abdu'l-Baha encouraging the Western Baha'is to interact with their Baha'i family in the East:

Today, the Baha'is of the East are longing with deep desire to see you face to face. Their highest hope and fondest wish is that the day may come when they will be gathered together in an assembly with you. Consider well the power that accomplished this wonderful transformation.

I saw the fruition of this process when our two communities started consulting to do a project together, which resulted in being virtual guests at the beautiful and elaborate celebration of their 100th anniversary of the Ascension of Abdu'l-Baha.

Soon, we realized that we were lucky in the West to have the financial means, but we lacked human resources in our small community. In contrast, our friends in Jaipur have ample human resources, but they struggle with the finances to carry out their activities. Our community decided to help with their efforts by contributing financially. We felt that sustainable support was the best way rather than a one-time contribution, and we have since been sending our share of responsibility for the activities.

Each member of our community feels a sense of pride and accomplishment due to this beautiful, world-embracing involvement and experience, helping with Baha'i activities such as children's classes, junior youth activities, and devotional gatherings there. Friends in Jaipur are very grateful for our financial support.

Although humanity is closely connected by physical means, the hearts of people can be very distant from each other. Many walls, such as skin color, nationality, religion, political views, and language, hinder the East and the West from getting closer.

But whether we come from the East or the West, we each recognize that our world is getting smaller thanks to improvements in communication and transportation. This has highlighted the need for unified efforts by all countries and combining resources for the betterment of the world.

I am not sure that our community's small attempt to reach out to a community in the East will reduce the weight of the world's problems. Still, it surely has given us a sense of pride that at least we are working to cooperate with our brothers and sisters on the other side of the planet.

Humanomics: Alleviating Poverty Through Virtues

For many years, I've tried to emphasize the need for humanity and morality in our economic systems – because I believe that lack of morality is the root cause of misery in the lives of billions of people.

Those people struggle daily to survive in the face of immoral economic injustice.

So in this brief essay, I will try to define economics as it is now practiced in most places, point out its problems, and suggest a remedy.

The complex subject of economics is hard to define, so here's an easy way to understand it by going to the original root of the term: economics is derived from the Greek word "Oikonomia," which refers to managing a household or family. This means, obviously, that an economic system is supposed to help us manage our households – not only in the individual sense but in the collective one, as well.

Every economic system, then, should exist to help sustain the welfare of all the human family members, so at a minimum, they can live comfortable lives and share their resources and earnings. That way, no family member lives in poverty or privation, and humanity as a whole can live a stable and productive existence. Historically, when great disparities in wealth exist, it destabilizes entire societies, provoking war and revolution – so a good economic system doesn't only ensure prosperity, it also keeps the peace. The Baha'i teachings repeatedly call out this basic fact, as Abdu'l-Baha did in this speech he gave in Canada in 1912:

Although the body politic is one family, yet, because of lack of harmonious relations some members are comfortable and some in direst misery; some members are satisfied and some are hungry; some members are clothed in most costly garments and some families are in need of food and shelter. Why? Because this family lacks the necessary reciprocity and symmetry. This household is not well arranged. This household is not living under a perfect law. All the laws which are legislated do not ensure happiness. They do not provide comfort. Therefore, a law must be given to this family by means of which all the members of this family will enjoy equal well-being and happiness.

Is it possible for one member of a family to be subjected to the utmost misery and to abject poverty and for the rest of the family to be comfortable? It is impossible unless those members of the family be senseless, atrophied, inhospitable, unkind. Then they would say, "Though these members do belong to our family, let them alone. Let us look after ourselves. Let them die. So long as I am comfortable, I am honored, I am happy – this, my brother – let him die. If he be in misery, let him remain in misery, so long as I am comfortable. If he is hungry, let him remain so; I am satisfied. If he is without

clothes, so long as I am clothed, let him remain as he is. If he is shelterless, homeless, so long as I have a home, let him remain in the wilderness."

Such utter indifference in the human family is due to lack of control, to lack of a working law, to lack of kindness in its midst. If kindness had been shown to the members of this family, surely all the members thereof would have enjoyed comfort and happiness.

Sadly, as most of us know, this lack of reciprocal kindness means our current economic systems do not work well – in the human family, one in ten people live on less than \$2 a day. Globally, one-third of urban dwellers live in slums. What is the problem? Where did the system go wrong?

Perhaps the problem was exacerbated when Adam Smith, who observed economic activities in the marketplace as they relate to people's behavior, made some assumptions and came up with a system. He assumed that everyone wants to maximize their satisfaction or profits, with self-interest as the major motivation. He also said the market could correct itself, so no governmental intervention is necessary.

This made sense to many, but Mr. Smith's system left little room for morality or human virtues.

However, Adam Smith was a moral person, and many years before he wrote his book *The Wealth of the Nations*, he wrote *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. In that earlier book, Smith warned that wealth's inherent danger can corrupt human society. His warning was ignored.

In that sense, a lack of spirituality contributes directly to the root cause of our economic problems because we have not included a moral component that would guide our conscience and actions.

In today's economic reality, money has become like a religion; therefore, we follow the practice of everyone in it for themselves, making as much money as they want by any means. Nobody asks if someone is a good person or evinces praiseworthy actions. Many consider someone who is poor a failure because they believe we have been created to make money and get rich.

It is easy to criticize the system itself, but that does not solve the problem.

Instead, we can all have a hand in reforming the system when we start injecting virtues gradually and slowly into it so that it revives itself to become a system that is sensitive to the needs of humanity, sensitive to the poor people of the world, and responsive to the spiritual aspiration of human beings.

Every day we can practice virtues like truthfulness, kindness, generosity, and honesty in our economic activities. These spiritual virtues, common in all religions, create an environment of generosity, caring, and cooperation – all necessary for the poor to prosper. We can do the same by injecting human values into the political, educational, and other systems because all systems suffer from the same afflictions.

As Baha'u'llah advised us in relation to those without means: **"O Ye Rich Ones on Earth! The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust, and be not intent only on your own ease."**

We must take action – because our inaction is partly responsible for the suffering of the poor. If we don't change the system, millions of people will continue to live in misery every day, deprived of God's purpose for them because they are too busy finding a few dollars to survive.

We need "Humanomics" – economics with human elements – because we are humans, and we all aspire to have those qualities and values. You may ask: how can we do this? What is my role? It is impossible to change a system, so why should I even try? All systems are subject to change, so, in countless small ways and some large ones, too, we all can make a difference.

Our actions will lay a solid spiritual foundation for the emerging future global economy – a balanced, equitable moral system with no room for the greed and extreme wealth that inevitably accompanies poverty and economic injustice. In that regard, we all need to ask ourselves a question, the answer to which sets the direction of the path for the rest of our lives. The question is: How much is enough? If you answer this question, it will lead you to the virtue of contentment.

You'll create a yardstick that measures your material and spiritual achievements in your answer to that question. That yardstick, which considers spirituality as well as material things, changes our perspective. At present, sadly, our measurements are incredibly lopsided.

That personalized economic yardstick involves an important measurement: simple living. Throughout history, there have been a great many people who were symbols of simplicity. The Baha'is are blessed to follow the example of Abdu'l-Baha, who lived a simple life, avoided materialism, and shared whatever he had with others. Simplicity also makes financial sense, which can relieve us of so many headaches.

The pandemic highlighted the poor's plight, widening the gap even more between the rich and the poor, and now the war in Europe has dragged millions more into poverty and starvation. The need for action is dire and urgent. The Baha'i teachings urge every human being not to close our eyes to the sufferings of members of our human family. Baha'u'llah wrote this advice to a king:

Fear the sighs of the poor and of the upright in heart who, at every break of day, bewail their plight ... They, verily, are thy treasures on earth. It behoveth thee, therefore, to safeguard thy treasures from the assaults of them who wish to rob thee. Inquire into their affairs, and ascertain, every year, nay every month, their condition, and be not of them that are careless of their duty.

By introducing spiritual virtues into our economic life, we begin to revolutionize the economic system within and change it to a humane system that meets the material needs and spiritual aspirations that God meant for everybody.

“The Russians Love Their Children Too”

For those of us who are old enough to remember, this was the title of Sting’s song at the height of the Cold War, when the level of hatred for Russians had reached its highest. The song gently reminded us about the fundamental fact that no matter to what country or political ideology we belong, we are human first, and we have the same human emotions, such as love for our children.

Here are the lyrics:

*“In Europe and America there’s a growing feeling of hysteria
Conditioned to respond to all the threats
In the rhetorical speeches of the Soviets
Mister Krushchev said, “We will bury you”
I don’t subscribe to this point of view
It’d be such an ignorant thing to do
If the Russians love their children too
How can I save my little boy from Oppenheimer’s deadly toy?
There is no monopoly on common sense
On either side of the political fence
We share the same biology, regardless of ideology
Believe me when I say to you
I hope the Russians love their children too
There is no historical precedent
To put the words in the mouth of the president?
There’s no such thing as a winnable war
It’s a lie we don’t believe anymore
Mister Reagan says, “We will protect you”
I don’t subscribe to this point of view
Believe me when I say to you
I hope the Russians love their children too
We share the same biology, regardless of ideology
But what might save us, me and you
Is if the Russians love their children too”*

The lyrics are outdated, but the message is fresh and clear. It points us to the universal fact that parents everywhere love their children, worry about their future, and fear losing them. Those days there was so much fear, paranoia, and mistrust that even Americans suspected other Americans to be a spy of Russia or sympathizers. Many Americans lost their jobs in the movie industry, and some went to jail.

And now, once again, there is so much hatred and negative feelings in the world. In particular, negative feelings toward Russia because of the war and the destruction in Ukraine.

The mass media's coverage of this devastating war is comprehensive and detailed. Every death and bombarding is shown. Every tear shed, every story of Ukrainian suffering is reported.

Sadly, what is missing is seeing the faces of the dead Russian soldier's mother and father, who do not even know where their son's body lies. These soldiers were forced to leave home away from their parents to fight a war that they most likely did not want and were killed and left behind the heartbreak for their grieving parents. The media has no access to these parents so that they can share their pain and agony, and that is a tragedy because **"The Russians love their children too."**

Any human death is a tragedy. It does not matter if they are Ukrainian, Russian, American or German. The savagery of war has to stop. Abdu'l-Baha tells us why:

"For thousands of years men and nations have gone forth to the battlefield to settle their differences. The cause of this has been ignorance and degeneracy. Praise be to God! In this radiant century minds have developed, perceptions have become keener, eyes are illumined and ears attentive. Therefore, it will be impossible for war to continue. Consider human ignorance and inconsistency. A man who kills another man is punished by execution, but a military genius who kills one hundred thousand of his fellow creatures is immortalized as a hero. One man steals a small sum of money and is imprisoned as a thief. Another pillages a whole country and is honored as a patriot and conqueror. A single falsehood brings reproach and censure, but the wiles of politicians and diplomats excite the admiration and praise of a nation. Consider the ignorance and inconsistency of mankind. How darkened and savage are the instincts of humanity!" - Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

How long more does humanity need to realize that there is no winning for those who lost their lives and left behind their families to grieve? It is so sad that the young who have their whole lives ahead of them must pay the ultimate price of life in every war. How much longer will we glorify killings in our psyche and culture through songs and movies? We can if we want to put all these energies into educating humanity on ways to settle disputes through reasoning and peaceful methods. And if all that fails, by governments getting united, they can arise against the aggressors and stop them.

Baha'u'llah has suggested the path that humanity has to follow:

"The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace amongst men. Such a peace demandeth that the Great Powers should resolve, for the sake of the tranquillity of the peoples of the earth, to be fully reconciled among themselves. Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him. If this be done, the nations of the world will no longer require any armaments, except for the purpose of preserving the security of their realms and of maintaining internal order

within their territories. This will ensure the peace and composure of every people, government and nation.” -Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

We can not even imagine the amount of money and resources that could be saved by the nations not stockpiling weapons. All these savings could be used for constructive purposes such as eradicating diseases and eliminating poverty.

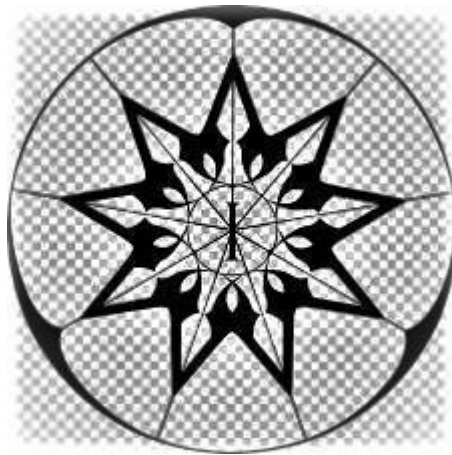
The news of the Ukraine war has attracted the world's attention, so it is easy to forget that some Russians in Russia are fighting for freedom, voicing their opposition to this war, and going to jail.

As we mourn every death in Ukraine, mourn the destruction of the country and other parts of the globe, let us also grieve with the mothers and fathers of the dead Russian soldiers who died by following orders. Those parents loved their children too.

Now is an excellent time not to get carried away with hate; to take the path of moderation. Pray for peace and remind ourselves that not every German was a Nazi. Not every person from the Middle East is a terrorist, and not every Russian is a warmonger and should be hated.

Chapter 2

Practical Economic Suggestions For Everyday Use



The present economic system is sick and is dying. It cannot meet the needs of humanity. The gap between rich and poor is getting wider and wider, which has increased the suffering of the masses. The solutions that can heal it have been ignored. It is time to re-examine the fundamental assumptions that this system was built on and replace them with humane, moral and spiritual ones. We need to build an economic system fit to help humanity achieve its goal of an ever-advancing civilization, a world where there is no room for economic injustice, and people have all the necessities of life to live peaceful and fulfilling lives. A shift in thinking is needed. Based on the Baha'i Teachings, this material aims to provide some insight and suggestions for laying the foundation for a better economic future. We have the solutions and the technology to build a new system; all we need is the resolve and the will. Everyone has an inherent power to contribute. The time for action is upon us. This is our eleventh hour.

We live in a very confusing time, particularly after the economic market crash of 2008, which almost destroyed the whole economic system and forced governments to take desperate measures to save the system and avoid universal chaos. That was caused by unchecked greed, which led to a destructiveness that only a lack of morality can create.

Economic problems started from its inception when Adam Smith, the father of modern economics, wrote "The Wealth of Nations." His book became like the holy book for the economist. He described economics as a science of creating wealth and excluded morality and spirituality in his theories. He made self-interest the engine of the system. According to him, everybody is trying to maximize his or her satisfaction. That philosophy became the breeding ground for greed, the cause of so many economic problems in the world. Other economists followed his ideas and built their theories on his assumptions. They failed to consider and didn't care to find out that Adam Smith was the first to acknowledge the importance of morality in his book "The Theory of Moral Sentiments," which was written in 1759, seven years before "The Wealth of Nations." He had recognized the inherent danger of wealth, even as he provided ideas for generating it:

“This disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and powerful, and to despise or, at least, neglect persons of poor and mean conditions, though necessary both to establish and to maintain the distinction of ranks and the order of society, is, at the same time, the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments.” – Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, p.3.

The Baha'i concept of economics is fundamentally different and is based on spiritual and moral principles. Abdul'-Baha explains it clearly:

"The secrets of the whole economic question are Divine in nature, and are concerned with the world of the heart and spirit." - 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Baha'i World, Volume IV, p. 448

Shoghi Effendi shed more light on this:

“... By the statement 'the economic solution is divine in nature' is meant that religion alone can, in the last resort, bring in man's nature such a fundamental change as to enable him to adjust the economic relationships of society. It is only in this way that man can control the economic forces that threaten to disrupt the foundations of his

existence, and thus assert his mastery over the forces of nature.” -Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 551. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 26 December 1935)

I understand that the Baha'is aim to spiritualize the economic system by injecting moral and spiritual values into it. Economics is made for humanity and has to reflect in it all human aspirations, including ethical, moral and spiritual.

It is important to remember that the Baha'i Economic System will occur when the transformation of man and society has been accomplished, and with it, man's awareness of his spiritual station and his destiny. He will have subordinated his animal nature and will, therefore, behave less selfishly. At this time, it is almost impossible to imagine a society that has spiritually grown to that extent. But by introducing more of the spiritual qualities in our lives, we are laying the foundation for such a society and such an economic system. Some of our goals may seem idealistic, but that is precisely what we are, idealists. We are dreaming of a better world and are ready to make sure that Bahá'u'lláh's World Commonwealth is going to be established. No great achievement can take place without a goal or dream. Without them, the ever-advancing civilization would not have progressed from the Stone Age to where we are now.

Since we do not have the Bahá'i economic system in place yet, we may think that we cannot do anything to bring it about, and we must wait for its arrival. But that is not true. There is so much we can do as individuals and in our communities that is economical, and we can do it without realizing that we are participating in economic activity. Our participation will set the example for the rest of the world and, at the same time, prepare the ground for the time when the World Commonwealth will come into being.

The Universal House of Justice reminds us that the time has come to pay greater attention to the economic side of our lives and take steps to improve the world's economic prosperity.

“Although Baha'u'llah does not set out in His Revelation a detailed economic system, a constant theme throughout the entire corpus of His teachings is the reorganization of human society. Consideration of this theme inevitably gives rise to questions of economics. Of course, the future order conceived by Baha'u'llah is far beyond anything that can be imagined by the present generation. Nevertheless, its eventual emergence will depend on strenuous effort by His followers to put His teachings into effect today. With this in mind, we hope that the comments below will stimulate thoughtful, ongoing reflection by the friends. The aim is to learn about how to participate in the material affairs of society in a way that is consistent with the divine precepts and how, in practical terms, collective prosperity can be advanced through justice and generosity, collaboration and mutual assistance.” -The Universal House of Justice, March 1, 2017

Unfortunately, money is a yardstick that we use to measure poverty, wealth, failure and success. I wish that as we grow and expand our spiritual horizons, we will adopt a spiritual yardstick to measure our lives. Money cannot and should not be the only means of measuring our life's achievements.

Today, more than your heart and intellect, you need the power of your imagination because you are going to picture yourself in the future. Once you do that and grasp the beauty of peace, love

and harmony and see how the sufferings and misery have been removed and man no longer has to fight to survive in his economic life, you will bring yourself back to the present and, hopefully, you will start making small changes in your economic activities that will lead to the fundamental changes in order to lay the foundation of a new and wonderful economic behaviour based on spirituality and not greed.

'Abdu'l-Bahá often talked about very complex subjects. Still, He made them simple and easy to understand, and I believe that economics doesn't have to be daunting or confusing, especially when it comes to action. These suggestions are intended to be clear and simple to encourage you to participate in economic activities with increased awareness. They are meant for everyone, whether or not you are knowledgeable about economics. Hopefully, you may find them useful, and they will empower you to act to bring about a fundamental change in your character and your everyday economic actions. It also helps you realize what an incredible power we have as individuals to transform society in every way, including economic ways.

This list of suggestions may seem overwhelming, and you may not be able to practice all those that apply to your situation. But you have to remember that it is not about the results; it is about sincere and wholehearted efforts. It is a pure intention that counts.

➤ **Focus on the essential questions of life.** After answering the questions "**Who am, I?**" and "**What is the purpose of my life?**" the equally important question of "**How much is enough?**" should be answered. One of the biggest problems everyone faces is that we do not get a chance to understand who we are and what constitutes the purpose of our lives. Also, we are so busy that we do not ask how much money is enough. How much do we need to live a fruitful life? Practice contentment. Life distracts us from asking ourselves some fundamental questions. Answering these questions can guide us to go through tests and difficulties in life.

➤ **Live a simple life, a life like 'Abdu'l-Bahá.** Living a simple life brings peace of mind and removes some of the distractions of our life journey. Many studies indicate that simplicity reduces stress in life and creates a sense of freedom from the burden of material possessions. A movement already in place called "voluntary simplicity" encourages people to live a simple life. There are some benefits to living a simple life. It is a decision made by many who had too much to handle.

➤ **Change your mindset.** You need to believe that you are essentially a spiritual being and have a spiritual purpose in your life. You need to realize your spiritual destiny. Once this is realized, then acting accordingly is much more effective and easy. This mindset will help you to have a healthy approach to your material life. Every change begins first in your mind.

➤ **Pay a fair price.** If you feel that the price is too low, pay more than the asking price. The Báb practiced this when He worked as a merchant. One of the most beautiful things related to economic activities is the commitment of fair-minded people to disregard existing prices and pay more because they believe their price estimate is fair.

➤ **Share the profits with employees.** 'Abdu'l-Bahá taught us how important it is for the workers to have a share of the profits. Besides profit-sharing, there are many ways to help. Get medical coverage for employees. Support the emotional and physical well-being of employees. Taking care of workers is a privilege and an opportunity to be of service to people. Looking for such opportunities is a wonderful act.

➤ **Pay fair wages,** not based on what society dictates. We do not need to follow the minimum wage guidelines. The Baha'i Writings provide the guidelines to ensure that we pay what is fair. Society's wage guidelines should not prevent us from paying more if we think that is fair.

➤ **Be honest in your dealings.** Present it with all the facts explained. In our society, we tend to misrepresent a product or share only enough information to present it in the best possible light.

Truthfulness is the foundation of all virtues. When selling your car, house or other possessions, clearly describe the real condition. Mentioning the negative points about a car or a house is not wrong. I have done it, and it did help me to get a good price.

➤ **Provide the best quality of service** or the best product possible and do so in a spirit of service. We are privileged to have the assurance that we have demonstrated an act of worship by doing our job well. Make customer satisfaction a goal. There is more to our jobs than just earning money. How satisfying it is to know that the customer is happy and we have played a part in it. Being proud of our work is a blessing millions do not have. They make money but are not happy and satisfied inside.

➤ **Look for opportunities to extend** to co-workers and co-operate in the workplace. Most workplaces are very isolating, and individuals work by themselves. Reaching out and extending help and treating each other fairly creates a better spirit and working environment. Extend support to others, even your competitors. Be a cause of unity by seeing them as you would see your employees or colleagues and doing as much as you can to help them.

➤ **Be content with a reasonable margin of profit.** There is no end to greed in our society, so being satisfied with earning a certain profit will create a sense of contentment and provide an example to others. This is an extension of how much is enough question. There is nothing wrong with being satisfied and content with a set amount of profit.

➤ **Update yourself with the latest information** and study in your field to provide a better service, be the leader in your profession, and be punctual in business and other meetings. Being on time at work increases the efficiency of the system and demonstrates respect for others. If time is money, then one should not waste it.

➤ Remember that your **actions are the best manifestation of your beliefs,** and be conscious of them. The cliché is true that actions speak louder than words. We should

be an example for others since we are the ones to lead society towards an ever-advancing civilization.

➤ If you are lending money, ask for a **reasonable interest rate** and not the maximum rate. We are told that the rate of interest has to be fair and reasonable. Baha'u'llah has advised us to do so. Banks should not be the only ones setting interest rates.

➤ **Resist the consumer mentality** which exists in our society. As the standard of living rises, consumerism increases and consuming becomes a bad habit with severe consequences. Fighting this tendency is very important for our economic life and our spiritual development. Consumerism has become a spreading disease, and its forces are paralyzing the progress of our souls.

➤ **Be knowledgeable about advertising.** Advertisements conceal the information we need to buy a product, and they make false claims, using psychological methods to make a sale. Advertising covers all areas of our economic life. One has to be very savvy to navigate through all the false claims of advertising. Selling has become very sophisticated, and one has to be very smart about it and read between the lines.

➤ **Spiritually justify your expenditure.** With so much poverty in the world today, we have to answer to our conscience for any unnecessary spending. We have been advised to be frugal in our spending. It would be beneficial if we could create in us this “policeman” to check our spending.

➤ **Avoid wastage** in the workplace and suggest ways to cut down on waste. We can all help in some way to avoid the loss of resources.

➤ **Protect the environment** in your business and personal life. We owe it to future generations to protect the environment. It would be sad if humanity grows spiritually in the future, but the damage is done, and our environment is destroyed.

➤ **Increase your economic and business knowledge.** The more we know about how economics works, the better we will be able to forecast the future.

➤ **Volunteer for service** whenever possible with the spirit of service, following Abdu'l-Bahá's example, Who served mankind all of His life.

➤ **Give to the Bahá'i Fund and also support worthy charitable organizations.** Every act of giving is a small step towards reducing the gap between rich and poor.

➤ **Have or adopt a financial goal in life.** As we have teaching plans in the Faith and other goals and plans in our life, it is vital to have an individual financial plan. Goals encourage discipline. This is very important. It is almost impossible to have a comfortable financial life without planning.

➤ **Avoid debt** as much as possible since too many financial burdens damage the quality of spiritual and human life. **Investigate the rate of interest** on mortgages, loans and credit

to reduce cost. Volumes can be written about this subject. Debts are one of the most destructive factors that should be avoided.

➤ **Create a habit of saving.** Life is full of uncertainty and change, and having some money for a rainy day creates peace of mind. Saving should be part of our financial goals. It is a beautiful habit to have. It is not easy to save with the pressure of our consumer mentality today, but it is crucial.

➤ **Spread the word about honest and fair businesses and professionals.** It is like giving them free advertising. They need all the help they can get. It has a very enabling power helping honest people and businesses.

➤ **Don't buy the latest models** if the old ones are in working order and provide the same service. Having the most recent of everything creates an unnecessary economic burden for an individual, decreasing the quality of life. Be practical about material possessions. But it is hard not to want to purchase the latest model of car when everyone is doing the same.

➤ **Avoid keeping up with the Joneses.** That is the worst kind of spending. It is also a sign of spiritual and emotional immaturity. And we see it happen every day. Regrettably, people want the approval of others while their spiritual destiny is in jeopardy.

➤ **Support the concept of one world currency.** If we have fewer currencies to exchange, life becomes much more comfortable, and this is a good step in the right direction towards world unity. And anything that can promote world unity is extremely important.

➤ **Don't follow society's shortcuts concerning taxation.** There are claims made which can perhaps be legally justified but are morally wrong.

➤ **Make honest insurance claims.** False insurance claims have become like a source of income for some who claim damages to their bodies or their properties. This misuse hurts every honest person because insurance costs will increase due to the increase in dishonest claims. There are some incidences that though legally, one can make a claim, but morally it does not go with the spirit of honesty

➤ **Make fair expense claims** at work. It has become a common practice to claim the maximum amount even if it is not used, but we have the duty to be honest about them.

➤ **Do not abuse sick leave.** Some people use their sick leave even though they are not ill. They think that if they do not use it, they will lose it. But in reality, though sick leave is a right but has to be used in the right spirit when one is sick and should not be considered a paid day off, even if one is not ill.

➤ **Return to the store when you realize you have been undercharged** or received too much change for your purchase. This is practicing the virtue of honesty. Watch the face of the cashier when you do this. They are probably wondering, "Who are these people?" The answer is that we are the people from the future, where honesty is the norm.

- **Resist society's corrupt practices of bribery and cheating.** In some places in the world, giving bribes is a way of life; that is a test and an opportunity to fight this harmful practice. It is very hard in places like India and China, where I have lived. Refusing to participate in these practices is very difficult.
- **Regard service first and profit second.** This seems idealistic in society, but for Bahá'is, it is considered a way of life. And in the long run, it is the best advertisement one can buy for free.
- **Participate in social and economic projects.** We can help to change the world for the better by getting involved in these projects. And they are a valuable way of learning and contributing. We need to gain experience in social activities so that we can contribute more in the future.
- **Do not support the idea of the end justifying the means** for promotion at work, getting a contract, or applying for a job. Our goal is to grow spiritually, and these practices do not help us to improve. That is the worst kind of numbing our conscience.
- **Be honest in a job interview.** Society has adopted the practice of magnifying positive and minimizing or omitting negative, but it is a form of lying in reality. It will feel strange to the interviewer and us, but we have to start being honest.
- **Be truthful in filling out forms or tenders.** Exaggerating has become a way of life, but it is not a Bahá'í way of life. It is a tough thing to do when competing, but we can have the satisfaction that Baha'u'llah is happy with us.
- **Do not sacrifice your values to get a promotion** or contract even though there is nothing wrong with being ambitious and wanting to progress through the ranks. Some would do anything to get a promotion, but we cannot follow that practice.
- **Use good quality material in production.** Do not use harmful ingredients in production. Be educated about the ingredients, so no harm comes as a result.
- **Protect the poor and underprivileged** of our society in any way possible. It is our spiritual duty and privilege.
- **Give your Huqúqu'lláh** (the Right of God) to know well that this giving is a privilege, not a tax. Give with a sense of sharing rather than a sense of loss. This is your opportunity to practice generosity. Giving is the best practical step for bridging the gap between the rich and poor.
- **Create a consciousness that your welfare,** well-being and happiness depend on the welfare, prosperity and happiness of every poor, needy and underprivileged person in the world; that the real meaning of the oneness of humankind will come into being when we see others as members of our family. This should be easy for us since we have heard and said it many times that:

“Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship.” -Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p.288

➤ **Money is a tool and not the goal of your life.** Most people make the biggest mistake because they forget that we have not been created to make money. That should not be our life's goal. Money should be seen as an effective tool to serve humanity and improve our spiritual and economic life of ourselves and others. This is the key that can make a person happy or sad at the end of our physical life. Since we cannot take it with us, then why not spend it for the good of humankind.

➤ **Spend an equal amount of energy in becoming detached from material possessions** as you spend getting them, recognizing that they are a test and remembering what Baha'u'llah said:

"Thou dost wish for gold, and I desire thy freedom from it. Thou thinkest thyself rich in its possession, and I recognize thy wealth in thy sanctity therefrom. By My life! This is My Knowledge, and that is thy fancy; how can My way accord with thine?"- Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words, Arabic no.56

It is like spiritual detoxification. There is nothing inherently wrong with being rich as long as we are fully aware of its benefits and dangers. Baha'u'llah has allowed us to have all the luxuries we desire, as long as we are detached from them.

➤ **Remind yourself of your spiritual destination** while pursuing financial goals since materialism can slowly take over your spiritual life. Materialism can destroy our spiritual well-being without constant reminders of our spiritual destiny. We have to have the “big picture” in our view all the time so that we are not lost.

➤ **Live the Bahá'i Life.** In a sense, it is a simple statement to live the Bahá'i life, but it requires an understanding of ourselves and our purpose in life. **It is easier said than done.**

➤ **Be considerate to those who rent from you.** Be sensitive to their situation. If they are in trouble, be flexible with their rent payments. Let them miss a payment or part of a payment. Besides the spiritual satisfaction that you feel, you also gain a tenant who cares for you and your property and will use it as if it's theirs. It even makes economic sense since you will probably lessen the cost of repairs.

➤ **Develop virtues** common to all religions and the foundation for any system's success. At present, acquiring the virtues seems idealistic, but we must remember that acquiring these virtues will be commonplace as we move closer to an ever-advancing civilization. They may not look like they have anything to do with economics, but they help us gain spiritual and human qualities, which help us create a better society. Here is the list of virtues identified by The Virtues Project:

Assertiveness, Caring, Cleanliness, Compassion, Confidence, Consideration, Courage, Courtesy Creativity, Detachment, Determination, Enthusiasm, Excellence, Faithfulness, Flexibility, Forgiveness, Friendliness, Generosity, gentleness,

Helpfulness, Honesty, Honor, Humility, Idealism, Joyfulness, Justice, Kindness, Love, Loyalty, Mercy, Moderation, Modesty, Obedience, Orderliness, Patience, Peacefulness, Prayerfulness, Purposefulness, Reliability, Respect, Responsibility, Reverence, Self-discipline, Service, Steadfastness, Tact, Thankfulness, Tolerance, Trust, Trustworthiness, Truthfulness, Unity

➤ **Deal with your insistent self or ego**; otherwise, it can undo any success or progress if it is not recognized as a serious threat to our good efforts. History is full of examples of how egos created destruction throughout the ages. As human beings, our life in this world and our progress in the next world depend on our decisions. Some say we make our heaven and hell here on earth due to our choices. It is sad if we do not make the right decision and give our higher nature the upper hand. Because we are bombarded by advertisements and consumerism, nurturing our higher nature is very difficult, and that is why we need to tune ourselves spiritually to make the right choice so that we get the rewards and benefits of that choice. We know that reading the Writings has been encouraged in our Faith, and when we read the Holy Writings and meditate on them, our souls are uplifted, affecting our decision-making. Our souls are tuned by reading the Writings and bringing ourselves to account each day. It is like a spiritual balance sheet so that we can perceive the good and the bad in our ways. **This is such an important factor in our lives, and we need to take the opportunity to deal with it adequately.**

➤ Recognize and nurture the **four aspects of your being**:

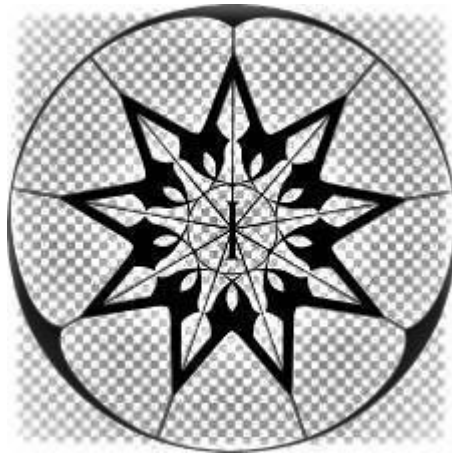
- a) **Spiritual**
- b) **Physical**
- c) **Emotional**
- d) **Intellectual**

Most people ignore one aspect for the sake of others, but we need all aspects to have balance in our lives. This sounds like one of those self-help mantras, but awareness of all aspects of our being is essential to realistic **self-knowledge, which is the first step towards knowing God.**

➤ **Be more vocal in a loving way** about what we think about the changes needed to improve the economic life of individuals and society. In short, express our ideas and vision without being militant or aggressive. We all have a say in all matters and can be the catalysts of positive change. We do not want to be political or militant, but we cannot forget that our job is to provide vision and direction to wayward humanity. It is like having the healing medicine and not giving it to the sick.

Chapter 3

Study of the Bahá'í Writings on Economics



Introduction

At the outset, it has to be mentioned that we are studying these Bahá'í Writings on economics briefly without going too deeply into their importance and implications for the sake of simplicity. Volumes can be written on each of these Writings, and each could be the subject of immense research. As time goes by, we will realize their importance and how they can and will bring us towards a totally different economic system. Future economists will write books on how these Sacred Writings changed our spiritual, social and economic lives. So please bear in mind that the simplicity of the language and my feeble attempts to share my understanding of them do not do them justice. Many Writings could be mentioned here, but I chose these on purpose because they cover many areas related to economics.

Divine Economy

What makes the “divine economy” different from all the economic systems of the world is its approach to the source of the economic problems and their solutions. In this way, it differentiates itself from all the past and present economic theories and thoughts.

“The secrets of the whole economic question are Divine in nature, and are concerned with the world of the heart and spirit. In the Baha’i Teachings this is most completely explained, and without the consideration of the Baha’i Teachings, it is impossible to bring about a better state.” - Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Baha’i World*, Volume 1V, p. 448

“... By the statement ‘the economic solution is Divine in nature’ is meant that religion alone can, in the last resort, bring in man’s nature such a fundamental change as to enable him to adjust the economic relationships of society. It is only in this way that man can control the economic forces that threaten to disrupt the foundations of his existence, and thus assert his mastery over the forces of nature.” - From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, December 26, 1935, *Lights of Guidance*, p.551

These Writings clearly explain the difference between the present economic system and the divine economy, which will characterize the future for mankind. The economists' assumption in the past and are still making is that man must maximize his satisfaction. He wants the best for himself and does not care for the interest or welfare of others. Man is depicted as selfish, and the economic systems catered to this assumption. It is no surprise that it has led us to so many crises. But the Baha’i Writings explain that the whole question of economics is divine or spiritual, which is a better foundation than selfishness or greediness. With this approach, man has a divine destiny and is not ruled just by man-made laws and regulations. It is fundamentally different because the Baha’i economic system is based on man’s heart; it is founded solidly on the human spirit.

Baha’i Economic System

"There are practically no technical teachings on economics in the Cause, such as banking, the price system, and others. The Cause is not an economic system, nor can its Founders be considered as having been technical economists. The contribution of the Faith to this subject is essentially indirect, as it consists in the application of spiritual principles to our present-day economic system. Bahá'u'lláh has given us a few basic principles which should guide future Bahá'í economists in establishing such institutions which will adjust the economic relationships of the world."-From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, January 25, 1936, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 551

We do not have a Baha’i economic system because we do not have the spiritual requirements

for such a system, a system that would be divine in nature. We do not have the spiritual maturity to imagine such a system. But there will be a world commonwealth, and we know that future economists, in consultation with the Universal House of Justice, will bring this into being. We can only prepare for this system by developing our spiritual capacity and contributing by our actions towards laying a foundation for that system.

The Station of Man

“Lofty is the station of man, were he to hold fast to righteousness and truth and to remain firm and steadfast in the Cause... His is the loftiest station, and his influence educateth the world of being.” Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p.220

“If, on the contrary, the spiritual nature of the soul has been so strengthened that it holds the material side in subjection, then does man approach the Divine; his humanity becomes so glorified that the virtues of the Celestial Assembly are manifested in him; he radiates the Mercy of God, he stimulates the spiritual progress of mankind, for he becomes a lamp to show light on their path.” - Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p.65-66

God has told us that He created man in His image. Man's station is very high and has a great spiritual destiny. But in the world of economics, this is not recognized. Man is a labourer, a manager, or a consumer, and his contribution is limited to that. The system does not recognize that his spiritual aspirations need to be the goal of an economic system. This system enables him and provides him with tools to work towards his spiritual destiny and spiritual goals and become a spiritual being who has a human experience rather than a human being who has a spiritual experience.

Material Civilization and Spiritual Civilization

“Material civilization has reached an advanced plane but now there is need of spiritual civilization. Material civilization alone will not satisfy; it cannot meet the conditions and requirements of the present age; its benefits are limited to the world of matter. There is no limitation to the spirit of man, for spirit in itself is progressive, and if the divine civilization be established, the spirit of man will advance.” - Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 101

“As heretofore material civilization has been extended, the divine civilization must now be promulgated. Until the two agree, real happiness among mankind will be unknown. By mere intellectual development and power of reason, man cannot attain to his fullest degree - that is to say, by means of intellect alone he cannot accomplish the progress effected by religion.” - Ibid, p. 170

The history of mankind has demonstrated that man hasn't realized that he has two natures – one is his material nature, and the other is his spiritual nature. History has demonstrated man's development in terms of inventions, scientific knowledge, a higher standard of living and generally material progress. Man is satisfied that he has made great improvements, and he can calculate his gains yearly. But the sad point is that his spiritual progress has not kept up with his material progress. Man's ignorance about his nature, his spiritual nature, has made him one-sided – all his energies are spent on material gain. He does not know that he has a spiritual side and that his material progress depends on his spiritual progress. If not made on a spiritual basis, all decisions will not be beneficial for his soul and his being. The perfect harmony is that in which material civilization and spiritual civilization go hand in hand. At present, there is a significant imbalance between the two civilizations.

The Nature of the Economic Problem

“Although the body politic is one family yet because of lack of harmonious relations some members are comfortable and some in direst misery, some members are satisfied and some are hungry, some members are clothed in most costly garments and some families are in need of food and shelter. Why? Because this family lacks the necessary reciprocity and symmetry. This household is not well arranged. This household is not living under a perfect law. All the laws which are legislated do not ensure happiness. They do not provide comfort. - Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundation of World Unity, p.38

“Economic plans of reconstruction have been carefully devised, and meticulously executed. And yet crisis has succeeded crisis, and the rapidity with which a perilously unstable world is declining has been correspondingly accelerated. A yawning gulf threatens to involve in one common disaster both the satisfied and dissatisfied nations, democracies and dictatorships, capitalists and wage-earners, Europeans and Asiatic, Jew and Gentile, white and coloured.”- Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p.190

Man's inability to see that we as members of the human race are family, his dependence on his intellect and disregard for the moral/spiritual laws that must govern life have led us to this state of crisis. Man has failed to understand that the welfare of the whole depends on his welfare, and his welfare depends on the welfare of the whole. This selfish tendency of every man for himself has created the problems that we have at the moment. It does not matter how many laws we make; as long as man's lower nature is not controlled, there will be chaos. What man needs is to understand that other human beings are part of him. Humanity can be compared to the human body. Just as the human body is connected and what happens to one part of the body affects the rest, so, too, we cannot ignore one part of humanity because it affects the whole. There was a time that people did not think beyond their own backyard. But with the development of technology and the arrival of the age of information, our backyard has been extended to the whole world and all humankind. We cannot be indifferent and ignore what is going on in other parts of the world because, directly or indirectly, our lives are affected. An example would be stock markets in different parts of the world. If the stock market in China changes, the stock market in New York also changes. So we have to

recognize that we are all in it together, and we need to help each other in order to have a better spiritual and material life.

The Economic Cost of Warfare

“Peace is the pretext, and night and day they are all straining every nerve to pile up more weapons of war, and to pay for this their wretched people must sacrifice most of whatever they are able to earn by their sweat and toil. How many thousands have given up their work in useful industries and are labouring day and night to produce new and deadlier weapons which would spill out the blood of the race more copiously than before.

Each day they invent a new bomb or explosive and then the governments must abandon their obsolete arms and begin producing the new, since the old weapons cannot hold their own against the new...” - Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 61

“Observe that if such a happy situation be forthcoming, no government would need continually to pile up the weapons of war, nor feel itself obliged to produce ever new military weapons with which to conquer the human race. A small force for the purposes of internal security, the correction of criminal and disorderly elements and the prevention of local disturbances, would be required - no more. In this way the entire population would, first of all, be relieved of the crushing burden of expenditure currently imposed for military purposes, and secondly, great numbers of people would cease to devote their time to the continual devising of new weapons of destruction.” - *Ibid*, p. 65-66

We can readily calculate the allocation of a national budget for military forces and weapons and, at the same time, calculate the cost of eradicating malaria, providing clean drinking water or educating one child. When you compare how much the money used for warfare could benefit the sick and needy, it is not difficult to understand how much we have wasted and continue to waste and how harmful it is. But the statistics do not tell the picture of the human lives that have been lost unnecessarily and the human suffering experienced. This suffering could have been avoided and could still be avoided. Imagine a world in which there is only one military for the whole world and one police force to ensure its security. Costs are reduced and monies channelled into humanitarian pursuits.

Co-operation vs Competition

“In the world of nature we behold the living organisms in a ceaseless struggle for existence. Everywhere we are confronted by the evidences of the physical survival of the

fittest. This is the very source of error and misapprehension in the opinions and the theories of man who fail to realize that the world of nature is inherently defective in cause and outcome and that the defects therein must be removed by education.” - Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p.400

“In nature there is the law of the survival of the fittest. Even if man be not educated, then according to the natural institutes this natural law will demand of man supremacy. The purpose and object of schools, colleges and universities is to educate man and thereby rescue and redeem him from the exigencies and defects of nature and to awaken within him the capability of controlling and appropriating nature’s bounties.” - Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p.353

Man began his existence during the Stone Age, and survival of the fittest was the rule of the land. He had to compete with the elements and hunt for food for his survival. But unfortunately, as man’s intellect developed and his economic circumstances improved, he still continued to behave in the same manner. Now the scenario has changed. Instead of hunting and fighting for territory, the firms fight and compete. The big fish eats the small fish, and this is considered a success. But it is time for the fish to live together. We have to educate ourselves to eliminate this remnant of Stone Age behaviour that has no place in modern society. If we want to compete, it should be in the spiritual realm; we should strive to be the most generous person and the most kind. That is real competition.

Capitalism

There is a strong belief in the world that capitalism is a solution to all economic problems. But we know that no system is perfect, whether it be capitalism or communism, if the foundation is not built on divine principles.

“There is nothing in the teachings against some kind of capitalism; its present form, though, would require adjustments to be made.” - Shoghi Effendi, Directives from the Guardian, p. 19

There is a perception that capitalism is based on freedom and, ideally, is a perfect system. But the reality is, as the Baha’i Writings tell us, it is not divine and is not founded on divine principles. In its present form, corruption, greed, and selfishness manifest, leading to many economic disasters. Many who dislike a communist system believe that capitalism is the solution. But this is not true because no system is perfect if it is not built on divine principles. So capitalism has many merits, but it is not going to be the future economic system of the world in the present form.

The Golden Rule

“...’All economic problems may be solved by the application of the Science of the Love of God’. That is to say: If the Rule called golden ... were actually applied to the world’s economic problems, which if not solved bid fair to destroy us, and the love of God, the sort of love which makes a home life happy, were used as a scientific measurement to regulate our international and national affairs; to settle all relations between labour and capital, between rich and poor, to regulate all coinage and commerce, can there be any doubt that the results would be far more conducive to human welfare than our present policies have produced? - Abdu’l-Bahá, Portals to Freedom, p.156

The cause of most of the problems in the world is a lack of empathy in that people are unable to put themselves in the place of others and can’t imagine, for example, how it feels to be poor or how it feels to be jobless. When we don’t have empathy, we become numb to the sufferings of others and don’t understand the implications of our actions and words and their consequences.

If the factory owner understood the struggles of the working class, what they experience and how they juggle to manage their incomes and pay their bills, he would ensure that they receive fair wages, and the workers would know that their employer understands their situation. In the same way, if the workers or employees have empathy, they would understand what a difficult job it is to run a factory. Both the employer and employee would be aware of each other’s struggles and realize that decisions made are for the benefit of both. Then we wouldn’t experience so many disruptions in economic activities such as strikes and “work to rule.”

Below are some Writings from different religions on this subject. After reading them, you may realize those different religions agree and derive their inspiration from the same Source.

“We are as much alive as we keep the Earth alive.” -Chief Dan George

“One should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated.” - Mahavira, Sutrakritanga (Jainism)

“I am a stranger to no one; and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed, I am a friend to all.” -Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1299 (Sikhism)

“Regard your neighbor’s gain as your own gain and your neighbor’s loss as your own loss.” – T’ai Shang Kan Ying P’ien, 213-218 (Taoism)

“Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself.” - Muhammad, Hadith (Islam)

“Lay not on any soul a load which ye would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things ye would not desire for yourself.”– Baha’u’llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah, p.128 (Baha’i Faith)

“Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself.” - Shayast-na-Shayast 13.29 (Zoroastrianism)

“Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.” – The Buddha, Udana-Varga 5.18 (Buddhism)

“This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you . . .” – Mahabharata 5:1517 (Hinduism)

“In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you.” – Jesus, Matthew 7:12 (Christianity)

“One word which sums up the basis of all good conduct . . . loving kindness. Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself.” – Confucius, Analects 15.23

“What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary.” - Hillel, Talmud, Shabbath 31a (Judaism)

Wealth

“O Son of Being!

Busy not thyself with this world, for with fire We test the gold, and with gold We test Our servants.” - Bah’áu’lláh, Hidden Words, Arabic, #55

“ ... Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy. If, however, a few have inordinate riches while the rest are impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability to its possessor.”- Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, #.24

“O Son of Man!

Thou dost wish for gold and I desire thy freedom from it. Thou thinkest thyself rich in its possession, and I recognize thy wealth in thy sanctity therefrom. By My life! This is my knowledge, and that is thy fancy; how can My way accord with thine?” - Baha’u’llah, The Hidden Words, Persian, #5

People tend to believe that wealth is good and always a relief. The Baha’i Teachings do not agree. There is nothing against getting rich as long as we are aware of the dangers that it can bring. There is no doubt that material possessions and wealth can be wonderful tools, but they can be extremely harmful too. Studies have shown that quality of life does not necessarily increase with an increase in wealth.

In many cases, it has been the reverse. Winning a lottery is not necessarily a blessing if we

don't have the capacity to handle material wealth. Also, people who have won a lottery or gained a fortune find themselves very isolated and lonely because they cannot trust other people to befriend them just for themselves; instead, people want to be close to them to gain some of their wealth. Many who gain wealth have more problems than before, which often changes their character. Money is a test, and some pass, using it for charity and good causes but some do not pass, spending it on harmful and excessive behaviour. Money does not guarantee happiness. We have to possess the spiritual capacity to handle the test.

Moderation

“... In all matters moderation is desirable. If a thing is carried to excess, it will prove a source of evil...” - Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p.69

“Fear ye God, and take heed not to outstrip the bounds of moderation, and be numbered among the extravagant.” - Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p.251

We live in an age of excess, and everything seems to be out of proportion. People don't seem to understand the concept of moderation in this materialistic society. The popular belief is that more is better and bigger is better. Excess causes a lifestyle of consumerism in which people spend money on things that they really don't need while their fellow human beings are dying of starvation. If people spent some of their money on the poor instead of engaging in excessive spending, it would help to lessen the gap between the rich and poor. Materialism feeds our egos and has therefore caused so much harm to our souls. Moderation is in itself a blessing if one can practice it.

Voluntary Sharing

“Man reacheth perfection through good deeds, voluntarily performed, not through good deeds the doing of which was forced upon him. And sharing is a personally chosen righteous act: that is, the rich should extend assistance to the poor, they should expend their substance for the poor, but of their own free will, and not because the poor have gained this end by force. For the harvest of force is turmoil and the ruin of the social order. On the other hand voluntary sharing, the freely-chosen expending of one's substance, leadeth to society's comfort and peace.” - Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 115

The concept of sharing is quite foreign in modern-day societies because there is a sense of entitlement – “I've earned this. I've got it, and it's mine. Why should I share it?” Many systems have been introduced, notably, communism, which promoted equality and sharing.

But it was a sharing by force rather than voluntarily, and it didn't work. But when man reaches a higher level of spirituality, he will realize the pleasure of sharing voluntarily. We are only beginning to see glimpses of this in our society. I believe this will become common in the future as people discover the pleasure and satisfaction in sharing and being generous, rather than hoarding something for only their use.

Equality

“Social inequality is the inevitable outcome of the natural inequality of man. Human beings are different in ability and should, therefore, be different in their social and economic standing. Extremes of wealth and poverty should, however, be abolished.” - Shoghi Effendi, Directives from the Guardian, p.20

“For the community needs financier, farmer, merchant and labourer just as an army must be composed of commander, officers and privates. All cannot be commanders; all cannot be officers or privates. Each in his station in the social fabric must be competent - each in his function according to ability but with justness of opportunity for all.”- Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 216

Equality does not mean that everybody is paid the same amount or that everyone does the same thing (as in communism) because, by creation, we are not equal. Every person is unique with his own talents. But extremes of wealth need to be limited so that everyone is given the opportunity to live a comfortable life. All cannot be engineers in society, and all can not be farmers, all cannot be army personnel, and all cannot be teachers. Everyone has different roles, and everyone is equal in terms of opportunities, not necessarily salaries.

Woman's Equal Rights

“... there must be an equality of rights between men and women. Women shall receive an equal privilege of education. This will enable them to qualify and progress in all degrees of occupation and accomplishment. For the world of humanity possesses two wings: man and woman. If one wing remains incapable and defective, it will restrict the power of the other, and full flight will be impossible. Therefore, the completeness and perfection of the human world is dependent upon the equal development of these two wings.” - Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 318

It is sad to observe that still humanity is flying with one wing, and great talents and human qualities have deprived the world. In many societies in the world, women are not even allowed to work. A section of society does not contribute to the economy, welfare, happiness, or quality of life. A whole society loses out in this scenario. Imagine when man and woman

are equal in rights and are able to work together to create prosperity and happiness in the world.

Benevolence

“ ... In the Teachings of Baha’u’llah benevolence (is enjoined) and this is greater than equality. Equality is attained through force, but benevolence is a voluntary act (or is a matter of choice). Man’s perfection is achieved through good deeds done voluntarily, not by good deeds done through compulsion, and benevolence is a good deed performed voluntarily. That means that the rich should be benevolent towards the poor - that is, give to the poor, but by their own free will and desire - not that the poor should compel the rich to do so. For compulsion breeds discord, and disrupts the order in human affairs. For benevolence, which is voluntary benefaction, engenders peacefulness in the world of humanity, and it brings illumination to the realm of man.” - Abdu’l-Bahá, World Order Magazine, January 1949

In recent years some multi-billionaires have begun donating most of their money to charitable organizations. This is benevolence. This is the sign of the new race of men, defined by man reaching such a spiritual understanding that he finds pleasure and happiness in giving away his earnings rather than hoarding them for himself. This is the stage that mankind has to reach, wherein everyone realizes that money is a tool, not the goal of his life and that he can use this tool to make a difference and to make life easier for others. That realization is a sign of spiritual maturity. Benevolence is not just for the rich; it is a sense of giving that anyone can practice regardless of their material status.

Justice

“We ask God to endow human souls with justice so that they may be fair, and may strive to provide for the comfort of all, that each member of humanity may pass his life in the utmost comfort and welfare. Then this material world will become the very paradise of the Kingdom, this elemental earth will be in a heavenly state and all the servants of God will live in the utmost joy, happiness and gladness.” – Abdu’l-Bahá, Foundation of World Unity, p.43

“Among the results of the manifestation of spiritual forces will be that the human world will adapt itself to a new social form, the Justice of God will become manifest throughout human affairs, and human equality will be universally established.

The essence of the matter is divine justice will become manifest in human conditions and affairs, and all mankind will find comfort and enjoyment in life.” – Abdu’l-Bahá,

The kingdom of God on earth will be realized when injustice has been eradicated. Everyone is at the moment fighting for some kind of justice, either racial, political, economic or sexual, and this is the beginning. It will be a long journey for mankind to understand that justice is essential for all aspects of life.

Agriculture-The Farmer

“... we must begin with the farmer, there will we lay a foundation for system and order because the peasant class and the agriculture class exceed other classes in the importance of their service.” - Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p.39

“The question of economics must commence with the farmer and then be extended to the other classes, inasmuch as the number of farmers is greater than all other classes, many many times greater. Therefore it is fitting that the economic problem be first solved with the farmer, for the farmer is the first active agent in the body politic. In brief, from among the wise men in every village a board should be organized and the affairs of that village should be under the control of that board.” - Abdu'l-Bahá, Extract from a Tablet to an individual believer, October 4, 1912, translation corrected in the World Centre, December 1985; cited in Lights of Guidance, p. 547

The basis of the future economic system will be local and start with the farmer. The role of the farmer is extremely important because the actions of the food industry at the present time are affecting the health and survival of mankind. People are questioning the quality of the food we put in our bodies. The methods of production of vegetables, meat, grains etc., are questionable, to say the least. The greed in this industry and the shortcuts taken in production have been linked to a higher incidence of life-threatening diseases. New research is pointing to the importance of organic food and herbs as a cure for many sicknesses. If the future of medicine is in the prevention of disease through nutrition, then farmers are vital not only for providing us with food but also for giving us health.

Work and Profession

“ ... Every individual, no matter how handicapped and limited he may be, is under the obligation of engaging in some work or profession, for work, specially when performed in the spirit of service, is according to Baha'u'llah a form of worship. It has not only a utilitarian purpose, but has a value in itself, because it draws us nearer to God, and enables us to better grasp His purpose for us in this world. It is obvious, therefore, that the inheritance of wealth cannot make anyone immune from daily work.” - From a letter

written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States and Canada, March 22, 1937; cited in Lights of Guidance, p. 624

“... Whatever the progress of the machinery may be, man will have always to toil in order to earn his living. Effort is an inseparable part of man’s life. It may take different forms with the changing conditions of the world, but it will be always present as a necessary element in our earthly existence. Life is after all a struggle. Progress is attained through struggle, and without such a struggle life ceases to have a meaning; it becomes even extinct. The progress of machinery has not made effort unnecessary. It has given it a new form, a new outlet.” - Shoghi Effendi, Letter written to an individual believer, dated December 26, 1935, Lights of Guidance, p.551

“ ... Share your time with God. Spend half of the day in search of livelihood, guaranteeing your material life and dignified appearance, and dedicate the other half in the acquisition of moral virtues and service at the threshold of God...” - Abdu'l-Bahá, Áhang-i-Badí', volume 31, number 339, p.83. (pilgrim's note)

Everyone can make a contribution to society through their work. It doesn't have to be physical work, but there is no room for idleness. There's a satisfaction in working, especially if you are doing work with a sense of service, and then it becomes our daily worship. And by engaging in work or a profession, we contribute to society's progress and an ever-advancing civilization. Acquiring virtues is the goal and earning a livelihood is the means.

Wages

“... The Master has definitely stated that wages should be unequal, simply because that men are unequal in their ability, and hence should receive wages that would correspond to their varying capacities and resources. This view seems to contradict the opinion of some modern economists. But the friends should have full confidence in the words of the Master, and should give preference to His statements over those voiced by our so-called modern thinkers.” -Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p.551

“The workers could either be granted a wage that adequately meets their daily needs, as well as a right to a share in the revenues of the factory when they are injured, incapacitated, or unable to work, or else a wage could be set that allows the workers to both satisfy their daily needs and save a little for times of weakness and incapacity.” - Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, revised edition (2014), p.317

“Now I want to tell you about the law of God. According to the Divine law, employees should not be paid merely by wages. Nay, rather they should be partners in every work.” - Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'u'llah and New Era, p.160

As we have discussed previously, absolute equality of wages is impossible because every man has different capacities and talents. But everyone has to be paid enough to live a comfortable,

acceptable life from all points of view, so that a workman feels that he has been appreciated for his work. His wages should be enough to cover his expenses, provide for his children's education, and enable him to accumulate some savings. That is fair wages. Also, if workers are paid a portion of the profit of a factory or firm, they will have a sense of ownership, and they will work harder because they understand the benefits. The owners will need to supervise less because they know that the workers are partners in the business and can relax and have peace of mind.

Taxation

“We see you adding every year unto your expenditures and laying the burden thereof on the people whom ye rule; this verily is naught but grievous injustice. Fear the sighs and tears of this Wronged One, and burden not your peoples beyond that which they can endure.” - Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p.40

“Each person in the community whose need is equal to his individual producing capacity shall be exempt from taxation. But if his income is greater than his needs, he must pay a tax until an adjustment is effected. That is to say, man's capacity for production and his needs will be equalized and reconciled through taxation. If his production exceeds, he will pay a tax; if his necessities exceed his production he shall receive an amount sufficient to equalize or adjust. Therefore taxation will be proportionate to capacity and production, and there will be no poor in the community.” - Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.217

Taxation is one of the fundamental principles of any economic system. Abdu'l-Baha has proposed graduated taxes, which means that the more one makes, the more taxes he pays. Taxes have to be fair; they are levied only after someone has paid all of his expenses and has money left over. This method doesn't compromise the quality of life of the individual, and monies collected from the taxes are spent on the poor and underprivileged, reducing the number of those in need in the community.

Huquq'llah (Right of God)

“The minimum amount subject to Huqúqu'lláh is reached when one's possessions are worth the number of Vahid (19); that is, whenever one owneth 19 mithqals of gold, or acquireth possessions attaining this value, after having deducted therefrom the yearly expenses, the Huqúq becometh applicable and its payment is obligatory.”- Bahá'u'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. 1, p.493; *Huququ'llah-The Right of God*, #6

In addition to taxation, Baha'u'llah has devised another means to narrow the gap between the

rich and the poor. The Right of God is given voluntarily when an individual earns more than all his needs. At that point, he gives a voluntary set percentage of his assets. It is important to note that taxes collected, added to money given to charity, and given to the Baha'i fund with money given as the Right of God, can really bridge the gap between the two extremes.

Rate of Interest

“Therefore as a token of favor towards men We have prescribed that interest on money should be treated like other business transactions that are current amongst men. Thus, now that this lucid commandment hath descended from the heaven of the Will of God, it is lawful and proper to charge interest on money, that the people of the world may, in a spirit of amity and fellowship and with joy and gladness, devotedly engage themselves in magnifying the Name of Him Who is the Well-Beloved of all mankind. Verily, He ordaineth according to His Own choosing. He hath now made interest on money lawful, even as He had made it unlawful in the past.” - Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp.133-134

In this quotation, “the past” refers to Islam in which interest was forbidden. It is very difficult to run a banking system without interest. But in many societies, the rate of interest is extremely high, on credit cards and student loans, for example. High interest on a student loan is unfair because students charged with this interest do not have jobs to pay the loan or the interest and need to keep paying it for many years once they enter the workforce. That puts a heavy burden on the individual's economic life, which, in turn, diminishes his quality of life. Baha'u'llah emphasized the concept of a good loan, meaning that the interest rate had to be such that it did not burden the borrower and benefited everyone. The person or firm lending the money gets an adequate amount of interest, and the person borrowing is happy because he can afford to pay it. A good loan is basically a rate of interest that is fair and reasonable, using the principle of moderation.

Economic resources

“... The economic resources of the world will be organised, its sources of raw materials will be tapped and fully utilized, its markets will be coordinated and developed, and the distribution of its products will be equitably regulated.

“... The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war, whether economic or political, will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to the increase of the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the

exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the planet, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race...” - Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 204

The world's economic resources belong to every human being on this planet. It does not matter where the oil fields or the uranium mines are located. Every human being is entitled to them. Once humanity has reached this spiritual understanding, there will be better utilization of resources. They will be distributed in a fair and just way for the betterment of mankind and the advancement of science and technology, rather than making them the means of destruction such as the atom bomb and nuclear weapons.

Economic Barriers

“That a narrow and brutal nationalism, which the postwar theory of self-determination has served to reinforce, has been chiefly responsible for the policy of high and prohibitive tariffs, so injurious to the healthy flow of international trade and to the mechanism of international finance, is a fact which few would venture to dispute.” - Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 35

“A world community in which all economic barriers will have been ... demolished ...” - Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p.41

Every economic barrier created by narrow-minded nationalism is a hindrance to achieving the oneness of mankind. When economic barriers such as tariffs and import-export taxes are removed and the employment of different currencies and weights and measures around the world unified, we will move closer to a world commonwealth, a system for all nations.

Strikes

“You have asked about strikes. Great difficulties have arisen and will continue to arise from this issue. The origin of these difficulties is twofold: One is the excessive greed and rapacity of the factory owners, and the other is the gratuitous demands, the greed, and the intransigence of the workers. One must therefore seek to address both.

Now, the root cause of these difficulties lies in the law of nature that governs present-day civilization, for it results in a handful of people accumulating vast fortunes that far exceed their needs, while the greater number remain naked, destitute, and helpless. This

is at once contrary to justice, to humanity, and to fairness; it is the very height of inequity and runs counter to the good-pleasure of the All-Merciful.

This disparity is confined to the human race: Among other creatures, that is, among the animals, a certain kind of justice and equality prevails. Thus there is equality within a shepherd's flock, or within a herd of deer in the wilderness, or among the songbirds that dwell in the mountains, plains, and orchards. The animals of every species enjoy a measure of equality and do not differ greatly from one another in their means of existence, and thus they live in perfect peace and joy.

It is quite otherwise with the human race, where the greatest oppression and injustice are to be found. Thus you can observe, on the one hand, a single person who has amassed a fortune, made an entire country his personal dominion, acquired immense wealth, and secured an unceasing flow of gains and profits, and, on the other, a hundred thousand helpless souls—weak, powerless, and wanting even a mouthful of bread. There is neither equality here nor benevolence. Observe how, as a result, general peace and happiness have become so wanting, and the welfare of humanity so undermined, that the lives of a vast multitude have been rendered fruitless! For all the wealth, power, commerce, and industry are concentrated in the hands of a few individuals, while all others toil under the burden of endless hardships and difficulties, are bereft of advantages and benefits, and remain deprived of comfort and peace. One must therefore enact such laws and regulations as will moderate the excessive fortunes of the few and meet the basic needs of the myriad millions of the poor, that a degree of moderation may be achieved.

However, absolute equality is just as untenable, for complete equality in wealth, power, commerce, agriculture, and industry would result in chaos and disorder, disrupt livelihoods, provoke universal discontent, and undermine the orderly conduct of the affairs of the community. For unjustified equality is also fraught with peril. It is preferable, then, that some measure of moderation be achieved, and by moderation is meant the enactment of such laws and regulations as would prevent the unwarranted concentration of wealth in the hands of the few and satisfy the essential needs of the many. For instance, the factory owners reap a fortune every day, but the wage the poor workers are paid cannot even meet their daily needs: This is most unfair, and assuredly no just man can accept it. Therefore, laws and regulations should be enacted which would grant the workers both a daily wage and a share in a fourth or fifth of the profits of the factory in accordance with its means, or which would have the workers equitably share in some other way in the profits with the owners. For the capital and the management come from the latter and the toil and labour from the former. The workers could either be granted a wage that adequately meets their daily needs, as well as a right to a share in the revenues of the factory when they are injured, incapacitated, or unable to work, or else a wage could be set that allows the workers to both satisfy their daily needs and save a little for times of weakness and incapacity.

If matters were so arranged, neither would the factory owners amass each day a fortune which is absolutely of no use to them—for should one's fortune increase beyond measure, one would come under a most heavy burden, become subject to exceeding hardships and troubles, and find the administration of such an excessive fortune to be most difficult and to exhaust one's natural powers—nor would the workers endure such

toil and hardship as to become incapacitated and to fall victim, at the end of their lives, to the direst need.

It is therefore clearly established that the appropriation of excessive wealth by a few individuals, notwithstanding the needs of the masses, is unfair and unjust, and that, conversely, absolute equality would also disrupt the existence, welfare, comfort, peace, and orderly life of the human race. Such being the case, the best course is therefore to seek moderation, which is for the wealthy to recognize the advantages of moderation in the acquisition of profits and to show regard for the welfare of the poor and the needy, that is, to fix a daily wage for the workers and also to allot them a share of the total profits of the factory.

In brief, insofar as the mutual rights of the factory owners and the workers are concerned, laws must be enacted that would enable the former to make reasonable profits and the latter to be provided with their present necessities and their future needs, so that if they become incapacitated, grow old, or die and leave behind small children, they or their children will not be overcome by dire poverty but will receive a modest pension from the revenues of the factory itself.

For their part, the workers should not make excessive demands, be recalcitrant, ask for more than they deserve, or go on strike. They should obey and comply and make no demands for exorbitant wages. Rather, the mutual and equitable rights of both parties should be officially fixed and established according to the laws of justice and compassion, and any party that violates them should be condemned after a fair hearing and be subject to a definitive verdict enforced by the executive branch, so that all affairs may be appropriately ordered and all problems adequately resolved.

The intervention of the government and the courts in the problems arising between owners and workers is fully warranted, since these are not such particular matters as are ordinary transactions between two individuals, which do not concern the public and in which the government should have no right to interfere. For problems between owners and workers, though they may appear to be a private matter, are detrimental to the common good, since the commercial, industrial, and agricultural affairs, and even the general business of the nation, are all intimately linked together: An impairment to one is a loss to all. And since the problems between owners and workers are detrimental to the common good, the government and the courts have therefore the right to intervene.

Even in the case of differences that arise between two individuals with regard to particular rights, a third party, namely the government, is needed to resolve the dispute. How, then, can the problem of strikes, which entirely disrupt the country—whether they arise from the inordinate demands of the workers or the excessive greed of the factory owners—remain neglected?

Gracious God! How can one see one's fellow men hungry, destitute, and deprived, and yet live in peace and comfort in one's splendid mansion? How can one see others in the greatest need and yet take delight in one's fortune? That is why it has been decreed in the divine religions that the wealthy should offer up each year a portion of their wealth for the sustenance of the poor and the assistance of the needy. This is one of the

foundations of the religion of God and is an injunction binding upon all. And since in this regard one is not outwardly compelled or obliged by the government, but rather aids the poor at the prompting of one's own heart and in a spirit of joy and radiance, such a deed is most commendable, approved, and pleasing.

This is the meaning of the righteous deeds mentioned in the heavenly Books and Scriptures.” -Abdu'l-Baha. Some Answered Questions, p.315-320

“Today the method of demand is the strike and resort to force, which is manifestly wrong and destructive of human foundations. Rightful privilege and demand must be set forth in laws and regulations.” -Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 238

This topic is explained in such detail by Abdu'l-Baha that any commentary is unnecessary. Besides the economic loss due to strikes, there is a spiritual price that it causes. So much disunity creates so much hatred, so much mistrust. Those bad feelings do far more damage to society than the economic ones.

Science and Technology

“Science cannot create amity and fellowship in human hearts.” -Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 171

“The development and progress of a nation is according to the measure and degree of that nation's scientific attainments. Through this means its greatness is continually increased, and day by day the welfare and prosperity of its people are assured.” -Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 49

“A scientific man is a true index and representative of humanity, for through processes of inductive reasoning and research he is informed of all that appertains to humanity, its status, conditions and happenings. He studies the human body politic, understands social problems and weaves the web and texture of civilization. In fact, science may be likened to a mirror wherein the infinite forms and images of existing things are revealed and reflected. It is the very foundation of all individual and national development. Without this basis of investigation, development is impossible.”-Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p.50

One of the fundamental principles of the Baha'i Faith is the harmony between science and religion. Science is a very important tool for creating unity. How can mankind achieve unity in the world without communication devices such as the internet and the telephone? They have an important role, but they are also not the masters of the situation. They are tools that, used properly, will contribute to the achievement of world unity. But we also need religion. Science cannot prove the existence of religion as yet, but it doesn't mean that it is contrary to religion. As science and technology develop, they can prove religion's benefits rather than

overlook its worth.

The Poor and Needy

“Know ye that the poor are the trust of God in your midst. Watch that ye betray not His trust, that ye deal not unjustly with them and that ye walk not in the ways of the treacherous. Ye will most certainly be called upon to answer for His trust on 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.” -Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 251

“O Son of Man!

Bestow My wealth upon My poor, that in heaven thou mayest draw from stores of unfading splendor and treasures of imperishable glory. But by My life! To offer up thy soul is a more glorious thing couldst thou but see with Mine eye.” - Bahá'u'lláh *The Arabic Hidden Words*, #57

“O Children of Dust!

Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.” - Bahá'u'lláh, *The Persian Hidden Words*, #49

“O people of wealth and riches! If you see a poor man suffering from any calamity, do not run away from him but sit with him and ask him about the things heaped upon him from the seas of determination and predestination.” -Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Baha'i World*, Vol. IV, p. 453

As we become more spiritually aware, we realize that we have a very important responsibility and duty to look after the poor and needy, to make sure that they are cared for and live happily. This is a God-given duty. They have been entrusted to us, and by caring for them, we take a step towards the unity of mankind and a society in which there are no poor.

World Currency

“... a uniform and universal system of currency, of weights and measures, will simplify and facilitate intercourse and understanding among the nations and races of mankind

...” - Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p.203

In order to achieve the oneness of mankind, a uniform and universal currency and means of weights and measures are necessary. Those who have travelled understand the difficulty of going from one country to another, exchanging currencies, and figuring out different weights and measures. Once this uniformity is achieved, travelling to different countries will be like travelling from one city to another in one's own country. So much time and energy will be saved in a world with one currency and one method of weights and measures. In Europe, some countries adopted one currency (Euro), and although it has had its problems, it definitely is a step in the right direction.

World Commonwealth

“From every standpoint the world of humanity is undergoing a reformation ... scientific ideas and theories are developing and advancing to meet a new range of phenomena; invention and discovery are penetrating hitherto unknown fields, revealing new wonders and hidden secrets of the material universe; industries have vastly wider scope and production; everywhere the world of mankind is in the throes of evolutionary activity indicating the passing of the old conditions and advent of the new age of reformation.” - Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.439

“The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System - the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.” - Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 85

“It is the superstructure of that self-same Order, attaining its full stature through the emergence of the Baha'i World Commonwealth - the Kingdom of God on earth - which the Golden Age of that same Dispensation must, in the fullness of time, ultimately witness.” - Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 26

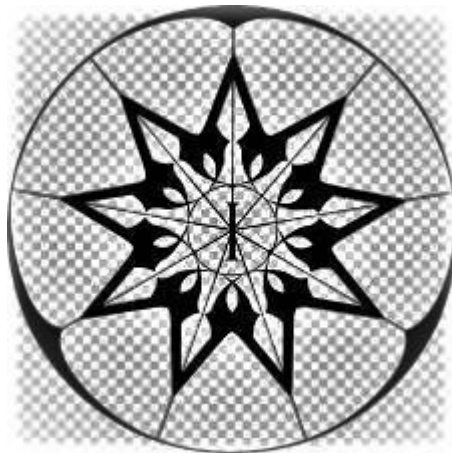
“ ... the precautionary and defensive measures to be devised, coordinated, and carried out to counteract the full force of the inescapable attacks which the organized efforts of ecclesiastical organizations of various denominations will progressively launch and relentlessly pursue; and, last but not least, the multitudinous issues that must be faced, the obstacles that must be overcome, and the responsibilities that must be assumed, to enable a sore-tried Faith to pass through the successive stages of unmitigated obscurity, of active repression, and of complete emancipation, leading in turn to its being acknowledged as an independent Faith, enjoying the status of full equality with its sister religions, to be followed by its establishment and recognition as a State religion, which in turn must give way to its assumption of the rights and prerogatives associated with the Baha'i state, functioning in the plenitude of its powers, a stage which must ultimately culminate in the emergence of the world-wide Baha'i Commonwealth, animated wholly by the spirit, and operating solely in direct conformity with the laws and principles of Baha'u'llah.” - Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 14-15

“This commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system. A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity. A world metropolis will act as the nerve center of a world civilization, the focus towards which the unifying forces of life will converge and from which its energizing influences will radiate.” - Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 203

World unity is the highest aspiration of mankind, and a world commonwealth is a goal for humanity. Once it is established, the whole world will be one country for the first time in human history. We cannot comprehend it, but perhaps the future world can be compared to one country, and the provinces or states of that country will be like the present countries of the world. Every country will keep its own language and culture and, at the same time, be part of the world commonwealth. The world commonwealth will be a government for the whole world, and there will be a universal language for the whole world, one currency, one political system, one education system and one economic system.

Chapter 4

Practical Suggestions for Community Service



As responsible citizens, we often struggle to balance our time among our efforts at spiritual growth, our family life, and our work and render a service to the community. No thanks to technological advancement with so many gadgets that enable us to multi-task more and more, we have been transformed from human beings to human doings. Added to that is also the rampant spread of materialism that is consuming our spiritual growth and draining our energy. How can we have time for one more thing- one more social action, one more commitment? Though providing a service may sound like one more commitment to fit into our already busy lives, service does not necessarily need to become a big project. Any look, gesture, word or action that helps others is an act of service.

To serve humanity is one of the essential duties of the Baha'is. They have been asked to devote their time and energy to providing a service to make the world better for its citizens.

“It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action.... That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth. In another passage He hath proclaimed: It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.” -Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 249.

“. . . all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship, if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity. This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer. A physician ministering to the sick, gently, tenderly, free from prejudice and believing in the solidarity of the human race, he is giving praise.” -'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 176.

The concept of service has been part of all societies throughout human history and has helped it in its path. Serving others is nothing new to the people of all religions:

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” – Christianity, Mark 10:45.

“And do not forget to do good to one another.” –Islám, Qu'rán 2:238.

“That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race.” – Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 250.

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” – Mahatma Gandhi

“Service to humanity is service to God.” -'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 8.

How else can our world become united if, as citizens, we don't try to help each other? How else can the sufferings of the world be reduced? The ordinary people of the world like you and me will ultimately make a difference and make this earth a better and more peaceful place if we take one more extra step to help our fellow human beings.

Serving others has the added benefit of solving one's problems and can give peace and contentment to our souls. It helps us to deal with our problems and tests, which can destroy or undermine our happiness.

“Be not the slave of your moods, but their master. But if you are so angry, so depressed and so sore that your spirit cannot find deliverance and peace even in prayer, then quickly go and give some pleasure to someone lowly or sorrowful, or to a guilty or innocent sufferer! Sacrifice yourself, your talent, your time, your rest to another, to one who has to bear a heavier load than you — and your unhappy mood will dissolve into a blessed, contented submission to God.” -'Abdu'l-Bahá, Star of the West. (This statement is a pilgrim note, it cannot be authenticated.)

Most of us want to do some service but do not know where to start. So perhaps it is a good idea to revisit this concept and, with the help of the list below, look at the possibilities of service open to us. We can serve in countless ways, and you can explore many other ways to serve your fellow human beings. If you approach the opportunity to serve others with a radiant countenance and the pure motivation of kindness and love, you'll find that the gifts you give will come back to you a thousandfold.

Below are some practical suggestions for you to find out if they match your passion and expertise:

- **Doing one's job the best way possible** is not only excellent service but an act of worship. We are blessed to know that doing our job to the best of our abilities is like saying prayers.
- **Offer a kind gesture, a kind word, a kind act.** A smile can sometimes convey more than many words. It does not cost anything, and yet it is a fantastic way of creating a loving atmosphere.
- **Random acts of kindness**, e.g. paying for someone's coffee, paying for someone in front of you in line, giving your place in line for someone in a rush, presenting a stranger with flowers, mowing the neighbour's lawn. Your imagination is the limit.
- **Paying for the education of poor children.** Baha'u'llah has instructed us to educate the children and has stated that it is as if they have educated His children.

- **Paying for medicine.** The cost of medication is increasing, and at the same time, the rate of poverty is rising, which leaves millions of sick people who cannot pay for their medicine. This is an opportunity to help the poor.
- **Visiting senior facilities.** Not many realize how lonely some of the older people are. Some have lost their family members or children, or families neglect to visit them. A short visit makes a significant difference in the quality of their lives.
- **Visiting the sick in hospitals.** Experiencing pain and being confined to a hospital bed often leads to frustration and discouraging thoughts. A visit is a great diversion and helps to uplift their souls and aids in their healing.
- **Volunteering to serve residents in group homes.** Having had the opportunity to work in a group home for people with disabilities, I have learned that it is not just a kind act. Still, it is an acknowledgement of acceptance that helps them integrate into society.
- **Driving people to appointments.** When people are sick, they are overwhelmed by their difficulties and their attempts to look after themselves. They may, therefore, be unable to drive themselves safely. Driving them to appointments keeps them safe and makes them feel cared for, which helps the healing process.
- **Shopping for your neighbours in need.** Every person will go through some problems such as sickness or an accident. Being there in their time of need and helping with some of the chores will make them feel appreciated and loved.
- **Cleaning homes** of people who cannot do it themselves. This reminds me of stories of great souls who did that and cared for the sick.
- **Volunteering in women's centres.** These centres provide help and support to the victims of domestic violence and other issues, and there may be volunteer opportunities to assist in that work.
- **Volunteering for the Red Cross/ Red Crescent.** This organization provides a variety of services, one of which is collecting blood, and for that, they need volunteers to donate blood and also to care for those donating.
- **Volunteering in treatment facilities and similar organizations.** These centres are very specialized, and training may be needed to help out, but there is always a need for caring helpers in this field.
- **Cleaning roads and highways or cleaning garbage in your neighbourhood or on trails.** Many religions and organizations have adopted this activity, but we always need to clean up our environment.

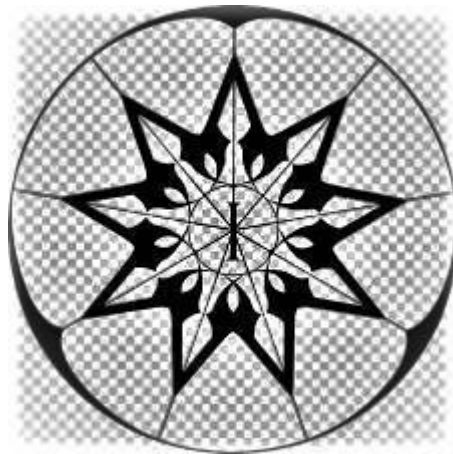
- **Teaching: Dance / Music / Painting / any other forms of the arts.** These activities create a passion in life. To be able to teach these arts is like opening the door to a new life.
- **Coaching sports.** Like teaching art, sport is a passionate endeavour. It is also is a bridge which can bring people together.
- **Picking fruit.** There is a lot of fruit in many places, and people do not have the time or the energy to pick it, so it goes to waste even though there are hungry people. One can feed the poor by picking it and donating it to food banks or other charitable organizations.
- **Calling or visiting those in need or offering companionship to lonely people** Tragedy strikes all of us, and when that happens, a visit or a simple phone call can make the difference for those who are feeling sad. Loneliness can cause depression, and visiting or calling may interrupt this process.
- **Connecting with Baha'is outside of meetings.** Our relationship with Baha'i friends may be limited just to our meetings. Being in touch with Baha'is outside of the meetings, either in their homes or out in the community creates closeness of hearts.
- **Offering services to literacy agencies.** Every town or city has an organization that provides educational services to newcomers to the country and those who require tutoring in reading, writing and computer literacy. They rely heavily on volunteers.
- **Volunteering at homeless shelters and halfway houses.** The number of homeless people is on the rise. Besides providing shelter, there are other needs to be met, and every little contribution helps.
- **Manning school crossings.** By helping in this way, children and their parents will feel safe.
- **Teaching yoga /Tai Chi/ martial arts/ any other exercise classes/coaching sports.** This is another way of helping.
- **Self-help classes.** Dealing with our personal and emotional issues is very important for our spiritual development. Teaching these classes empowers others to have a sense of control in their lives.
- **Teaching product-making classes like soap or candle-making.** In some underdeveloped countries, these skills are the only way people can make a living. In the absence of banks from which to borrow money or government institutions to help, this knowledge provides skills and empowers the poor.
- **Teaching gardening, and farming classes.** Gardening is a therapeutic activity. 'Abdu'l-Bahá loved it. It creates a sense of achievement, and the added benefit can be fresh and organic food that enhances our health.

- **Teaching woodwork classes.** This skill can change lives by empowering people to build and repair.
- **Providing classes** for jewellery making, beadwork, home decoration, food preserving and others. All these enrich people's lives.
- **Providing driving lessons.** Being able to drive encourages independence and self-reliance for many people. For those who cannot afford the cost of driving lessons, this service is a great gift.
- **Providing foreign language lessons.** For immigrants, learning the language of the new country is not a luxury but a necessity.
- **Teaching house repairs, appliance repairs, and car repairs.** Acquiring these skills can help individuals save a considerable amount of money.
- **Teaching computer classes.** Computers are the gateway to knowledge in this age. Many people do not know how to use this miracle of technology, and without it, they can feel quite lost. What a bounty to open up this new world to them!
- **Helping refugees and newcomers by volunteering with the welcome wagon or other like-minded organizations.** When people come to a new country or a new city, they need some orientation. The newcomers much appreciate any help in this regard.
- **Teaching adult education.** Not every adult is educated. It is not easy for adults who were unable to get an education in their childhood. To succeed in getting an education when they are adults, they need help and encouragement.
- **Picking up medicine, providing food, cooking, cutting the grass or doing landscaping for the sick.** These are other ways we can care for those ill or unable to do this work for themselves, which creates an opportunity for providing a service.
- **Translating written materials or interpreting.** Most newcomers in the country will take time to learn the language, and if they are older, it may take them much longer, so they have to rely on people to translate for them.
- **Babysitting.** Babysitting for those who cannot afford to pay for it and yet desperately need a break at times is liberating for those parents so that they have a little time with each other and can charge their batteries for facing the constant challenges of their lives.
- **Doing taxes.** Doing income tax is challenging and confusing for most of us, but it is an almost impossible job for those who are new to it. Many can't afford to pay someone to do it. Doing taxes is one of those gifts that not many can give to others, making it very special.

- **Giving financial advice.** Sound advice on finances can change the direction of one's life. Not many know to manage finances properly. Some people have learned this skill and can impart it to those who badly need it.
- **Offering to counsel those who need it.** It is a blessing to help someone struggling in life with mental, emotional, or physical challenges. It is highly rewarding.
- **Providing medical services.** This, like counselling, is a specialized field, but it does not mean that ordinary people like you and me cannot volunteer to provide first-aid, for example, if we have the training.
- **Providing legal services.** Legal aid is a very affordable service, but some people do not know how to access it. We can be the liaison to connect them.
- **Doing makeup or making the costumes for plays.** This is a unique service with its own rewards.
- **Volunteering in community gardens.** There is always some work in these gardens to help people without land grow their vegetables. Young people are always welcome to offer their manual services.
- **Connecting with volunteer organizations for possibilities.** In every town or city, there are many varieties of organizations that are trying to provide service to people. They rely on volunteers to help them. By connecting and consulting with these organizations and agencies, we can find many opportunities for service in the community that we live in.
- **Volunteering with food programs in schools.** Many schools have a food programme that aims to ensure no student goes to class hungry. They depend on the donations of stores and the services of volunteers to run them.
- **Providing accommodation for the sick and needy.** Most of the sick people in rural areas have to travel to bigger cities to get treatment and naturally have to stay in hotels and motels. Besides being expensive, these accommodations are not welcoming and do not provide an ideal environment for getting healthy. Opening our homes and hearts to help the sick was Abdul'-Baha's way and His wish for us to emulate.
- **Remembering in your prayers** and supporting those who are going through difficult times. Even if we don't have time to offer a service to our communities, we can always rely on the power of prayers that can have more beneficial effects than our physical efforts.

Chapter 5

Workshop on The Baha'i Writings on Economics



Introduction

Undoubtedly, economics is one of the most important and overwhelming questions of our time. Whether at the individual level or the national level, everyone is trying to solve their economic problems. At present, the world's economic situation is in a state of confusion, and mankind is looking for a solution. But there does not seem to be a solution in sight except re-examining the present economic system's fundamental values and standards and replacing them. We must remember that the current economic system is a by-product of the old order, which is dying out. It is dying because of the separation of economic advancement from spiritual advancement and the exclusion of spiritual and human values in formulating economic theories. The present economic system is a system without life and spirit. In 2008 the world's economic system almost collapsed due to greed and a lack of morality in the system. Even though some insiders knew that their actions were wrong, they did not do anything to correct them. Despite economies becoming more interdependent due to technological advancement and information flow, people's hearts are far apart.

We are transitioning from a fundamentally decaying system to a new system, but its outlines have yet to be defined. As Baha'is, we are assured that the World Order of Baha'u'llah will bring with it a new economic system with its foundation in the hearts of people. But until then, we need to increase our understanding and knowledge of the Writings on the subject. We know that there is no "Baha'i economic system" at this time, but there are guidelines within the Writings. In the future, the Universal House of Justice will formulate a Baha'i economic system in consultation with Baha'i economists. In the meantime, we need to examine the present economic system in light of the Baha'i Writings and get involved in our society's economic life. Our participation will set the example for the rest of the world and at the same time, prepare the ground for the time when the World Commonwealth will come into being. The Universal House of Justice reminds us that time has come to pay greater attention to the economic side of our lives and take steps to improve the world's economic prosperity.

“Although Baha'u'llah does not set out in His Revelation a detailed economic system, a constant theme throughout the entire corpus of His teachings is the reorganization of human society. Consideration of this theme inevitably gives rise to questions of economics. Of course, the future order conceived by Baha'u'llah is far beyond anything that can be imagined by the present generation. Nevertheless, its eventual emergence will depend on strenuous effort by His followers to put His teachings into effect today. With this in mind, we hope that the comments below will stimulate thoughtful, ongoing reflection by the friends. The aim is to learn about how to participate in the material affairs of society in a way that is consistent with the divine precepts and how, in practical terms, collective prosperity can be advanced through justice and generosity, collaboration and mutual assistance.”-The Universal House of Justice, March 1, 2017

Great care should be taken while doing so, not getting lost in discussing details and the technicalities of economic systems and focusing on the full picture. The economic field is vast and traditionally a setting for long and argumentative discussions with no definite conclusions. Avoiding this pitfall is essential. It should also be made clear that our aim is not

to discredit the past and present economic thoughts or economists. Instead, we can appreciate their hard work in formulating economic theories that have led to the present system. To the best of their abilities, they have tried to solve the problems of an ever-changing world. Their failure to do so is humanity's failure to recognize man's spiritual needs and destiny. Their solutions to the problems without divine guidance were doomed to fail.

Through this study of the Writings, we will increase our understanding of the importance of the changes that need to happen and to what extent we are the agents of change. We are witnessing the turning point of human history, and standing by is not the solution. Actions based on sound understandings of the Baha'i Writings and whole-hearted commitment to transform our lives' economic side are needed. In that way, we are laying the foundation for the new system that has been promised throughout the ages – the golden age of human history.

Contents

Part one: Deals with the study of the Writings on the nature of economic problems and their solutions. This study should help to create a framework to guide us through the rest of the material

Part two: Emphasizes the spiritual values that are essential to visualize a “Divine Economy.”

Part three: Concentrates on specific economic principles in the Writings.

Part four: Focuses on Bahá’u’lláh’s vision of a World Commonwealth.

PART ONE

‘Abdu’l-Bahá summarizes the state of our world’s affairs and explains the nature of the problems:

“Although the body politic is one family yet because of lack of harmonious relations some members are comfortable and some in direst misery, some members are satisfied and some are hungry, some members are clothed in most costly garments and some members are in need of food and shelter. Why? Because this family lacks the necessary reciprocity and symmetry. This household is not well arranged. This household is not living under a perfect law. All the laws which are legislated do not ensure happiness. They do not provide comfort.” - ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, p. 38; and Star of the West, Vol. XIII, p. 227–228.

Questions:

1. What is the result of a lack of harmonious relations?
2. What does the human family lack?
3. Why is this household not well arranged?
4. Do legislated laws alone ensure happiness?

“Economic plans of reconstruction have been carefully devised, and meticulously executed. And yet crisis has succeeded crisis, and the rapidity with which a perilously unstable world is declining has been correspondingly accelerated. A yawning gulf threatens to involve in one common disaster both the satisfied and dissatisfied nations, democracies and dictatorships, capitalists and wage-earners, Europeans and Asiatics, Jew and Gentile, white and coloured.”-Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p.190.

Questions:

1. What has happened despite carefully devised and meticulously executed economic plans?
2. Who will be involved in one common disaster?
3. What threatens to involve people in one common disaster?
4. Can you think of any economic plan that was devised but failed?
5. Name a few economic crises of our century.
6. Do you think economic problems can only be found in developing countries?
7. Can you name a few economic problems that industrial countries face or have faced?

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains one of the problems that has had great economic consequences on the world’s nations:

“Peace is the pretext, and night and day they are all straining every nerve to pile up more weapons of war, and to pay for this their wretched people must sacrifice most of whatever they are able to earn by their sweat and toil. How many thousands have given up their work in useful industries and are labouring day and night to produce new and deadlier weapons which would spill out the blood of the race more copiously than before.

“Each day they invent a new bomb or explosive and then the governments must abandon their obsolete arms and begin producing the new, since the old weapons cannot hold their own against the new.” -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 61.

Questions:

1. Why do people have to sacrifice most of whatever they can earn?
2. Why have thousands given up their work in useful industries?
3. What happens to old weapons once new ones are devised?

Now let us examine ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s vision of a world without war:

“Observe that if such a happy situation be forthcoming, no government would need continually to pile up the weapons of war, nor feel itself obliged to produce ever new military weapons with which to conquer the human race. A small force for the purposes of internal security, the correction of criminal and disorderly elements and the prevention of local disturbances, would be required -- no more. In this way the entire population would, first of all, be relieved of the crushing burden of expenditure currently imposed for military purposes, and secondly, great numbers of people would cease to devote their time to the continual devising of new weapons of destruction...” -‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 65–66.

Questions:

1. What is the “happy situation” that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to?
2. What is the alternative to the piling up of weapons of war and the continuing production of new military weapons?
3. What changes would the entire population experience?
4. What would be the size of a military force of the future, and what would be its function?
5. How would people spend their time if they were not producing weapons of destruction?
6. Suggest ways of using money saved by reducing military expenditures.

Another problem, that of the survival of the fittest, which originates in human nature, has been man's legacy from the days when he lived a primitive life in the jungles to the present time. Today it is called competition.

“In the world of nature we behold the living organisms in a ceaseless struggle for existence. Everywhere we are confronted by evidences of the physical survival of the fittest. This is the very source of error and misapprehension in the opinions and theories of men who fail to realize that the world of nature is inherently defective in cause and outcome and that the” -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 400. (Talk dated 7 November 1912 in Washington, D.C.)

Questions:

1. How is the law of the survival of the fittest the origin of all difficulties?
2. Is survival of the fittest the cause of economic problems?

The following are ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s directives to overcome this problem:

“This [survival of the fittest] is the very source of error and misapprehension in the opinions and theories of men who fail to realize that the world of nature is inherently defective in cause and outcom...and that the defects therein must be removed by education.” -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 400. (Talk dated 7 November 1912 in Washington, D.C.)

“In nature there is the law of the survival of the fittest. Even if man be not educated, then according to the natural institutes this natural law will demand of man supremacy. The purpose and object of schools, colleges and universities is to educate man and thereby rescue and redeem him from the exigencies and defects of nature and to awaken within him the capability of controlling and appropriating nature’s bounties.” -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 353.

Questions:

1. What remedies have been offered to solve this problem?
2. What is the purpose and object of schools?
3. Does man have the capability of controlling and appropriating nature’s bounties?
4. Do you think that the economic systems of the world work based on survival of the fittest?
5. What is the opposite of survival of the fittest?

What makes the “divine economy” different from all the economic systems of the world is its approach to the source of the economic problems and their solutions. In this way it differentiates itself from all the past and present economic theories and thoughts. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states:

“The fundamentals of the whole economic condition are divine in nature and are associated with the world of the heart and spirit. This is fully explained in the Bahá’í teaching, and without knowledge of its principles no improvement in the economic state can be realized. The Bahá’ís will bring about this improvement and betterment but not through sedition and appeal to physical force—not through warfare, but welfare.” - ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 238–239.

Shoghi Effendi further explains the above statement:

“... By the statement ‘the economic solution is divine in nature’ is meant that religion alone can, in the last resort, bring in man’s nature such a fundamental change as to enable him to adjust the economic relationships of society. It is only in this way that man can control the economic forces that threaten to disrupt the foundations of his existence, and thus assert his mastery over the forces of nature.” -Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 551. (From a letter written of behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 26 December 1935.)

Questions:

1. What is the secret of the whole economic question?
2. How can we control economic forces?
3. Is there any way other than the Bahá’í Teachings to solve the world's economic situation?

“Abdu’l-Bahá ... has said: ‘All economic problems may be solved by the application of the Science of the Love of God.’ That is to say: If the Rule called golden ... were actually applied to the world’s economic problems, which if not solved bid fair to destroy us, and the love of God, the sort of love which makes a home life happy, were used as a scientific measurement to regulate our international and national affairs; to settle all relations between labour and capital, between rich and poor: to regulate all coinage and commerce, can there be any doubt that the results would be far more conducive to human welfare than our present policies have produced?” -Howard Colby Ives: Portals to Freedom, p. 156.

Bahá’u’lláh has explained the Golden Rule:

“O SON OF BEING!

“Ascribe not to any soul that which thou wouldst not have ascribed to thee, and say not that which thou doest not. This is My command unto thee, do thou observe it.” - Bahá’u’lláh: The Hidden Words, Arabic No. 29.

Questions:

1. What is the Golden Rule?
2. Is the Golden Rule applied today?
3. How can the Golden Rule bridge the gap between the rich and the poor?

PART TWO

In this section, we will study Writings that are a foundation for a divine economy.

A key feature of the divine economy that differs fundamentally from current economic theories recognizes the importance of man's spiritual advancement and his material advancement.

“Material civilization has reached an advanced plane, but now there is need of spiritual civilization. Material civilization alone will not satisfy; it cannot meet the conditions and requirements of the present age; its benefits are limited to the world of matter. There is no limitation to the spirit of man, for spirit in itself is progressive and if the divine civilization be established, the spirit of man will advance.” -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 101.

“As heretofore material civilization has been extended, the divine civilization must now be promulgated. Until the two agree, real happiness among mankind will be unknown. By mere intellectual development and power of reason, man cannot attain to his fullest degree—that is to say, by means of intellect alone he cannot accomplish the progress effected by religion.” -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 170.

Questions:

1. What are the limits of material civilization?
2. How will the establishment of a divine civilization affect man?
3. Is spiritual civilization in balance with material civilization in the world today?
4. Has material advancement brought happiness to mankind?

Unlike the popular belief today that material advancement brings happiness, Bahá'u'lláh reminds us:

“O SON OF BEING!

“Busy not thyself with this world, for with fire We test the gold, and with gold We test our servants.” -Bahá'u'lláh: The Hidden Words, Arabic No. 55.

“O SON OF MAN!

“Thou dost wish for gold and I desire thy freedom from it. Thou thinkest thyself rich in its possession, and I recognize thy wealth in thy sanctity therefrom. By My life! This is My knowledge, and that is thy fancy; how can My way accord with thine?” -Ibid. No. 56.

Questions:

1. Why does Bahá'u'lláh want us to be detached from the material world?
2. What is real richness?

“...In all matters moderation is desirable. If a thing is carried to excess, it will prove a source of evil.” -Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 69.

“Fear ye God, and take heed not to outstrip the bounds of moderation, and be numbered among the extravagant.” -Bahá'u'lláh: Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 251.

Questions:

1. In what matters is moderation desirable?
2. Why does moderation have to be observed in all matters?
3. Is moderation a popular idea among people?

The most crucial mistake that the economists have made is their failure to recognize man's high station. Hence, it is not surprising to see man being reduced to one of the factors in production (labour), along with land and capital. Their theories have used a very limited definition of man. He has been depicted most of the time as a selfish and greedy being who has no other goal except to satisfy his own needs (consumer) without regard for the welfare of others. This view is far removed from what God has ordained for man. Bahá'u'lláh explains:

“Lofty is the station of man, were he to hold fast to righteousness and truth and to remain firm and steadfast in the Cause. ... His is the loftiest station, and his influence educateth the world of being.” -Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 220.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá adds:

“If ... the spiritual nature of the soul has been so strengthened that it holds the material side in subjection, then does man approach the Divine; his humanity becomes so glorified that the virtues of the Celestial Assembly are manifested in him; he radiates the Mercy of God, he stimulates the spiritual progress of mankind, for he becomes a lamp to show light on their path.” -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Paris Talks, pp. 97–98.

Questions:

1. How can man attain a great station?
2. Describe the potential of man once his spiritual nature has been strengthened.
3. Is man's true potential recognized in the present economic system?

This is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s guidance to assist man in achieving his true station by balancing his spiritual and material efforts.

“ ... Share your time with God. ... Spend half of the day in search of livelihood, guaranteeing your material life and dignified appearance, and dedicate the other half in the acquisition of moral virtues and service at the threshold of God...” -‘Abdu’l-Bahá:
Printed in the Persian magazine Payameh-Bahá’í, #116 (France).

Questions:

1. What areas should be the focus of our lives?
2. Do you think that we are responsible for earning our livelihood, or is it the role of the government to provide it for us?

Many economic systems have laid great emphasis on equality without recognizing the inherent inequalities in the abilities of man and in emphasizing absolute equality rather than an equality in opportunities.

“Social inequality is the inevitable outcome of the natural inequality of man. Human beings are different in ability and should, therefore, be different in their social and economic standing. Extremes of wealth and poverty should, however, be abolished...” - Shoghi Effendi: Directives of the Guardian, p. 20.

“For the community needs financier, farmer, merchant and labourer just as an army must be composed of commander, officers and privates. All cannot be commanders; all cannot be officers or privates. Each in his station in the social fabric must be competent—each in his function according to ability but with justice of opportunity for all.” -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 216.

Questions:

1. Why are people not equal?
2. In your opinion, should people with lesser abilities have a lower quality of life?
3. Can difference in functions and economic status be used as spiritual criteria?

Although there has been some recognition of the role of women and the contributions they have made to the advancement of our civilization, their real potential has not been recognized nor utilized.

“... there must be an equality of rights between men and women. Women shall receive an equal privilege of education. This will enable them to qualify and progress in all degrees of occupation and accomplishment. For the world of humanity possesses two wings: man and woman. If one wing remains incapable and defective, it will restrict the power of the other, and full flight will be impossible. Therefore, the completeness and perfection of the human world are dependent upon the equal development of these two wings.” -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 318.

Questions:

1. Do women presently have an equal opportunity of education everywhere in the world?
2. Are women prominent in all spheres of human affairs?
3. What do you suggest will improve the role of women in society?

The idea of the equality of men and women has been included in some economic theories, but as we can see in our world today, they have failed to achieve it. The Bahá'í Faith not only stresses the importance of equal opportunities but encourages mankind to go one step further:

“... the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh advocate voluntary sharing, and this is a greater thing than the equalization of wealth. For equalization must be imposed from without, while sharing is a matter of free choice.

“Man reacheth perfection through good deeds, voluntarily performed, not through good deeds the doing of which was forced upon him. And sharing is a personally chosen righteous act: that is, the rich should extend assistance to the poor, they should expend their substance for the poor, but of their own free will, and not because the poor have gained this end by force. For the harvest of force is turmoil and the ruin of the social order. On the other hand voluntary sharing, the freely-chosen expending of one's substance, leadeth to society's comfort and peace. It lighteth up the world; it bestoweth honour upon humankind.” -‘Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 115.

Questions:

1. Why is voluntary sharing greater than equality?
2. How will voluntary sharing change human affairs?
3. Does the present economic system encourage voluntary sharing?

No vision of a divine economy is complete without a foundation of justice.

“We ask God to endow human souls with justice so that they may be fair, and may strive to provide for the comfort of all, that each member of humanity may pass his life in the utmost comfort and welfare. Then this material world will become the very paradise of the Kingdom, this elemental earth will be in a heavenly state and all the servants of God will live in the utmost joy, happiness and gladness.” -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, p. 43; and Star of the West, p. 230.

“Among the results of the manifestation of spiritual forces will be that the human world will adapt itself to a new social form, the justice of God will become manifest throughout human affairs, and human equality will be universally established. ...

“The essence of the matter is that divine justice will become manifest in human conditions and affairs, and all mankind will find comfort and enjoyment in life.” -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 132.

Questions:

1. What are the effects of justice on human souls?
2. How can justice provide comfort for all?

PART THREE

In this section, Writings on some specific economic topics will be presented:

Capitalism

There is a strong belief in the world that capitalism is a solution to all economic problems. However, we know that no system is perfect, whether capitalism or communism if the foundation is not built on divine principles.

“There is nothing in the teachings against some kind of capitalism; its present form, though, would require adjustments to be made.” -Shoghi Effendi, Directives of the Guardian, p. 20.

Questions:

1. Is the present form of capitalism perfect?
2. What adjustments have to be made to capitalism?

Agriculture-The Farmer

“To solve this problem [welfare and well-being] we must begin with the farmer; there will we lay a foundation for system and order because the peasant class and the agricultural class exceed other classes in the importance of their service.” -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, p. 39.

“The question of economics must commence with the farmer and then be extended to the other classes inasmuch as the number of farmers is greater than all the classes, many many times greater. Therefore, it is fitting that the economic problem be first solved with the farmer, for the farmer is the first active agent in the body politic.” -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Lights of Guidance, p. 548. (Extract from a Tablet to an individual believer, 4 October 1912, translation corrected in the World Centre, December 1985)

Questions:

1. Why are the farmer’s services more important than the services of other workers?
2. Why should we start with the farmer?

Work and Profession

“Every individual, no matter how handicapped and limited he may be, is under the obligation of engaging in some work or profession, for work, especially when performed in the spirit of service, is according to Bahá’u’lláh, a form of worship. It has not only a utilitarian purpose, but has a value in itself, because it draws us nearer to God, and enables us to better grasp His purpose for us in this world. It is obvious, therefore, that the inheritance of wealth cannot make anyone immune from daily work.” -Shoghi Effendi: Directives of the Guardian, p. 83. (Letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of USA and Canada, dated 22 March 1937.)

“... Whatever the progress of the machinery may be, man will have always to toil in order to earn his living. Effort is an inseparable part of man’s life. It may take different forms with the changing conditions of the world, but it will be always present as a necessary element in our earthly existence. Life is after all a struggle. Progress is attained through struggle, and without such a struggle life ceases to have a meaning; it becomes even extinct. The progress of machinery has not made effort unnecessary. It has given it a new form, a new outlet.”-Shoghi Effendi: Lights of Guidance, p. 551. (Letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, dated 26 December 1935.)

Questions:

1. What purpose does work serve besides earning a livelihood?
2. Are rich people exempt from working?
3. How can work be a form of worship?
4. How can work bring us closer to God?

Wages

“... The Master has definitely stated that wages should be unequal, simply because that men are unequal in their ability, and hence should receive wages that would correspond to their varying capacities and resources. This view seems to contradict the opinion of some modern economists. But the friends should have full confidence in the words of the Master, and should give preference to His statements over those voiced by our so-called modern thinkers.” -Shoghi Effendi: Lights of Guidance, p. 551. (Letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, dated 26 December 1935.)

“...The workers could either be granted a wage that adequately meets their daily needs, as well as a right to a share in the revenues of the factory when they are injured, incapacitated, or unable to work, or else a wage could be set that allows the workers to both satisfy their daily needs and save a little for times of weakness and incapacity” - ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, p. 317.

“Now I want to tell you about the law of God. According to the Divine law, employees should not be paid merely by wages. Nay, rather they should be partners in every work.” -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Bahá’í World, Vol. IV, p. 454.

Questions:

1. Should wages be equal?
2. Will people earning less be deprived of opportunities?
3. Can workers be partners with their employers?

Taxation

Once work is done and money is earned, then the question of taxation arises.

“We see you increasing every year your expenditures, and laying the burden thereof on your subjects. This, verily, is wholly and grossly unjust. Fear the sighs and tears of this Wronged One, and lay not excessive burdens on your peoples.” -Bahá'u'lláh: Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 253; and The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 12.

“Each person in the community whose need is equal to his individual producing capacity shall be exempt from taxation. But if the income is greater than his needs, he must pay a tax until an adjustment is effected. That is to say, a man's capacity for production and his needs will be equalized and reconciled through taxation. If his production exceeds, he will pay a tax; if his necessities exceed his production, he shall receive an amount sufficient to equalize or adjust. Therefore, taxation will be proportionate to capacity and production, and there will be no poor in the community.” -‘Abdu'l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 217.

Questions:

1. Should people be taxed equally?
2. Can graduated taxes help the poor?
3. Is it possible that some people will not pay tax in a divine economy?

Retirement and Pension

“As to the question of retirement from work for individuals who have reached a certain age, this is a matter on which the International House of Justice will have to legislate as there are no provisions in the Aqdas concerning it.” -Shoghi Effendi: Directives of the Guardian, p. 83; Lights of Guidance, p. 626; and Principles of Bahá’í Administration, p. 12. (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, 22 March 1937.)

“Even though you are 79 years old, that does not seem in your case to be any handicap; and in this Cause, as the Guardian has told us there is work for everyone of some sort, of whatever age he or she may be.” -Shoghi Effendi: Lights of Guidance, p. 626. (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, 23 August 1954. Cited by the Universal House of Justice, 14 December 1970.)

“The workers could either be granted a wage that adequately meets their daily needs, as well as a right to a share in the revenues of the factory when they are injured, incapacitated, or unable to work, or else a wage could be set that allows the workers to both satisfy their daily needs and save a little for times of weakness and incapacity.” - ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, p.317

Questions:

1. How can workers get support when they become feeble or helpless?

Rate of Interest

Presently, governments and economists use interest rates as an important tool to regulate economic activities. However, there are economies in the world that do not agree with the idea of any interest (e.g. some Islamic countries).

“Most of the people are found to be in need of this matter; for if no interest be allowed, affairs (business) will be trammelled and obstructed. ... A person is rarely found who would lend money to anyone upon the principle of ‘Qar-i-hasan’ (literally ‘good loan’, i.e. money advanced without interest and repaid at the pleasure of the borrower). Consequently, out of favour to the servants, We have appointed ‘profit on money’ to be current, among other business transactions which are in force among people. That is ... it is allowable, lawful and pure to charge interest on money ... but this matter must be conducted with moderation and justice. The Pen of Glory has withheld itself from laying down its limits, as a Wisdom from His Presence and as a convenience for His servants. We exhort the friends of God to act with fairness and justice, and in such a way that the mercy of His beloved ones, and their compassion, may be manifested toward each other. ...

“The execution of these matters has been placed in charge of the men of the House of Justice, in order that they may act in accordance with the exigencies of the time and with wisdom.” -Bahá'u'lláh: Quoted by J. E. Esselmont in Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era, The Ethics of Wealth section, pp. 136–137.

Questions:

1. What is a good loan?
2. What is the importance of interest rates?
3. Are you paying any interest? If yes, do you think the rate is fair?

Economic Resources

“The economic resources of the world will be organized, its sources of raw materials will be tapped and fully utilized, its markets will be coordinated and developed, and the distribution of its products will be equitably regulated.

“... The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war, whether economic or political, will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to the increase of the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the planet, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race.” -Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 204.

Questions:

1. How can economic resources be used for the improvement of human life?
2. To whom do the economic resources of the world belong?
3. Can economic resources be used to assist in the prolongation of human life?

Economic Barriers

“That a narrow and brutal nationalism, which the post-war theory of self-determination has served to reinforce, has been chiefly responsible for the policy of high and prohibitive tariffs, so injurious to the healthy flow of international trade and to the mechanism of international finance, is a fact which few would venture to dispute.” –Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 35.

“A world community in which all economic barriers will have been permanently demolished and the interdependence of Capital and Labour definitely recognized; ...” - Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 41.

Questions:

1. Do tariffs harm economic development?
2. Why are tariffs imposed?
3. Can you think of any country that is removing its economic barriers?

World Currency

“... a uniform and universal system of currency, of weights and measures, will simplify and facilitate intercourse and understanding among the nations and races of mankind.”

-Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 203.

Questions:

1. How can a universal system of currency, weights and measurements help mankind?

PART FOUR

In the light of the Writings we have studied, it will now be easier to understand the vision of Bahá'u'lláh's world commonwealth.

“From every standpoint the world of humanity is undergoing a reformation. ... scientific ideas and theories are developing and advancing to meet a new range of phenomena; invention and discovery are penetrating hitherto unknown fields, revealing new wonders and hidden secrets of the material universe; industries have vastly wider scope and production; everywhere the world of mankind is in the throes of evolutionary activity indicating the passing of the old conditions and advent of the new age of reformation.” - ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 439.

“The world’s equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind’s ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.” -Bahá'u'lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, para. 181, p. 85

“It is the superstructure of that self-same Order, attaining its full stature through the emergence of the Bahá’í World Commonwealth—the Kingdom of God on earth—which the Golden Age of that same Dispensation [Bahá’í] must, in the fullness of time, ultimately witness.” -Shoghi Effendi: *God Passes By*, p. 26.

Questions:

1. What re-formation is the world of humanity undergoing?
2. What has upset the world’s equilibrium?
3. How will the new World Order revolutionize mankind?
4. Can you define the Bahá’í World Commonwealth.

We have been assured that the advent of the Bahá'í World Commonwealth is inevitable. However, it is essential that mankind knows the stages of the process that he must pass through to reach that goal. Shoghi Effendi clearly explains:

“ ... the precautionary and defensive measures to be devised, co-ordinated, and carried out to counteract the full force of the inescapable attacks which the organized efforts of ecclesiastical organizations of various denominations will progressively launch and relentlessly pursue; and, last but not least, the multitudinous issues that must be faced, the obstacles that must be overcome, and the responsibilities that must be assumed, to enable a sore-tried Faith to pass through the successive stages of unmitigated obscurity, of active repression, and of complete emancipation, leading in turn to its being acknowledged as an independent Faith, enjoying the status of full equality with its sister religions, to be followed by its establishment and recognition as a State religion, which in turn must give way to its assumption of the rights and prerogatives associated with the Bahá'í state, functioning in the plenitude of its powers, a stage which must ultimately culminate in the emergence of the world-wide Bahá'í Commonwealth, animated wholly by the spirit, and operating solely in direct conformity with the laws and principles of Bahá'u'lláh.” -Shoghi Effendi: *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 14-15.

“This commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system. A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity. A world metropolis will act as the nerve centre of a world civilization, the focus towards which the unifying forces of life will converge and from which its energizing influences will radiate.” -Shoghi Effendi: *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 203.

Questions:

1. What power will animate the Bahá'í World Commonwealth?
2. What will be the responsibility of the members of the World Legislature?
3. What body will have the final verdict in all disputes?
4. What will act as the nerve centre of the world civilization?

“And as the Bahá’í Faith permeates the masses of the peoples of East and West, and its truth is embraced by the majority of the peoples of a number of the Sovereign States of the world, will the Universal House of Justice attain the plenitude of its power, and exercise, as the supreme organ of the Bahá’í Commonwealth, all the rights, the duties, and responsibilities incumbent upon the world’s future super-state.” -Shoghi Effendi: *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 7.

“The Declaration of Trust [and By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States,] ... stands in its final form as a worthy and faithful exposition of the constitutional basis of the Bahá’í communities in every land, foreshadowing the final emergence of the world Bahá’í Commonwealth of the future.” -Shoghi Effendi: *Bahá’í Administration*, pp. 134–135.

“Haifa, Israel, the “... permanent world Administrative Centre of the future Bahá’í Commonwealth, destined never to be separated from, and to function in proximity of, the Spiritual Centre of that Faith [Bahá’í]” -Shoghi Effendi: *God Passes By*, p. 348.

Questions:

1. When will the Universal House of Justice attain the plenitude of its power?
2. What will act as the constitutional basis for the Bahá’í communities of the world?
3. Where will the permanent world Administrative and Spiritual Centre of the Bahá’í Commonwealth be?

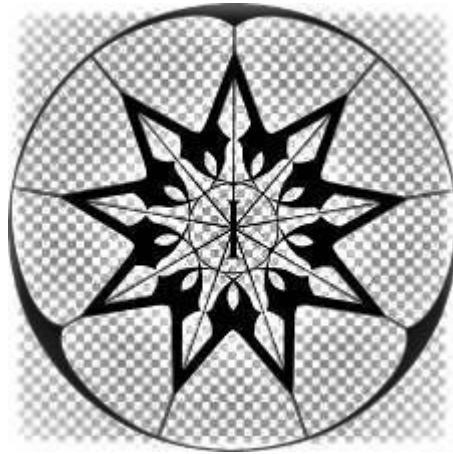
The last question! Who has the bounty of assisting the establishment of Bahá'u'lláh's World Commonwealth? Shoghi Effendi gave us this answer:

“To us, the ‘generation of the half-light’, living at a time which may be designated as the period of the incubation of the World Commonwealth envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, has been assigned a task whose high privilege we can never sufficiently appreciate, and the arduousness of which we can as yet but dimly recognize.” -Shoghi Effendi: *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 168–169.

Chapter 6

Economics of the Future

A compilation from the Bahá'í Writings



Introduction

The collection of writings for this compilation which started in 1979, was intended to be used for my research study on Bahá'í Teachings on Economics". Teachings on this important subject are very scattered in the Bahá'í Writings. I have tried to classify them to the best of my ability, but I find the same very difficult since the guidelines given are very general and putting it under one heading, at times, may not look justified.

The economic question in our time is a burning one, and never a need for solving the world's economic problems was felt as it is felt now. No country belonging to any school of economic thought, whether developing or developed, can deny the fact that its main objective is to solve its economic problems.

There was never such a dire need for a better and deeper understanding of the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith on this subject, as more and more people now are eager to find out what solutions are found in the Bahá'í Writings.

It is hoped that after reading these wonderful writings on this subject, you can analyze the world's current economic situation and appreciate what the Bahá'í Faith has to offer.

I have to thank the beloved Universal House of Justice and their Research Department, whose help, guidance and corrections this compilation would not have existed.

Application of Economic Teachings to Modern Problems

First we have to study the economic teachings in the light of modern problems more thoroughly so that we may advocate what the Founders of the Faith say and not what we conjecture from Their Writings. There is great difference between sounding a great general principle and finding its application to actual prevailing conditions. -Shoghi Effendi: Directives of the Guardian, p. 21.

For legal standards, political and economic theories are solely designed to safeguard the interests of humanity as a whole, and not humanity to be crucified for the preservation of the integrity of any particular law or doctrine. -Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 42.

... the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá do not provide specific and detailed solutions to all such economic questions which mostly pertain to the domain of technical economics, and as such do not concern directly the Cause. True, there are certain guiding principles in Bahá'í Sacred Writings on the subject of economics, but these do by no means cover the whole field of theoretical and applied economics, and are mostly intended to guide further Bahá'í economic writers and technicians to evolve an economic system which would function in full conformity with the spirit and the exact provisions of the Cause on this and similar subjects. The International House of Justice will have, in consultation with economic experts, to assist in the formulation and evolution of the Bahá'í economic system of the future. One thing, however, is certain that the Cause neither accepts the theories of the Capitalistic economics in full, nor can it agree with the Marxists and Communists in their repudiation of the principle of private ownership and of the vital sacred rights of the individual. -Shoghi Effendi: Lights of Guidance, pp. 549–550. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 10 June 1930.)

... the Writings are not so rich on this subject and many issues at present baffling the minds of the world are not even mentioned. The primary consideration is the spirit that has to permeate our economic life and this will gradually crystallize itself into definite institutions and principles that will help to bring about the ideal conditions foretold by Bahá'u'lláh. -Shoghi Effendi: Directives of the Guardian, p. 20; and Lights of Guidance, p. 550. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, 20 December 1931: Bahá'í News, No. 90, March 1935, p. 2.)

Bahá'í World Commonwealth

... inscrutable wisdom designed ultimately to weld the mutually antagonistic elements of human society into a single, organically-united, unshatterable world commonwealth. -Shoghi Effendi: Messages to America, p. 81.

... which [state religion] in turn must give way to its assumption of the rights and prerogatives associated with the Bahá'í state, functioning in the plenitude of its powers, a stage which must ultimately culminate in the emergence of the world-wide Bahá'í Commonwealth, -Shoghi Effendi: The Advent of Divine Justice, p. 12

... the precautionary and defensive measures to be devised, co-ordinated, and carried out to counteract the full force of the inescapable attacks which the organized efforts of ecclesiastical organizations of various denominations will progressively launch and relentlessly pursue; and, last but not least, the multitudinous issues that must be faced, the obstacles that must be overcome, and the responsibilities that must be assumed, to enable a sore-tried Faith to pass through the successive stages of unmitigated obscurity, of active repression, and of complete emancipation, leading in turn to its being acknowledged as an independent Faith, enjoying the status of full equality with its sister religions, to be followed by its establishment and recognition as a State religion, which in turn must give way to its assumption of the rights and prerogatives associated with the Bahá'í state, functioning in the plenitude of its powers, a stage which must ultimately culminate in the emergence of the world-wide Bahá'í Commonwealth, animated wholly by the spirit, and operating solely in direct conformity with the laws and principles of Bahá'u'lláh. -Shoghi Effendi: The Advent of Divine Justice, pp. 14–15.

It is the structure of His New World Order, now stirring in the womb of the administrative institutions He Himself has created, that will serve both as a pattern and a nucleus of that world commonwealth which is the sure, the inevitable destiny of the peoples and nations of the earth. -Shoghi Effendi: The Promised Day is Come, p. 118.

It is the superstructure of that self-same Order, attaining its full stature through the emergence of the Bahá'í World Commonwealth—the Kingdom of God on earth—which the Golden Age of that same Dispensation must, in the fullness of time, ultimately witness. -Shoghi Effendi: God Passes By, p. 26.

For as the authority with which Bahá'u'lláh has invested the future Bahá'í Commonwealth becomes more and more apparent, the fiercer shall be the challenge which from every quarter will be thrown at the verities it enshrines. -Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 18.

And as the Bahá'í Faith permeates the masses of the peoples of East and West, and its truth is embraced by the majority of the peoples of a number of the Sovereign States of the world, will the Universal House of Justice attain the plenitude of its power, and exercise, as the supreme organ of the Bahá'í Commonwealth, all the rights, the duties, and responsibilities incumbent upon

the world's future super-state. -Shoghi Effendi: *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 7

It [the Monument Gardens—the resting place of the Greatest Holy Leaf on Mount Carmel] marks, too, a further milestone in the road leading eventually to the establishment of that permanent world Administrative Centre of the future Bahá'í Commonwealth, destined never to be separated from, and to function in the proximity of, the Spiritual Centre of that Faith, -Shoghi Effendi: *God Passes By*, p. 348.

To us, the “generation of the half-light,” living at a time which may be designated as the period of the incubation of the World Commonwealth envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, has been assigned a task whose high privilege we can never sufficiently appreciate, and the arduousness of which we can as yet but dimly recognize. -Shoghi Effendi: *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 168–69.

... the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is now visibly succeeding in demonstrating its claim and title to be regarded as a World Religion, destined to attain, in the fullness of time, the status of a world-embracing Commonwealth, which would be at once the instrument and the guardian of the Most Great Peace announced by its Author. -Shoghi Effendi: *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 196.

The process of disintegration must inexorably continue, and its corrosive influence must penetrate deeper and deeper into the very core of a crumbling age. Much suffering will still be required ere the contending nations, creeds, classes and races of mankind are fused in the crucible of universal affliction, and are forged by the fires of a fierce ordeal into one organic commonwealth, one vast, unified, and harmoniously functioning system. Adversities unimaginably appalling, undreamed of crises and upheavals, war, famine, and pestilence, might well combine to engrave in the soul of an unheeding generation those truths and principles which it has disdained to recognize and follow. -Shoghi Effendi: *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 193.

... it [The Declaration of Trust and By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States] stands in its final form as a worthy and faithful exposition of the constitutional basis of Bahá'í communities in every land, foreshadowing the final emergence of the world Bahá'í Commonwealth of the future. -Shoghi Effendi: *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 135.

This final and crowning stage [World Bahá'í Commonwealth] in the evolution of the plan wrought by God Himself for humanity will, in turn, prove to be the signal for the birth of a world civilization, incomparable in its range, its character and potency, in the history of mankind -Shoghi Effendi: *Messages to the Bahá'í World*, p. 155.

Bahá'í Economic system

There are practically no technical teachings on economics in the Cause, such as banking, the price system, and others. The Cause is not an economic system, nor its Founders be considered as having been technical economists. The contribution of the Faith to this subject is essentially indirect, as it consists of the application of spiritual principles to our present-day economic system. Bahá'u'lláh has given us a few basic principles which should guide future Bahá'í economists in establishing such institutions which will adjust the economic relationships of the world. -Shoghi Effendi: Directives of the Guardian, p. 20; and Lights of Guidance, p. 551. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 25 January 1936: Bahá'í News, No. 103, October 1936, p. 2)

With regard to your wish for reorganizing your business along Bahá'í lines, Shoghi Effendi deeply appreciates the spirit that has permitted you to make such a suggestion. But he feels nevertheless that the time has not yet come for any believer to bring about such a fundamental change in the economic structure of our society, however restricted may be the field for such an experiment. The economic teachings of the Cause, though well known in their main outline, have not as yet been sufficiently elaborated and systematized to allow anyone to make an exact and thorough application of them even on a restricted scale. -Shoghi Effendi: Directives of the Guardian, pp. 19–20.

The International House of Justice will have, in consultation with economic experts, to assist in the formulation and evolution of the Bahá'í economic system of the future. -Shoghi Effendi: Lights of Guidance, p. 550. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 10 June 1930: Extracts from the Baha'i Writings on the Subject of Agriculture and Related Subjects, A Compilation of the Universal House of Justice)

... the Writings are not so rich on this subject and many issues at present baffling the minds of the world are not even mentioned. The primary consideration is the spirit that has to permeate our economic life, and this will gradually crystallize itself into definite institutions and principles that will help to bring about the ideal condition foretold by Bahá'u'lláh. -Shoghi Effendi: Directives of the Guardian, p. 20; and Lights of Guidance, p. 550. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, 20 December 1931: Bahá'í News, No. 90, March 1935, p. 2.)

... Bahá'u'lláh did not bring a complete system of economics to the world. Profit sharing is recommended as a solution to one form of economic problems. -Shoghi Effendi: Directives of the Guardian, p. 20; and Lights of Guidance, p. 551. (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, 19 November 1945: Bahá'í News, No. 210, August 1948, p. 3.)

As regards the activities of the economic committee of the National Assembly; Shoghi Effendi fully sympathizes with the desire of some of the members to see the Committee find ways and means to put into practice the economic teachings of the Cause, as explained in some of the recorded Writings and Sayings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master. But he believes that the time is not yet ripe for such activities. -Shoghi Effendi: Directives of the Guardian, p. 21.

Divine Economy

Does not the very operation of the world-unifying forces that are at work in this age necessitate that He Who is the Bearer of the Message of God in this day should not only reaffirm that self-same exalted standard of individual conduct inculcated by the Prophets gone before Him, but embody in His appeal, to all governments and peoples, the essentials of that social code, that Divine Economy, which must guide humanity's concerted efforts in establishing that all-embracing federation which is to signalize the advent of the Kingdom of God on this earth? -Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 61.

In like manner are the Bahá'í economic principles the embodiment of the highest aspirations of all wage-earning classes and of economists of various schools. -'Abdu'l-Bahá: Tablet to August Forel, p. 26. Haifa, 21 September 1921.

... By the statement 'the economic solution is divine in nature' is meant that religion alone can, in the last resort, bring in man's nature such a fundamental change as to enable him to adjust the economic relationships of society. It is only in this way that man can control the economic forces that threaten to disrupt the foundations of his existence, and thus assert his mastery over the forces of nature. -Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 551. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 26 December 1935.)

Economic Resources

The economic resources of the world will be organized, its sources of raw materials will be tapped and fully utilized, its markets will be coordinated and developed, and the distribution of its products will be equitably regulated.

... The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war, whether economic or political, will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to the increase of the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the planet, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race.

A world federal system, ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West, liberated from the curse of war and its miseries, and bent on the exploitation of all the available sources of energy on the surface of the planet, a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sustained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation—such is the goal towards which humanity, impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving. -Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 204.

Praise be to God! A wonderful thing is perceived: the lightning and similar forces are subdued by a conductor, and act by His Command. Exalted is the mighty One who hath made manifest that which He desired, through His absolute, invincible command!

O people of Bahá! Each one of the revealed commands is a strong fortress for the protection of the world. Verily this oppressed One only wishes your security and elevation. -Bahá'u'lláh: Bahá'í World Faith, p. 183.

From every standpoint the world of humanity is undergoing a reformation. The laws of former governments and civilizations are in process of revision; scientific ideas and theories are developing and advancing to meet a new range of phenomena; invention and discovery are penetrating hitherto unknown fields, revealing new wonders and hidden secrets of the material universe; industries have vastly wider scope and production; everywhere the world of mankind is in the throes of evolutionary activity indicating the passing of the old conditions and advent of the new age of reformation. - 'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 439. New York, 17 November 1912.

Tariffs and Other Economic Barriers

That a narrow and brutal nationalism, which the post-war theory of self-determination has served to reinforce, has been chiefly responsible for the policy of high and prohibitive tariffs, so injurious to the healthy flow of

international trade and to the mechanism of international finance, is a fact which few would venture to dispute. -Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 35.

A world community in which all economic barriers will have been permanently demolished and the interdependence of Capital and Labour definitely recognized; -Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 41.

Economic Adjustment

The fourth principle or teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the readjustment and equalization of the economic standards of mankind. This deals with the question of human livelihood. It is evident that under present systems and conditions of government the poor are subject to the greatest need and distress while others more fortunate live in luxury and plenty far beyond their actual necessities. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 107. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 7 May 1912.

Through the manifestation of God’s great equity the poor of the world will be rewarded and assisted fully, and there will be a readjustment in the economic conditions of mankind so that in the future there will not be the abnormally rich nor the abject poor. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 132. Jersey City, New Jersey, 19 May 1912.

The readjustment of the economic laws for the livelihood of man must be effected in order that all humanity may live in the greatest happiness according to their respective degrees. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 170. New York, 2 June 1912.

This readjustment of the social economy is of the greatest importance inasmuch as it ensures the stability of the world of humanity; and until it is effected, happiness and prosperity are impossible. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 181–182. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 9 June 1912.

World Currency

... uniform and universal system of currency, of weights and measures, will simplify and facilitate intercourse and understanding among the nations and races of mankind. -Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 203.

Economic Problems

a) The Nature and Causes of Economic Problems

It seems as though all creatures can exist singly and alone. For example, a tree can exist solitary and alone on a given prairie or in a valley or on the mountainside. An animal upon a mountain or a bird soaring in the air might live a solitary life. They are not in need of cooperation or solidarity. Such animated beings enjoy the greatest comfort and happiness in their respective solitary lives.

On the contrary, man cannot live singly and alone. He is in need of continuous cooperation and mutual help. For example, a man living alone in the wilderness will eventually starve. He can never, singly and alone, provide himself with all the necessities of existence. Therefore, he is in need of cooperation and reciprocity. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, p. 38.

Although the body politic is one family yet because of lack of harmonious relations some members are comfortable and some in direst misery, some members are satisfied and some are hungry, some members are clothed in most costly garments and some families are in need of food and shelter. Why? Because this family lacks the necessary reciprocity and symmetry. This household is not well arranged. This household is not living under a perfect law. All the laws which are legislated do not ensure happiness. They do not provide comfort. Therefore a law must be given to this family by means of which all the members of this family will enjoy equal well-being and happiness.

Is it possible for one member of a family to be subjected to the utmost misery and to abject poverty and for the rest of the family to be comfortable? It is impossible unless those members of the family be senseless, atrophied, inhospitable, unkind. Then they would say, “Though these members do belong to our family—let them alone.

Such utter indifference in the human family is due to lack of control, to lack of a working law, to lack of kindness in its midst. If kindness had been shown to the members of this family surely all the members thereof would have enjoyed comfort and happiness. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, pp. 38.

Now the root cause of these difficulties lies in the law of nature that governs present-day civilization, for it results in a handful of people accumulating vast fortunes that far exceed their needs, while the greater number remain naked, destitute, and helpless. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Some Answered Questions*, p. 315.

The body of the human world is sick. Its remedy and healing will be the oneness of the kingdom of humanity. Its life is the Most Great Peace. Its illumination and quickening is love. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 19. New York, 16 April 1912.

Economic plans of reconstruction have been carefully devised, and meticulously executed. And yet crisis has succeeded crisis, and the rapidity with which a perilously unstable world is declining has been correspondingly accelerated. A yawning gulf threatens to involve in one common disaster both the satisfied and dissatisfied nations, democracies and dictatorships, capitalists and wage-earners, Europeans and Asiatics, Jew and Gentile, white and coloured. -Shoghi Effendi: *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 190.

b) The Solution to Economic Problems

The fundamentals of the whole economic condition are divine in nature and are associated with the world of the heart and spirit. This is fully explained in the Bahá’í teaching, and without knowledge of its principles no improvement in the economic state can be realized. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 238. Boston, Massachusetts, 23 July 1912.

The Bahá’í Cause covers all economic and social questions under the heading and ruling of its laws. The essence of the Bahá’í spirit is that, in order to establish a better social order and economic condition, there must be allegiance to the laws and principles of government. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 238. Boston, Massachusetts, 23 July 1912.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá ... has said: “All economic problems may be solved by the application of the Science of the Love of God.” That is to say: if the Rule called golden and treated as if it were leaden (Worse: for lead has its uses but so far as one may determine, the Golden Rule has been laid on a shelf whose dust is seldom disturbed.)—if that Rule were actually applied to the world’s economic problems, which if not solved bid fair to destroy us, and the love of God, the sort of love which makes a home life happy, were used as a scientific measurement to regulate our international and national affairs; to settle all relations between labour and capital, between rich and poor: to regulate all coinage and commerce, can there be any doubt that the results would be far more conducive to human welfare than our present policies have produced? - Howard Colby Ives: *Portals to Freedom*, p. 156.

Role of Governments in Economic Affairs

Subject to their approval a place should be fixed where they would meet. There they should hold fast to the cord of consultation and adopt and enforce that which is conducive to the security, prosperity, wealth and tranquillity of the people. -Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 92–93.

It is incumbent upon the Trustees of the House of Justice to take counsel together regarding those things which have not outwardly been revealed in the Book, and to enforce that which is agreeable to them. -Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 68; and quoted by Shoghi Effendi in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 23.

All the governments of the world must be united and organize an assembly the members of which should be elected from the parliaments and the nobles of the nations. These must plan with utmost wisdom and power so that neither the capitalist suffer from enormous losses nor the labourers become needy. In the utmost moderation they should make the law; then announce to the public that the rights of the working people are to be strongly preserved. Also the rights of the capitalists are to be protected. When such a general plan is adopted by the will of both sides, should a strike occur, all the governments of the world collectively should resist it. Otherwise, the labour problem will lead to much destruction, -‘Abdu'l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, p. 43.

The intervention of the government and the courts in the problems arising between owners and workers is fully warranted, since these are not such particular matters as are ordinary transactions between two individuals, which do not concern the public and in which the government should have no right to interfere. For problems between owners and workers, though they may appear to be a private matter, are detrimental to the common good, since the commercial, industrial, and agricultural affairs, and even the general business of the nation, are all intimately linked together. An impairment to one is a loss to all. And since the problems between owners and workers are detrimental to the common good, the government and the courts have therefore the right to intervene. -‘Abdu'l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, pp. 318-319

A world federal system, ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West, liberated from the curse of war and its miseries, and bent on the exploitation of all the available sources of energy on the surface of the planet, a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sustained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation—such is the goal towards which humanity, impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving. -Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 204.

This commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system. A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity. A world metropolis will act as the nerve centre of a world civilization, the focus towards which the unifying forces of life will converge and from which its energizing influences will radiate. - Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 203.

Man—Not a Mere Factor in Production

Lofty is the station of man, were he to hold fast to righteousness and truth and to remain firm and steadfast in the Cause. In the eyes of the All-Merciful a true man appeareth even as a firmament; its sun and moon are his sight and hearing, and his shining and resplendent character its stars. His is the loftiest station, and his influence educateth the world of being. -Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 220.

Man possesses conscious intelligence and reflection; nature does not. This is an established fundamental among philosophers. Man is endowed with volition and memory; nature has neither. Man can seek out the mysteries latent in nature, whereas nature is not conscious of her own hidden phenomena. Man is progressive; nature is stationary, without the power of progression or retrogression. Man is endowed with ideal virtues—for example, intellection, volition, faith, confession and acknowledgement of God—while nature is devoid of all these. The ideal faculties of man, including the capacity for scientific acquisition, are beyond nature's ken. These are powers whereby man is differentiated and distinguished from all other forms of life. -'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 51. Washington, D.C., 23 April 1912.

Equality

O children of men!

Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest. Such is My counsel to you, O concourse of light! Heed ye this counsel that ye may obtain the fruit of holiness from the tree of wondrous glory. -Bahá'u'lláh: The Hidden Words, Arabic No. 68.

Likewise with regard to the party of 'equality' which seeks the solution of the economic problems: until now all proposed solutions have proved impracticable except the economic proposals in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh which are practicable and cause no distress to society. -'Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 305.

But in the divine teachings equality is brought about through a ready willingness to share. It is commanded as regards wealth that the rich among the people, and the aristocrats should, by their own free will and for the sake of their own happiness, concern themselves with and care for the poor. This equality is the result of the lofty characteristics and noble attributes of mankind. -'Abdu'l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, p. 44.

Now the remedy [inequality of wealth] must be carefully undertaken. It cannot be done by bringing to pass absolute equality between men.

Equality is a chimera! It is entirely impracticable! Even if equality could be achieved it could not continue—and if its existence were possible, the whole order of the world would be destroyed. The law of order must always obtain in the world of humanity. Heaven has so decreed in the creation of man. -'Abdu'l-Bahá: Paris Talks, pp. 151–152.

One must therefore enact such laws and regulations as will moderate the excessive fortunes of the few and meet the basic needs of the myriad millions of the poor, that a degree of moderation may be achieved. However, absolute equality is just as untenable, for complete equality in wealth, power, commerce, agriculture, and industry would result in chaos and disorder, disrupt livelihoods, provoke universal discontent, and undermine the orderly conduct of the affairs of the community. For unjustified equality is also fraught with peril. It is preferable, then, that some measure of moderation be achieved, and by moderation is meant the enactment of such laws and regulations as would prevent the unwarranted concentration of wealth in the hands of the few and satisfy the essential needs of the many. For instance, the factory owners reap a fortune every day, but the wage the poor workers are paid cannot even meet their daily needs. This is most unfair, and assuredly no just man can accept it. -'Abdu'l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, p. 316.

Different Degrees and Capacities of Man

Nevertheless, there will be preservation of degree because in the world of humanity there must needs be degrees. The body politic may well be likened to an army. In this army there must be a general, there must be a sergeant, there must be a marshal, there must be the infantry; but all must enjoy the greatest comfort and welfare. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, p. 41.

The arrangements of the circumstances of the people must be such that poverty shall disappear, that everyone, as far as possible, according to his rank and position, shall share in comfort and well-being.

We see amongst us men who are overburdened with riches on the one hand, and on the other those unfortunate ones who starve with nothing; those who possess several stately palaces, and those who have not where to lay their head. Some we find with numerous courses of costly and dainty food; whilst others can scarce find sufficient crusts to keep them alive. Whilst some are clothed in velvets, furs and fine linen, others have insufficient, poor and thin garments with which to protect them from the cold. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Paris Talks, p. 151.

Some are full of intelligence, others have an ordinary amount of it, and others again are devoid of intellect. In these three classes of men there is order but not equality. How could it be possible that wisdom and stupidity should be equal? Humanity, like a great army, requires a general, captains, under-officers in their degree, and soldiers, each with their own appointed duties. Degrees are absolutely necessary to ensure an orderly organization. An army could not be composed of generals alone, or of captains only, or of nothing but soldiers without one in authority. The certain result of such a plan would be that disorder and demoralization would overtake the whole army. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Paris Talks, p. 152.

The essence of the matter is that divine justice will become manifest in human conditions and affairs, and all mankind will find comfort and enjoyment in life. It is not meant that all will be equal, for inequality in degree and capacity is a property of nature. Necessarily there will be rich people and also those who will be in want of their livelihood, but in the aggregate community there will be equalization and readjustment of values and interests. -Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 132. Jersey City, New Jersey, 19 May 1912.

For the community needs financier, farmer, merchant and labourer just as an army must be composed of commander, officers and privates. All cannot be commanders; all cannot be officers or privates. Each in his station in the

social fabric must be competent—each in his function according to ability but with justness of opportunity for all. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 216. New York, 1 July 1912.

When the laws He has instituted are carried out, there will be no millionaires possible in the community and likewise no extremely poor. This will be effected and regulated by adjusting the different degrees of human capacity. - ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 217. New York, 1 July 1912.

Social inequality is the inevitable outcome of the natural inequality of man. Human beings are different in ability and should, therefore, be different in their social and economic standing. Extremes of wealth and poverty should, however, be abolished -Shoghi Effendi: Directives of the Guardian, p. 20

Professions and Crafts

a) Work and Professions

... Whatever the progress of the machinery may be, man will have always to toil in order to earn his living. Effort is an inseparable part of man’s life. It may take different forms with the changing conditions of the world, but it will be always present as a necessary element in our earthly existence. Life is after all a struggle. Progress is attained through struggle, and without such a struggle life ceases to have a meaning; it becomes even extinct. The progress of machinery has not made effort unnecessary. It has given it a new form, a new outlet. -Shoghi Effendi: Lights of Guidance, p. 551. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, December 26, 1935.)

It is enjoined upon every one of you to engage in some form of occupation, such as crafts, trades and the like. We have graciously exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship unto God, the True One. Ponder ye in your hearts the grace and the blessings of God and render thanks unto Him at eventide and at dawn. Waste not your time in idleness and sloth. Occupy yourselves with that which profiteth yourselves and others. Thus hath it been decreed in this Tablet from whose horizon the day-star of wisdom and utterance shineth resplendent.

The most despised of men in the sight of God are those who sit idly and beg. Hold ye fast unto the cord of material means, placing your whole trust in God, the Provider of all means. When anyone occupieth himself in a craft or trade, such occupation itself is regarded in the estimation of God as an act of worship; and this is naught but a token of His infinite and all-pervasive bounty. -Bahá’u’lláh: Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 26.

With reference to Bahá'u'lláh's command concerning the engagement of the believers in some sort of profession; the teachings are most emphatic on this matter, particularly the statement in the *Aqdas* to this effect which makes it quite clear that idle people who lack the desire to work can have no place in the new World Order. As a corollary of this principle, Bahá'u'lláh further states that mendicity should not only be discouraged but entirely wiped out from the face of society. It is the duty of those who are in charge of the organization of society to give every individual the opportunity of acquiring the necessary talent in some kind of profession, and also the means of utilizing such a talent, both for its own sake and for the sake of earning the means of his livelihood. Every individual, no matter how handicapped and limited he may be, is under the obligation of engaging in some work or profession, for work, especially when performed in the spirit of service, is according to Bahá'u'lláh, a form of worship. It has not only a utilitarian purpose, but has a value in itself, because it draws us nearer to God, and enables us to better grasp His purpose for us in this world. It is obvious, therefore, that the inheritance of wealth cannot make anyone immune from daily work. -Shoghi Effendi: *Directives of the Guardian*, pp. 82-83

O My Servants!

Ye are the trees of My garden; ye must give forth goodly and wondrous fruits, that ye yourselves and others may profit therefrom. Thus it is incumbent on every one to engage in crafts and professions, for therein lies the secret of wealth, O men of understanding! For results depend upon means, and the grace of God shall be all-sufficient unto you. Trees that yield no fruit have been and will ever be for the fire.

O My Servants!

The basest of men are they that yield no fruit on earth. Such men are verily counted as among the dead, nay better are the dead in the sight of God than those idle and worthless souls.

O My Servants!

The best of men are they that earn a livelihood by their calling and spend upon themselves and upon their kindred for the love of God, the Lord of all worlds. -Bahá'u'lláh: *The Hidden Words*, Persian Nos. 80-82.

Having attained the stage of fulfilment and reached his maturity, man standeth in need of wealth, and such wealth as he acquireth through crafts or professions is commendable and praiseworthy in the estimation of men of wisdom, and especially in the eyes of servants who dedicate themselves to the education of the world and to the edification of its peoples. -Bahá'u'lláh: *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 35.

b) Arts and Crafts

The people of Bahá should not deny any soul the reward due to him, should treat craftsmen with deference, and, unlike the people aforesaid, should not defile their tongues with abuse.

In this Day the sun of craftsmanship shineth above the horizon of the occident and the river of arts is flowing out of the sea of that region. One must speak with fairness and appreciate such bounty. -Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 38–39.

The third Tajalli [effulgence] is concerning arts, crafts and sciences. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words. Great indeed is the claim of scientists and craftsmen on the peoples of the world. -Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 51–52.

Agriculture and the Farmer

To solve this problem [economics] we must begin with the farmer; there will we lay a foundation for system and order because the peasant class and the agricultural class exceed other classes in the importance of their service. - 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, p. 39.

The question of economics must commence with the farmer and then be extended to the other classes inasmuch as the number of farmers is greater than all other classes, many many times greater. Therefore, it is fitting that the economic problem be first solved with the farmer, for the farmer is the first active agent in the body politic. In brief, from among the wise men in every village a board should be organized and the affairs of that village should be under the control of that board. - 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Lights of Guidance, p. 548. (Extract from a Tablet to an individual believer, 4 October 1912, translation corrected in the World Centre, December 1985.)

Special regard must be paid to agriculture. Although it hath been mentioned in the fifth place, unquestionably it precedeth the others. -Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 90.

Of course conditions in the East differ where the Countries are rarely industrial and mostly agricultural we should have to apply different laws from the West and that is why the principles of the Movement strike at the root which is common to them both. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has developed in various of His

talks, which you will find in different compilations, the principles upon which the Bahá'í economic system would be based. A system that prevents among others the gradual control of wealth in the hands of a few and the resulting state of both extremes, wealth and poverty. -Shoghi Effendi: Lights of Guidance, p. 549. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 28 October 1927: Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings on the Subject of Agriculture and Related Subjects, A Compilation of the Universal House of Justice.)

As to your fourth question, Shoghi Effendi believes that it is preferable not to confuse the methods explained by the Master with present systems. They may have many resemblances but also many points of difference. Moreover these general statements we have in the teachings have to be explained and applied by the House of Justice before we can really appreciate their significance. - Shoghi Effendi: Lights of Guidance, p. 549. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 21 October 1932: Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings on the Subject of Agriculture and Related Subjects, A Compilation of the Universal House of Justice.)

Capitalist and Capitalism

If it be right for a capitalist to possess a large fortune, it is equally just that his workman should have a sufficient means of existence. -'Abdu'l-Bahá: Paris Talks, p. 153.

... the best course is to seek moderation, which is for the wealthy to recognize the advantages of moderation in the acquisition of profits and to show regard for the welfare of the poor and the needy, that is, to fix a daily wage for the workers and also to allot them a share of the total profits of the factory - 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, p. 318.

There is nothing in the teachings against some kind of capitalism; its present form, though, would require adjustments to be made. -Shoghi Effendi: Directives of the Guardian, p. 20; and Lights of Guidance, p. 551. (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, 19 November 1945: Bahá'í News, No. 210, August 1948, p. 3.)

Workers and Industry

a) Factory—Labourers and Workmen

Laws must be made because it is impossible for the labourers to be satisfied with the present system. They will strike every month and every year. Finally, the capitalists will lose. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, p. 44.

... insofar as the mutual rights of the factory owners and the workers are concerned, laws must be enacted that would enable the former to make reasonable profits and the latter to be provided with their present necessities and their future needs, -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, p. 318.

For their part, the workers should not make excessive demands, be recalcitrant, ask for more than they deserve, or go on strike. They should obey and comply and make no demands for exorbitant wages. Rather, the mutual and equitable rights of both parties should be officially fixed and established - ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, p. 318.

b) Factory—Shares and Profits

... to fix a daily wage for the workers and also to allot them a share of the total profits of the factory. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, p. 318.

Also, every factory that has ten thousand shares will give two thousand shares of these ten thousand to its employees and will write the shares in their names, so that they may have them, and the rest will belong to the capitalists. Then at the end of the month or year whatever they may earn after the expenses and wages are paid, according to the number of shares, should be divided among both. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, p. 43.

Wages

In brief, insofar as the mutual rights of the factory owners and the workers are concerned, laws must be enacted that would enable the former to make reasonable profits and the latter to be provided with their present necessities and their future needs, so that if they become incapacitated, grow old, or die and leave behind small children, they or their children will not be overcome by dire poverty but will receive a modest pension from the revenues of the factory itself. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, p 318.

For instance, the owners of properties, mines and factories should share their incomes with their employees and give a fairly certain percentage of their products to their workingmen in order that the employees may receive, beside their wages, some of the general income of the factory so that the employee may strive with his soul in the work. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, p. 43.

The Master has definitely stated that wages should be unequal, simply because that men are unequal in their ability and hence should receive wages that would correspond to their varying capacities and resources. -Shoghi Effendi: Directives of the Guardian, p. 20; and Lights of Guidance, p. 551. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 26 December 1935.)

This view [refer to previous paragraph] seems to contradict the opinion of some modern economists. But the friends should have full confidence in the words of the Master, and should give preference to His statements over those voiced by our so-called modern thinkers. -Shoghi Effendi: Lights of Guidance, p. 551. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 26 December 1935.)

Representatives of the Wage-earning Classes

... in the industrial world, where the representatives of the wage-earning classes, either through violence or persuasion, are capturing the seats of authority and wielding the sceptre of power: in the field of religion, where we have lately witnessed widespread and organized attempts to broaden and simplify the basis of man's faith, to achieve unity in Christendom and restore the regenerating vigour of Islám; in the heart of society itself, where the ominous signs of increasing extravagance and profligacy are but lending fresh impetus to the forces of revolt and reaction that are growing more distinct every day—in these as in many others we have much cause for alarm, but much to be hopeful and thankful for also. -Shoghi Effendi: Bahá'í Administration, p. 146.

Trade Unions

Regarding your question about trade unions: The Guardian considers that this is a matter for each National Spiritual Assembly to advise the believers on. As long as the trade unions are not members of any particular political party, there does not seem to be any objection to the Bahá'ís belonging to them.-Shoghi Effendi: Lights of Guidance, p. 628. (From the Guardian's secretary in a letter written on his behalf dated 2 February 1951.)

Retirement

As to the question of retirement from work for individuals who have reached a certain age, this is a matter on which the International House of Justice will have to legislate as there are no provisions in the Aqdas concerning it. -Shoghi Effendi: Directives of the Guardian, p. 83; and Lights of Guidance, p. 626. (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, 22 March 1937: Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 12.)

Even though you are 79 years old, that does not seem in your case to be any handicap; and in this Cause, as the Guardian has told us there is work for everyone of some sort, of whatever age he or she may be. -Shoghi Effendi: Lights of Guidance, p. 626. (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, 23 August 1954: cited by the Universal House of Justice, 14 December 1970.)

Pensions

Therefore, laws and regulations should be enacted which would grant the workers both a daily wage and a share in a fourth or fifth of the profits of the factory in accordance with its means, or which would have the workers equitably share in some other way in the profits with the owners. For the capital and the management come from the latter and the toil and labour from the former. The workers could either be granted a wage that adequately meets their daily needs, as well as a right to a share in the revenues of the factory when they are injured, incapacitated, or unable to work, or else a wage could be set that allows the workers to both satisfy their daily needs and save a little for times of weakness and incapacity. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, p. 317

Strikes

You have asked about strikes. Great difficulties have arisen and will continue to arise from this issue. The origin of these difficulties is twofold: One is the excessive greed and rapacity of the factory owners, and the other is the gratuitous demands, the greed, and the intransigence of the workers. One must therefore seek to address both.

Now, the root cause of these difficulties lies in the law of nature that governs present-day civilization, for it results in a handful of people accumulating vast fortunes that far exceed their needs, while the greater number remain naked, destitute, and helpless. This is at once contrary to justice, to humanity, and to fairness; it is the very height of inequity and runs counter to the good-pleasure of the All-Merciful.

This disparity is confined to the human race: Among other creatures, that is, among the animals, a certain kind of justice and equality prevails. Thus there is equality within a shepherd's flock, or within a herd of deer in the wilderness, or among the songbirds that dwell in the mountains, plains, and orchards. The animals of every species enjoy a measure of equality and do not differ greatly from one another in their means of existence, and thus they live in perfect peace and joy.

It is quite otherwise with the human race, where the greatest oppression and injustice are to be found. Thus you can observe, on the one hand, a single person who has amassed a fortune, made an entire country his personal dominion, acquired immense wealth, and secured an unceasing flow of gains and profits, and, on the other, a hundred thousand helpless souls—weak, powerless, and wanting even a mouthful of bread. There is neither equality here nor benevolence. Observe how, as a result, general peace and happiness have become so wanting, and the welfare of humanity so undermined, that the lives of a vast multitude have been rendered fruitless! For all the wealth, power, commerce, and industry are concentrated in the hands of a few individuals, while all others toil under the burden of endless hardships and difficulties, are bereft of advantages and benefits, and remain deprived of comfort and peace. One must therefore enact such laws and regulations as will moderate the excessive fortunes of the few and meet the basic needs of the myriad millions of the poor, that a degree of moderation may be achieved.

However, absolute equality is just as untenable, for complete equality in wealth, power, commerce, agriculture, and industry would result in chaos and disorder, disrupt livelihoods, provoke universal discontent, and undermine the orderly conduct of the affairs of the community. For unjustified equality is also fraught with peril. It is preferable, then, that some measure of moderation be achieved, and by moderation is meant the enactment of such laws and regulations as would prevent the unwarranted concentration of wealth in the hands of the few and satisfy the essential needs of the many. For instance, the factory owners reap a fortune every day, but the wage the poor workers are paid cannot even meet their daily needs: This is most unfair, and assuredly no just man can accept it. Therefore, laws and regulations should be enacted which would grant the workers both a daily wage and a share in a fourth or fifth of the profits of the factory in accordance with its means, or which would have the workers equitably share in some other way in the profits with the owners. For the capital and the management come from the latter and the toil and labour from the former. The workers could either be granted a wage that adequately meets their daily needs, as well as a right to a share in the revenues of the factory when they are injured, incapacitated, or

unable to work, or else a wage could be set that allows the workers to both satisfy their daily needs and save a little for times of weakness and incapacity.

If matters were so arranged, neither would the factory owners amass each day a fortune which is absolutely of no use to them—for should one's fortune increase beyond measure, one would come under a most heavy burden, become subject to exceeding hardships and troubles, and find the administration of such an excessive fortune to be most difficult and to exhaust one's natural powers—nor would the workers endure such toil and hardship as to become incapacitated and to fall victim, at the end of their lives, to the direst need.

It is therefore clearly established that the appropriation of excessive wealth by a few individuals, notwithstanding the needs of the masses, is unfair and unjust, and that, conversely, absolute equality would also disrupt the existence, welfare, comfort, peace, and orderly life of the human race. Such being the case, the best course is therefore to seek moderation, which is for the wealthy to recognize the advantages of moderation in the acquisition of profits and to show regard for the welfare of the poor and the needy, that is, to fix a daily wage for the workers and also to allot them a share of the total profits of the factory.

In brief, insofar as the mutual rights of the factory owners and the workers are concerned, laws must be enacted that would enable the former to make reasonable profits and the latter to be provided with their present necessities and their future needs, so that if they become incapacitated, grow old, or die and leave behind small children, they or their children will not be overcome by dire poverty but will receive a modest pension from the revenues of the factory itself.

For their part, the workers should not make excessive demands, be recalcitrant, ask for more than they deserve, or go on strike. They should obey and comply and make no demands for exorbitant wages. Rather, the mutual and equitable rights of both parties should be officially fixed and established according to the laws of justice and compassion, and any party that violates them should be condemned after a fair hearing and be subject to a definitive verdict enforced by the executive branch, so that all affairs may be appropriately ordered and all problems adequately resolved.

The intervention of the government and the courts in the problems arising between owners and workers is fully warranted, since these are not such particular matters as are ordinary transactions between two individuals, which do not concern the public and in which the government should have no right to interfere. For problems between owners and workers, though they may appear to be a private matter, are detrimental to the common good, since the commercial, industrial, and agricultural affairs, and even the general business of the nation, are all intimately linked together: An impairment to one is a loss to all. And since the problems between owners and workers are

detrimental to the common good, the government and the courts have therefore the right to intervene.

Even in the case of differences that arise between two individuals with regard to particular rights, a third party, namely the government, is needed to resolve the dispute. How, then, can the problem of strikes, which entirely disrupt the country—whether they arise from the inordinate demands of the workers or the excessive greed of the factory owners—remain neglected?

Gracious God! How can one see one's fellow men hungry, destitute, and deprived, and yet live in peace and comfort in one's splendid mansion? How can one see others in the greatest need and yet take delight in one's fortune? That is why it has been decreed in the divine religions that the wealthy should offer up each year a portion of their wealth for the sustenance of the poor and the assistance of the needy. This is one of the foundations of the religion of God and is an injunction binding upon all. And since in this regard one is not outwardly compelled or obliged by the government, but rather aids the poor at the prompting of one's own heart and in a spirit of joy and radiance, such a deed is most commendable, approved, and pleasing.

This is the meaning of the righteous deeds mentioned in the heavenly Books and Scriptures. -'Abdu'l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, pp. 315-320

Today the method of demand is the strike and resort to force, which is manifestly wrong and destructive of human foundations. Rightful privilege and demand must be set forth in laws and regulations. -'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 238. Boston, Massachusetts, 23 July 1912.

Socialization

The question of socialization is very important. It will not be solved by strikes for wages. -'Abdu'l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, p. 43.

Unemployment

That inter-governmental debts have imposed a severe strain on the masses of the people in Europe, have upset the equilibrium of national budgets, have crippled national industries, and led to an increase in the number of the

unemployed, is no less apparent to an unprejudiced observer. -Shoghi Effendi: *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 35.

Industrial Slavery

“Between 1860 and 1865 you did a wonderful thing; you abolished chattel slavery; but today you must do a much more wonderful thing: you must destroy ‘industrial slavery’ ...” -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Star of the West*, Vol. VII, No. 15, p. 147. Quoted by J. E. Esselmont in *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, Industrial Slavery section, p. 137.

Science and technology

Science cannot create amity and fellowship in human hearts. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 171. New York, 8 June 1912.

The development and progress of a nation is according to the measure and degree of that nation’s scientific attainments. Through this means its greatness is continually increased, and day by day the welfare and prosperity of its people are assured. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 49. Washington, D.C., 23 April 1912.

A scientific man is a true index and representative of humanity, for through processes of inductive reasoning and research he is informed of all that appertains to humanity, its status, conditions and happenings. He studies the human body politic, understands social problems and weaves the web and texture of civilization. In fact, science may be likened to a mirror wherein the infinite forms and images of existing things are revealed and reflected. It is the very foundation of all individual and national development. Without this basis of investigation, development is impossible. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 50. Washington, D.C., 23 April 1912.

Use of Technical Knowledge

According to some accounts, mankind has been directed to borrow various good qualities and ways from wild animals, and to learn a lesson from these. Since it is permissible to imitate virtues of dumb animals, it is certainly far more so to borrow material sciences and techniques from foreign peoples, who at least belong to the human race and are distinguished by judgement and the power of speech. And if it be contended that such praiseworthy qualities are inborn in animals, by what proof can they claim that these essential principles of civilization, this knowledge and these sciences current among other peoples, are not inborn? -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 30.

It has now been clearly and irrefutably shown that the importation from foreign countries of the principles and procedures of civilization, and the acquisition from them of sciences and techniques—in brief, of whatsoever will contribute to the general good—is entirely permissible. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Secret of Divine Civilization, pp. 31–32.

Can we maintain that it is contrary to the fundamentals of the Faith to encourage the acquisition of useful arts and of general knowledge, to inform oneself as to the truths of such physical sciences as are beneficial to man, and to widen the scope of industry and increase the products of commerce and multiply the nation’s avenues of wealth? Would it conflict with the worship of God to establish law and order in the cities and organize the rural districts, to repair the roads and build railroads and facilitate transportation and travel and thus increase the people’s well-being? Would it be inconsistent with the Divine commands and prohibitions if we were to work the abandoned mines which are the greatest source of the nation’s wealth, and to build factories, from which come the entire people’s comfort, security and affluence? Or to stimulate the creation of new industries and to promote improvements in our domestic products? -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Secret of Divine Civilization, pp. 101–102.

One should regard the other technological advances, sciences, arts and political formulae of proven usefulness in the same light—i.e., those procedures which, down the ages, have time and again been put to the test and whose many uses and advantages have demonstrably resulted in the glory and greatness of the state, and the well-being and progress of the people. Should all these be abandoned, for no valid reason, and other methods of reform be attempted, by the time such reforms might eventuate, and their advantages might be put to proof, many years would go by, and many lives. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Secret of Divine Civilization, pp. 113–114.

Wastage on Wars

Peace is the pretext, and night and day they are all straining every nerve to pile up more weapons of war, and to pay for this their wretched people must

sacrifice most of whatever they are able to earn by their sweat and toil. How many thousands have given up their work in useful industries and are labouring day and night to produce new and deadlier weapons which would spill out the blood of the race more copiously than before.

Each day they invent a new bomb or explosive and then the governments must abandon their obsolete arms and begin producing the new, since the old weapons cannot hold their own against the new. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Secret of Divine Civilization, pp. 61–62.

Observe that if such a happy situation be forthcoming, no government would need continually to pile up the weapons of war, nor feel itself obliged to produce ever new military weapons with which to conquer the human race. A small force for the purposes of internal security, the correction of criminal and disorderly elements and the prevention of local disturbances, would be required—no more. In this way the entire population would, first of all, be relieved of the crushing burden of expenditure currently imposed for military purposes, and secondly, great numbers of people would cease to devote their time to the continual devising of new weapons of destruction -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Secret of Divine Civilization, pp. 65–66.

It is incumbent upon the ministers of the House of Justice to promote the Lesser Peace so that the people of the earth may be relieved from the burden of exorbitant expenditures. This matter is imperative and absolutely essential, inasmuch as hostilities and conflict lie at the root of affliction and calamity. - Bahá’u’lláh: Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 89.

... fathers, mothers, children in grief and lamentation, the foundations of life overturned, cities laid waste and fertile lands made desolate by the ravages of war. These conditions are the outcome of hostility and hatred between nations and peoples of religion who imitate and adhere to the forms and violate the spirit and reality of the divine teachings. -Abdu’l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 439, New York, 17 November 1912

If two nations were at war in olden times, ten or twenty thousand would be sacrificed, but in this century the destruction of one hundred thousand lives in a day is quite possible. So perfected has the science of killing become and so efficient the means and instruments of its accomplishment that a whole nation can be obliterated in a short time. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 123–124. New York, 13 May 1912.

... the vast and ever-swelling army of the unemployed with its crushing burden and demoralizing influence on governments and peoples; the wicked, unbridled race of armaments swallowing an ever-increasing share of the substance of already impoverished nations; -Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 32.

That the spirit of vindictiveness, of suspicion, of fear and rivalry, engendered by the war, and which the provisions of the Peace Treaties have served to

perpetuate and foster, has led to an enormous increase of national competitive armaments, involving during the last year the aggregate expenditure of no less than a thousand million pounds, which in turn has accentuated the effects of the world-wide depression, is a truth that even the most superficial observer will readily admit. -Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p 35.

The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war, whether economic or political, will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to the increase of the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the planet, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race. -Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 204.

Storehouses and Taxation

a) Village Storehouses

The solution begins with the village, and when the village is reconstructed, then the cities will be also. The idea is this, that in each village will be erected a storehouse. In the language of Religion it is called the House of Finance. That is a universal storehouse, which is commenced in the village. Its administration is through a committee of the wise ones of the community, and with the approval of that committee all the affairs are directed. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Quoted by George Orr Latimer in Light of the World, 1920, p. 47; and The Bahá’í World, Vol. IV, p. 450.

In brief, from among the wise men in every village a board should be organized and the affairs of that village should be under the control of that board. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Lights of Guidance, p. 548. (Extract from a Tablet to an individual believer, 4 October 1912, translation corrected in the World Centre, December 1985.)

Likewise a general storehouse should be founded with the appointment of a secretary. At the time of the harvest, with the approval of the members of that board, a determined percentage of the entire harvest should be appropriated for the storehouse. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Lights of Guidance, p. 548. (Extract from a Tablet to an individual believer, 4 October 1912, translation corrected in the World Centre, December 1985.)

The board of the house of finance (storehouse) will direct in every village the revenues of the house such as tithes, tax on animals, etc. In every village a storehouse and an officer-in-charge are to be provided while the notables of the village gather and form a board and to this board and officer the direction of the affairs of the village are entrusted. They take charge of all the questions pertaining to the village and the revenues of the storehouse such as tithes, tax on animals and other revenues are gathered in it and are given out for necessary expenditures. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Extract from a Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá dated 25 July 1919, to an individual believer, sent by the Universal House of Justice to the compiler.

b) City Storehouses

For larger cities, naturally, there will be a system on a larger scale. Were I to go into that solution the details thereof would be very lengthy. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, p. 41.

c) Storehouse Revenues

The storehouse is to have seven revenues: Tithes, taxes on animals, wealth without inheritors, all things found whose owners cannot be discovered, a third of all treasures (money) found in the earth, a third of the mines, and voluntary contributions. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Lights of Guidance, p. 548. (Extract from a Tablet to an individual believer, dated 4 October, 1912, translation corrected in the World Centre, December 1985)

As to the revenues of the storehouse, the House of justice must strive by every means possible to increase that amount, i.e. by every just means. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Extract from a Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá dated 25 July 1919, to an individual believer, sent by the Universal House of Justice to the compiler.

First, whatever contributions are necessary, they obtain from the bank at interest. For instance, they borrow from the bank at three per cent and loan to the public at four per cent. Any farmer who is in need of implements, they supply and give him all his necessities. When the crop is harvested, it will be the first income (of the store-house). The first revenue is this. But this revenue is not equally distributed. For instance, a person may have a crop of one thousand kilos and this is only sufficient for his wants and living. From him nothing will be taken because he needs it all. If something is taken from him, he will remain hungry. But again, there may be one whose needs require one thousand kilos and his income is two thousand kilos. From him one-tenth is taken. Again, one needs two thousand kilos, but his income is ten thousand kilos. From him two-tenths will be taken. He needs two thousand kilos. If two thousand are taken from him he still has six thousand remaining. One has fifty thousand kilos, from him one-third is taken. One may have ten

thousand kilos expenses, but has one hundred thousand kilos income. One-half is taken. The greater the income, the greater is the ratio (of taxation).

Second: It is also the same with the cattle. They take proportionately the revenue from the cattle. For example, if a man has two cows necessary for his wants, nothing is taken from him. The more he has, the more is taken from him. This is the second revenue.

The third revenue of the store-house comes from one who dies without heirs.

The fourth revenue comes from mines. If a mine is found upon the land of a person, one-third of it belongs to him and the remainder to the store-house.

The fifth revenue is hidden treasure. If a person finds a hidden treasure (in the earth) he takes half of it, and the other half goes to the store-house.

The sixth revenue. If it (treasure) is found on the way, also half of it belongs to the store-house.

The seventh revenue is voluntary contributions. Of their own free will and with the utmost willingness, the people will give. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Quoted by George Orr Latimer in *Light of the World*, 1920. pp. 47–48; and *The Bahá’í World*, Vol. IV, p. 450.

d) Storehouse Expenditures

On the other hand, there are seven expenditures:

- 1. General running expenses of the institution—salaries etc., and the administration of public safety, including the department of hygiene.**
- 2. Tithes to the general government (State).**
- 3. Taxes on animals for the State.**
- 4. Support of an orphanage.**
- 5. Support of cripples and the incurable.**
- 6. Support of educational institutions.**
- 7. Supplying any deficiency for the expenses of the poor.** -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 548–549. (Extract from a Tablet to an individual believer, dated 4 October 1912, translation corrected in the World Centre, December 1985.)

These are the seven revenues, but there are seven fixed expenditures.

The first expenditure: The store-house ought to give one-tenth to the Government, to the public treasury for the public expenses.

The second expenditure is for the poor. The poor who are in need, those who are exempt, not those who are idle. For instance, if a person's crop is burned or he has a loss in his business, and for this reason has become poor; these poor people are to be taken care of.

Third: The infirm, who come to want and cannot work.

Fourth: The orphans. To them also help must be given.

Fifth: The schools. The schools must be organized for the education of the children.

Sixth: For the deaf and blind.

Seventh: Public health. Whatever is necessary for the public health must be arranged. Swamps should be filled up, water should be brought in; whatever is necessary for the public health. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Quoted by George Orr Latimer in *Light of the World*, 1920. pp. 48–49; and *The Bahá’í World*, Vol. IV, pp. 450–451.

e) The National Treasury

If there is something left over (after these expenditures) it should be given to the Great House of Justice. And thus there will be no want in the village. The people will not remain hungry, they will not remain naked. All will be in the utmost welfare and comfort. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Quoted by George Orr Latimer in *Light of the World*, 1920, p. 49.

The farmers will be taken care of and if after all these expenses are defrayed any surplus is found in the storehouse it must be transferred to the national treasury. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 40.

If anything is left in the storehouse, that must be transferred to the general treasury of the nation for general national expenses. -‘Abdu’l-Baha: Letter to an individual dated 4 October 1912, sent by the Universal House of Justice to the compiler

f) Trustees

Certain trustees will be elected by the people in a given village to look after these transactions. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, p. 40.

g) Trusts

No more trusts will remain in the future. The question of the trusts will be wiped away entirely. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, p. 43.

h) Taxation

O kings of the earth! We see you increasing every year your expenditures, and laying the burden thereof on your subjects. This, verily, is wholly and grossly unjust. Fear the sighs and tears of this wronged One, and lay not excessive burdens on your peoples. Do not rob them to rear palaces for yourselves; nay rather choose for them that which ye choose for yourselves. - Bahá’u’lláh: Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 253; and The Proclamation of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 12.

As to the first [revenue], the tenths or tithes: we will consider a farmer, one of the peasants. We will look into his income. We will find out, for instance, what is his annual revenue and also what are his expenditures. Now, if his income be equal to his expenditures, from such a farmer nothing whatever will be taken. That is, he will not be subjected to taxation of any sort, needing as he does all his income. Another farmer may have expenses running up to one thousand dollars we will say, and his income is two thousand dollars. From such an one a tenth will be required, because he has a surplus. But if his income be ten thousand dollars and his expenses one thousand dollars or his income twenty thousand dollars, he will have to pay as taxes, one-fourth. If his income be one hundred thousand dollars and his expenses five thousand, one-third will he have to pay because he has still a surplus since his expenses are five thousand and his income one hundred thousand. If he pays, say, thirty-five thousand dollars, in addition to the expenditure of five thousand he still has sixty thousand left. But if his expenses be ten thousand and his income two hundred thousand then he must give an even half because ninety thousand will be in that case the sum remaining. Such a scale as this will determine allotment of taxes. All the income from such revenues will go to this general storehouse. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, p. 40.

Each person in the community whose need is equal to his individual producing capacity shall be exempt from taxation. But if his income is greater than his needs, he must pay a tax until an adjustment is effected. That is to say, a man’s capacity for production and his needs will be equalized and reconciled through taxation. If his production exceeds, he will pay a tax; if his necessities exceed his production, he shall receive an amount sufficient to

equalize or adjust. Therefore, taxation will be proportionate to capacity and production, and there will be no poor in the community.

Bahá'u'lláh, likewise, commanded the rich to give freely to the poor. In the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* it is further written by Him that those who have a certain amount of income must give one-fifth of it to God, the Creator of heaven and earth. -'Abdu'l-Bahá: *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 217. New York, 1 July 1912.

Rate of Interest

Many people stand in need of this. Because if there were no prospect for gaining interest, the affairs of men would suffer collapse or dislocation. One can seldom find a person who would manifest such consideration towards his fellow-man, his countryman or towards his own brother and would show such tender solicitude for him as to be well-disposed to grant him a loan on benevolent terms. [Such loans as bear no interest and are repayable whenever the borrower pleases]. Therefore as a token of favour towards men We have prescribed that interest on money should be treated like other business transactions that are current amongst men. Thus, ... it is lawful and proper to charge interest on money, that the people of the world may, in a spirit of amity and fellowship and with joy and gladness, devotedly engage themselves in magnifying the Name of Him Who is the Well-Beloved of all mankind. ... He hath now made interest on money lawful, even as He had made it unlawful in the past.

... However, this is a matter that should be practised with moderation and fairness. ...

Nevertheless the conduct of these affairs hath been entrusted to the men of the House of Justice that they may enforce them according to the exigencies of the time and the dictates of wisdom. -Bahá'u'lláh: *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 133–134.

Wealth

Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual's own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes. Above all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would

universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement, for such a benefactor would supply the needs and insure the comfort and well-being of a great multitude. Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy. If, however, a few have inordinate riches while the rest are impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability to its possessor. If, on the other hand, it is expended for the promotion of knowledge, the founding of elementary and other schools, the encouragement of art and industry, the training of orphans and the poor—in brief, if it is dedicated to the welfare of society—its possessor will stand out before God and man as the most excellent of all who live on earth and will be accounted as one of the people of paradise. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Secret of Divine Civilization, pp. 24–25.

a) The Distribution of Wealth

That the financial obligations contracted in the course of the war, as well as the imposition of a staggering burden of reparations upon the vanquished, have, to a very great extent, been responsible for the mal-distribution and consequent shortage of the world’s monetary gold supply, which in turn has, to a very great measure, accentuated the phenomenal fall in prices and thereby relentlessly increased the burdens of impoverished countries, no impartial mind would question. -Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 35.

b) The Limitation of Wealth

Hearts must be so cemented together, love must become so dominant that the rich shall most willingly extend assistance to the poor and take steps to establish these economic adjustments permanently. If it is accomplished in this way, it will be most praiseworthy because then it will be for the sake of God and in the pathway of His service. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 239. Boston, 23 July 1912.

There must be special laws made, dealing with these extremes of riches and of want. The members of the Government should consider the laws of God when they are framing plans for the ruling of the people. The general rights of mankind must be guarded and preserved. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Paris Talks, pp. 153–154.

The rich too must be merciful to the poor, contributing from willing hearts to their needs without being forced or compelled to do so. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 107. Pittsburgh, 7 May 1912.

The greatest means for prevention is that whereby the laws of the community will be so framed and enacted that it will not be possible for a few to be millionaires and many destitute. One of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings is the adjustment of means of livelihood in human society. Under this adjustment there can be no extremes in human conditions as regards wealth and sustenance. -'Abdu'l-Bahá: *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 216. New York, 1 July 1912.

Social inequality is the inevitable outcome of the natural inequality of man. Human beings are different in ability and should, therefore, be different in their social and economic standing. Extremes of wealth and poverty should, however, be abolished -Shoghi Effendi: *Directives of the Guardian*, p. 20; and *Lights of Guidance*, p. 550. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 26 January 1935.)

Moderation

In all matters moderation is desirable. If a thing is carried to excess, it will prove a source of evil. Consider the civilization of the West, how it hath agitated and alarmed the peoples of the world. An infernal engine hath been devised, and hath proved so cruel a weapon of destruction that its like none hath ever witnessed or heard. -Bahá'u'lláh: *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 69.

Fear ye God, and take heed not to outstrip the bounds of moderation, and be numbered among the extravagant. -Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 251.

Welfare

Regarding reciprocity and cooperation: each member of the body politic should live in the utmost comfort and welfare because each individual member of humanity is a member of the body politic and if one member of the members be in distress or be afflicted with some disease all the other members must necessarily suffer. -'Abdu'l-Bahá: *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 38.

The good pleasure of God consists in the welfare of all the individual members of mankind. -'Abdu'l-Bahá: *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 41.

Bahá'u'lláh set forth principles of guidance and teaching for economic readjustment. Regulations were revealed by Him which ensure the welfare of

the commonwealth. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 181. Philadelphia, 9 June 1912.

Human brotherhood and dependence exist because mutual helpfulness and cooperation are the two necessary principles underlying human welfare. - ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 150. New York, 28 May 1912.

The Poor and Needy

Thou must show forth that which will ensure the peace and the well-being of the miserable and the downtrodden. -Bahá’u’lláh: Tablets of Baha’u’llah, p. 84

Know ye that the poor are the trust of God in your midst. Watch that ye betray not His trust, that ye deal not unjustly with them and that ye walk not in the ways of the treacherous. Ye will most certainly be called upon to answer for His trust on 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. -Bahá’u’lláh: Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 251; and The Proclamation of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 9.

All have been enjoined to earn a living, and as for those who are incapable of doing so, it is incumbent on the Deputies of God and on the wealthy to make adequate provision for them. -Bahá’u’lláh: The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, para. 147, p. 72.

O Son of Man!

Should prosperity befall thee, rejoice not, and should abasement come upon thee, grieve not, for both shall pass away and be no more.

O Son of Being!

If poverty overtake thee, be not sad; for in time the Lord of wealth shall visit thee. Fear not abasement, for glory shall one day rest on thee.

O Son of Man!

Bestow My wealth upon My poor, that in heaven thou mayest draw from stores of unfading splendour and treasures of imperishable glory. But by My life! To offer up thy soul is a more glorious thing couldst thou but see with Mine eye. -Baha'u'llah: The Hidden Words, Arabic Nos. 52, 53 and 57.

O Children of Dust!

Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.

O Son of My Handmaid!

Be not troubled in poverty nor confident in riches, for poverty is followed by riches, and riches are followed by poverty. Yet to be poor in all save God is a wondrous gift, belittle not the value thereof, for in the end it will make thee rich in God, and thus thou shalt know the meaning of the utterance, “In truth ye are the poor,” and the holy words, “God is the all-possessing,” shall even as the true morn break forth gloriously resplendent upon the horizon of the lover’s heart, and abide secure on the throne of wealth.

O Ye Rich Ones on Earth!

The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust, and be not intent only on your own ease. -Bahá’u’lláh: The Hidden Words, Persian Nos. 49, 51 and 54.

O people of wealth and riches! If you see a poor man suffering from any calamity, do not run away from him but sit with him and ask him about the things heaped upon him from the seas of determination and predestination. - ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Bahá’í World, Vol. IV, p. 453.

Then the orphans will be looked after, all of whose expenses will be taken care of. The cripples in the village—all their expenses will be looked after. The poor in the village—their necessary expenses will be defrayed. And other members who for valid reasons are incapacitated—the blind, the old, the deaf—their comfort must be looked after. In the village no one will remain in need or in want. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, p. 40.

The rich will enjoy the privilege of this new economic condition as well as the poor, for owing to certain provisions and restrictions they will not be able to accumulate so much as to be burdened by its management, while the poor will be relieved from the stress of want and misery. The rich will enjoy his palace, and the poor will have his comfortable cottage. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 132. New Jersey, 19 May 1912.

What could be better before God than thinking of the poor? For the poor are beloved by our heavenly Father. When Christ came upon the earth, those who believed in Him and followed Him were the poor and lowly, showing that the poor were near to God. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 216. New York, 1 July 1912.

They who are possessed of riches, however, must have the utmost regard for the poor, for great is the honour destined by God for those poor who are steadfast in patience. By My life! There is no honour, except what God may

please to bestow, that can compare to this honour. Great is the blessedness awaiting the poor that endure patiently and conceal their sufferings, and well is it with the rich who bestow their riches on the needy and prefer them before themselves.

Please God, the poor may exert themselves and strive to earn the means of livelihood. This is a duty which, in this most great Revelation, hath been prescribed unto every one, and is accounted in the sight of God as a goodly deed. Whoso observeth this duty, the help of the invisible One shall most certainly aid him. He can enrich, through His grace, whomsoever He pleaseth. He, verily, hath power over all things -Baha'u'llah: Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 202–203.

Regarding your question concerning helping the poor: The Bahá'ís should not go so far as to refrain from extending charity to the needy, if they are able and willing to do so. However, in this, as in many other things, they should exert moderation. The greatest gift that we can give to the poor and the down-trodden is to aid to build up the divine institutions inaugurated in this day by Bahá'u'lláh as these institutions, and this World Order when established, will eliminate the causes of poverty and the injustices which afflict the poor. We should, therefore, do both, support our Bahá'í Fund, and also be kind and generous to the needy. -Shoghi Effendi: Lights of Guidance, pp. 124–125. (From a letter written on his behalf to an individual believer, 11 March 1942.)

Charity and Endowment

This Bahá'í teaching of human fellowship and kindness implies that we must be always ready to extend every assistance and help we can to those who are in distress and suffering. Bahá'í charity is of the very essence of the Teachings, and should therefore be developed in every Bahá'í community. Charitable institutions such as orphanages, free schools and hospitals for the poor, constitute an indispensable part of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*. It is the responsibility of every local Bahá'í community to insure the welfare of its poor and needy members, through whatever means possible.

But, of course, this extension of assistance to the poor, in whatever form, should under no circumstances be allowed to seriously interfere with the major collective interests of the Bahá'í Community, as distinguished from the purely personal interests of its members. The demands of the Cause transcend those of the individual, and should therefore be given precedence. But these two phases of Bahá'í social life, though not of equal importance, are by no means contradictory. Both of them are essential, and should be fostered, but each according to its own degree of importance. It is the responsibility of Bahá'í Assemblies to decide when individual interests should

be subordinated to those affecting the collective welfare of the community. But, as already stated, the interest of the individual should always be safeguarded within certain limits, and provided they do not seriously affect the welfare of the group as a whole. -Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 120–121. (From a letter written on his behalf to an individual believer, 26 June 1936.)

Charity is pleasing and praiseworthy in the sight of God and is regarded as a prince among goodly deeds. Consider ye and call to mind that which the All-Merciful hath revealed in the Qur’án: ‘They prefer them before themselves, though poverty be their own lot. And with such as are preserved from their own covetousness shall it be well.’ Viewed in this light, the blessed utterance above is, in truth, the day-star of utterances. Blessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself. Verily, such a man is reckoned, by virtue of the Will of God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise, with the people of Bahá who dwell in the Crimson Ark. -Bahá’u’lláh: *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 71.

It is not necessary to undertake special journeys to visit the resting-places of the dead. If people of substance and affluence offer the cost of such journeys to the House of Justice, it will be pleasing and acceptable in the presence of God. Happy are they that observe His precepts. -Bahá’u’lláh: *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 27–28.

Everyone, whether man or woman, should hand over to a trusted person a portion of what he or she earneth through trade, agriculture or other occupation, for the training and education of children, to be spent for this purpose with the knowledge of the Trustees of the House of Justice. - Bahá’u’lláh: *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 90.

As it is a blessed day [Naw-Rúz] it should not be neglected or left without results by making it a day limited to the fruits of mere pleasure. During such blessed days institutions should be founded that may be of permanent benefit and value to the people so that in their conversations and in history it may become widely known that such a good work was inaugurated on such a feast day. Therefore, the intelligent must look searchingly into conditions to find out what important affair, what philanthropic institutions are most needed, and what foundations should be laid for the community on that particular day, so that they may be established. ... If the community be in need of spreading sciences and widening the circle of knowledge, on that day they should proceed in that direction, that is to say, direct the thoughts of all the people to that philanthropic cause. If, however, the community is in need of widening the circle of commerce or industry or agriculture, they should inaugurate the means of attaining the desired aim. If the community needs protection, proper support and care of orphans, they should act upon the welfare of the orphans, and so forth. Such undertakings as are beneficial to the poor, the weak and the helpless should be pursued in order that, on that day, through the unity of all and through great meetings, results may be obtained, the glory and blessings of that day may be declared and manifest. - ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *A Blessed Day*, A talk published by Dr. Baher Forghani in *Days to*

Remember, p. 26; part in Lights of Guidance, pp. 303–304; Star of the West, Vol. IX, No. 1, pp. 8–9; and cited in a compilation, prepared by the Office of Social and Economic Development, entitled Social and Economic Development.

Tithes

Bahá'u'lláh states that the Bahá'í law of Zakát [Tithes] follows “what hath been revealed in the Qur'án” (Q and A 107). -Bahá'u'lláh: The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers section, No. 107, p. 140.

Since such issues as the limits for exemption, the categories of income concerned, the frequency of payments, and the scale of rates for the various categories of Zakát are not mentioned in the Qur'án, these matters will have to be set forth in the future by the Universal House of Justice. Shoghi Effendi has indicated that pending such legislation the believers should, according to their means and possibilities, make regular contributions to the Bahá'í Fund. - Baha'u'llah: The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Notes No. 161, p. 235.

Voluntary Sharing—Greater than Equality

To state the matter briefly, the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh advocate voluntary sharing, and this is a greater thing than the equalization of wealth. For equalization must be imposed from without, while sharing is a matter of free choice.

Man reacheth perfection through good deeds, voluntarily performed, not through good deeds the doing of which was forced upon him. And sharing is a personally chosen righteous act: that is, the rich should extend assistance to the poor, they should expend their substance for the poor, but of their own free will, and not because the poor have gained this end by force. For the harvest of force is turmoil and the ruin of the social order. On the other hand voluntary sharing, the freely-chosen expending of one's substance, leadeth to society's comfort and peace. -'Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 115.

And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is voluntary sharing of one's property with others among mankind. This voluntary sharing is greater than equality, and consists in this, that man should not prefer himself to others, but rather should sacrifice his life and property for others. But this should not be introduced by coercion so that it becomes a law and man is compelled to

follow it. Nay, rather, man should voluntarily and of his own choice sacrifice his property and life for others, and spend willingly for the poor, just as is done in Persia among the Bahá'ís. - 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 302.

In the Bolshevistic principles equality is effected through force. The masses who are opposed to the people of rank and to the wealthy class desire to partake of their advantages.

But in the divine teachings equality is brought about through a ready willingness to share. It is commanded as regards wealth that the rich among the people, and the aristocrats should, by their own free will and for the sake of their own happiness, concern themselves with and care for the poor. This equality is the result of the lofty characteristics and noble attributes of mankind. - 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, p. 44.

Divine Civilization

Material civilization has reached an advanced plane, but now there is need of spiritual civilization. Material civilization alone will not satisfy; it cannot meet the conditions and requirements of the present age; its benefits are limited to the world of matter. There is no limitation to the spirit of man, for spirit in itself is progressive, and if the divine civilization be established, the spirit of man will advance. - 'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 101. Cleveland, Ohio, 6 May 1912.

Every developed susceptibility will increase the effectiveness of man. Discoveries of the real will become more and more possible, and the influence of divine guidance will be increasingly recognized. All this is conducive to the divine form of civilization. ... The world shall at last find peace, and the equalities and rights of men shall be established. The capacity of humankind will be tested, and a degree shall be attained where equality is a reality. - 'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 101–102.

As heretofore material civilization has been extended, the divine civilization must now be promulgated. Until the two agree, real happiness among mankind will be unknown. By mere intellectual development and power of reason, man cannot attain to his fullest degree—that is to say, by means of intellect alone he cannot accomplish the progress effected by religion. - 'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 170. New York, 2 June 1912.

While it is true that its people have attained a marvellous material civilization, I hope that spiritual forces may animate this great body and a corresponding

spiritual civilization be established. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 19–20. New York, 16 April 1912.

And among the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh is that although material civilization is one of the means for the progress of the world of mankind, yet until it becomes combined with Divine civilization, the desired result, which is the felicity of mankind, will not be attained. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 303.

Material civilization is like a lamp-glass. Divine civilization is the lamp itself and the glass without the light is dark. Material civilization is like the body. No matter how infinitely graceful, elegant and beautiful it may be, it is dead. Divine civilization is like the spirit, and the body gets its life from the spirit, otherwise it becomes a corpse. It has thus been made evident that the world of mankind is in need of the breaths of the Holy Spirit. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 303.

Detachment

Cast away that which ye possess, and, on the wings of detachment, soar beyond all created things. Thus biddeth you the Lord of creation, the movement of Whose Pen hath revolutionized the soul of mankind. - Bahá’u’lláh: The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, para. 54, p. 39; Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 139; and The Proclamation of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 117.

What advantage is there in the earthly things which men possess? That which shall profit them, they have utterly neglected. -Bahá’u’lláh: The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, para. 40, p. 34; Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 138.

O My Servant!

Free thyself from the fetters of this world, and loose thy soul from the prison of self. Seize thy chance, for it will come to thee no more. -Bahá’u’lláh: The Hidden Words, Persian No. 40.

O Son of Passion!

Cleanse thyself from the defilement of riches and in perfect peace advance into the realm of poverty; that from the well-spring of detachment thou mayest quaff the wine of immortal life. -Bahá’u’lláh: The Hidden Words, Persian No. 55.

Earthly treasures We have not bequeathed, nor have We added such cares as they entail. By God! In earthly riches fear is hidden and peril is concealed.

Consider ye and call to mind that which the All-Merciful hath revealed in the Qur'án: 'Woe betide every slanderer and defamer, him that layeth up riches and counteth them.' (Qur'án 104:1–2)

Fleeting are the riches of the world; all that perisheth and changeth is not, and hath never been, worthy of attention, except to a recognized measure. -

Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 219. (Kitáb-i-'Ahd, the Book of the Covenant)

Justice

O Son of Spirit!

The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbour. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes. -Bahá'u'lláh: The Hidden Words, Arabic No. 2.

They that are just and fair-minded in their judgement occupy a sublime station and hold an exalted rank. The light of piety and uprightness shineth resplendent from these souls. We earnestly hope that the peoples and countries of the world may not be deprived of the splendours of these two luminaries. -Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 37.

The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men. The ocean of divine wisdom surgeth within this exalted word, while the books of the world cannot contain its inner significance. Were mankind to be adorned with this raiment, they would behold the day-star of the utterance, 'On that day God will satisfy everyone out of His abundance, (Qur'án 4:129) shining resplendent above the horizon of the world. Appreciate ye the value of this utterance; it is a noble fruit that the Tree of the Pen of Glory hath yielded. -Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 66–67.

And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are justice and right. Until these are realized on the plane of existence, all things shall be in disorder and remain imperfect. -'Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 304.

We ask God to endow human souls with justice so that they may be fair, and may strive to provide for the comfort of all, that each member of humanity may pass his life in the utmost comfort and welfare. Then this material world

will become the very paradise of the Kingdom, this elemental earth will be in a heavenly state and all the servants of God will live in the utmost joy, happiness and gladness. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, p. 43.

In reality, so far great injustice has befallen the common people. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Foundations of World Unity, pp. 43–44.

The government of the countries should conform to the Divine Law which gives equal justice to all. This is the only way in which the deplorable superfluity of great wealth and miserable, demoralizing, degrading poverty can be abolished. Not until this is done will the Law of God be obeyed. - ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Paris Talks, p. 154.

Among the results of the manifestation of spiritual forces will be that the human world will adapt itself to a new social form, the justice of God will become manifest throughout human affairs, and human equality will be universally established. ...

The essence of the matter is that divine justice will become manifest in human conditions and affairs, and all mankind will find comfort and enjoyment in life. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 132. New Jersey, 19 May 1912.

Inheritance

a. Inheritance falls into the following categories.

1. children	1,080	out of	2,520	shares
2. husband or wife	390	"	2,520	"
3. father	330	"	2,520	"
4. mother	270	"	2,520	"
5. brother	210	"	2,520	"
6. sister	150	"	2,520	"
7. teacher	90	"	2,520	"

...

- c. i. In cases where there is no issue the share of the children reverts to the House of Justice to be expended on orphans and widows and for whatever will profit mankind.**
- ii. If the son of the deceased be dead and leave issue, these will inherit the share of their father. If the daughter of the deceased be dead and leave issue, her share will have to be divided into the seven categories specified in the Most Holy Book.**
- d. Should one leave offspring but either part or all of the other categories of inheritors be non-existent, two thirds of their shares reverts to the offspring and one third to the House of Justice.**
- e. Should none of the specified beneficiaries exist, two thirds of the inheritance reverts to the nephews and nieces of the deceased. If these do not exist, the same share reverts to the aunts and uncles; lacking these, to their sons and daughters. In any case the remaining third reverts to the House of Justice.**
- f. Should one leave none of the aforementioned heirs, the entire inheritance reverts to the House of Justice.**
- g. The residence and the personal clothing of the deceased father pass to the male not to the female offspring. If there be several residences the principal and most important one passes to the male offspring. The remaining residences will together with the other possessions of the deceased have to be divided among the heirs. If there be no male offspring two thirds of the principal residence and the personal clothing of the deceased father will revert to the female issue and one third to the House of Justice. In the case of the deceased mother all her used clothing is to be equally divided amongst her daughters. Her unworn clothing, jewels and property must be divided among her heirs, as well as her used clothing if she leaves no daughter.**
- h. Should the children of the deceased be minors their share should either be entrusted to a reliable person or to a company for purposes of investment, until they attain the age of maturity. A share of the interest accrued should be assigned to the trustee.**
- i. The inheritance should not be divided until after the payment of the Huqúqu'lláh (The Right of God), of any debts contracted by the deceased and of any expenses incurred for a befitting funeral and burial.**
- j. If the brother of the deceased is from the same father he will inherit his full allotted share. If he is from another father he will inherit only two thirds of his share, the remaining one third reverting to the House of Justice. The same law is applicable to the sister of the deceased.**
- k. In case there are full brothers or full sisters, brothers and sisters from the mother's side do not inherit.**

- l. A non-Bahá'í teacher does not inherit. If there should be more than one teacher, the share allotted to the teacher is to be equally divided among them.**
- m. Non-Bahá'í heirs do not inherit.**
- n. Aside from the wife's used clothing and gifts of jewellery or otherwise which have been proven to have been given her by her husband, whatever the husband has purchased for his wife are to be considered as the husband's possessions to be divided among his heirs.**
- o. Any person is at liberty to will his possessions as he sees fit provided he makes provisions for the payment of Huqúqu'lláh and the discharge of his debts.** -Bahá'u'lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Other Sections*, pp. 153–156.

In future, a manufacturer will not be allowed to leave all his property to his own family. A law will be made something like this—that he must leave one-quarter only of his property to his family, and the other three-quarters must go to the factory workers who have created his wealth. -‘Abdu'l-Bahá: *Star of the West*, Vol. VIII:1, p. 11.

Huqúqu'lláh

Note. Readers are advised to read the compilation on *Huququ'llah- The Right of God* by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice for a detailed study of this subject.

Nothing that existeth in the world of being hath ever been or ever will be worthy of mention. However, if a person be graciously favoured to offer a penny-worth—nay even less—in the path of God, this would in His sight be preferable and superior to all the treasures of the earth. It is for this reason that the one true God—exalted be His glory—hath in all His heavenly Scriptures praised those who observe His precepts and bestow their wealth for His sake. Beseech ye God that He may enable everyone to discharge the obligation of Huqúq, inasmuch as the progress and promotion of the Cause of God depend on material means. If His faithful servants could realize how meritorious are benevolent deeds in these days, they would all arise to do that which is meet and seemly. -Bahá'u'lláh: *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I (Huqúqu'lláh), p. 489; *Huququ'llah- The Right of God*, 2007, #4

It is incumbent upon everyone to discharge the obligation of Huqúq. The advantages gained from this deed revert to the persons themselves. However, the acceptance of the offerings dependeth on the spirit of joy, fellowship and contentment that the righteous souls who fulfil this injunction will manifest.

If such is the attitude acceptance is permissible, and not otherwise. -

Bahá'u'lláh: The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I (Huqúqu'lláh), p. 490;
Huququ'llah- The Right of God, #11

Huqúqu'lláh is indeed a great law. It is incumbent upon all to make this offering, because it is the source of grace, abundance, and of all good. It is a bounty which shall remain with every soul in every world of the worlds of God, the All-Possessing, the All-Bountiful. -Bahá'u'lláh: The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I (Huqúqu'lláh), p. 490; Huququ'llah- The Right of God, #13

Fix thy gaze upon the glory of the Cause. Speak forth that which will attract the hearts and the minds. To demand the Huqúq is in no wise permissible. This command was revealed in the Book of God for various necessary matters ordained by God to be dependent upon material means. Therefore, if someone, with utmost pleasure and gladness, nay with insistence, wisheth to partake of this blessing, thou mayest accept. Otherwise, acceptance is not permissible. -Bahá'u'lláh: The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I (Huqúqu'lláh), p. 491; Huququ'llah- The Right of God, #84

Question: In the holy Tablets it hath been revealed that when someone acquireth the equivalent of nineteen mithqáls of gold, he should pay the Right of God on that sum. Might it be explained how much of this nineteen should be paid?

Answer: Nineteen out of one hundred is established by the ordinance of God. Computation should be made on this basis. It may then be ascertained what amount is due on nineteen. -Baha'u'llah: The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, No. 89, pp. 132–133.

The minimum amount subject to Huqúqu'lláh is reached when one's possessions are worth the number of Váhíd (19); that is, whenever one owneth 19 mithqáls of gold, or acquireth possessions attaining this value, after having deducted therefrom the yearly expenses, the Huqúq becometh applicable and its payment is obligatory. -Bahá'u'lláh: The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I (Huqúqu'lláh), p. 493; Huququ'llah- The Right of God, #44

There is a prescribed ruling for the Huqúqu'lláh. After the House of Justice hath come into being, the law thereof will be made manifest, in conformity with the Will of God -Bahá'u'lláh; Huququ'llah- The Right of God, #20

Thine intention to pay a visit to the blessed House is acceptable and well-pleasing in the sight of this Wronged One, provided it is accomplished in a spirit of joy and radiance and would not prove contrary to the dictates of wisdom.

Say: O people, the first duty is to recognize the one true God—magnified be His glory—the second is to show forth constancy in His Cause and, after these, one's duty is to purify one's riches and earthly possessions according to that which is prescribed by God. Therefore it beseemeth thee to meet thine

obligation to the Right of God first, then to direct thy steps toward His blessed House. This hath been brought to thine attention as a sign of favour. - Bahá'u'lláh: The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I (Huqúqu'lláh), p. 499; Huququ'llah- The Right of God, #2

Payments for the Huqúqu'lláh cannot be handed over to every person. These words have been uttered by Him Who is the sovereign Truth. The Huqúqu'lláh should be kept in the custody of trusted individuals and forwarded to His holy court through the Trustees of God. -Bahá'u'lláh: The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I (Huqúqu'lláh), p. 508; Huququ'llah- The Right of God, #88

Thou hast enquired about the Huqúq. From one's annual income, all expenses during the year are deductible, and on what is left 19% is payable to the Huqúq. Thus, a person hath earned £1,000 income out of his business. After deducting his annual expenses of say £600, he would have a surplus of £400 on which Huqúq is payable at the rate of 19%. This would amount to £76 to be offered for charitable purposes to the Huqúq.

The Huqúq is not levied on one's entire possessions each year. A person's wealth may be worth £100,000. How can he be expected to pay Huqúq on this property every year? For instance, whatever income thou hast earned in a particular year, you should deduct from it your expenses during that year. The Huqúq will then be payable on the remainder. Possessions on which Huqúq was paid the previous year will be exempt from further payment. - 'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I (Huqúqu'lláh), pp. 511–512; Huququ'llah- The Right of God, #46

Huqúq is applied on everything one possesseth. However, if a person hath paid the Huqúq on a certain property, and the income from that property is equal to his needs, no Huqúq is payable by that person.

Huqúq is not payable on agricultural tools and equipment, and on animals used in ploughing the land, to the extent that these are necessary. - 'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I (Huqúqu'lláh), p. 512; and Lights of Guidance, p. 308; Huququ'llah- The Right of God, #48

Regarding the Huqúqu'lláh ... this is applied to one's merchandise, property and income. After deducting the necessary expenses, whatever is left as profit, and is an addition to one's capital, such a sum is subject to Huqúq. When one has paid Huqúq once on a particular sum, that sum is no longer subject to Huqúq, unless it should pass from one person to another. One's residence, and the household furnishings are exempt from Huqúq ... Huqúqu'lláh is paid to the Centre of the Cause. -Shoghi Effendi: The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I (Huqúqu'lláh), p.515. (4 April–3 May 1927—translated from the Persian.); Huququ'llah- The Right of God, #51

The Great Financial Depression

The Great Depression, the aftermath of the severest ordeals humanity had ever experienced, the disintegration of the Versailles system, the recrudescence of militarism in its most menacing aspects, the failure of vast experiments and new-born institutions to safeguard the peace and tranquillity of peoples, classes and nations, have bitterly disillusioned humanity and prostrated its spirits. -Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 188.

Competition

In the world of nature we behold the living organisms in a ceaseless struggle for existence. Everywhere we are confronted by evidences of the physical survival of the fittest. This is the very source of error and misapprehension in the opinions and theories of men who fail to realize that the world of nature is inherently defective in cause and outcome and that the defects therein must be removed by education. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 400. Washington, D.C., 7 November 1912.

In nature there is the law of the survival of the fittest. Even if man be not educated, then according to the natural institutes this natural law will demand of man supremacy. The purpose and object of schools, colleges and universities is to educate man and thereby rescue and redeem him from the exigencies and defects of nature and to awaken within him the capability of controlling and appropriating nature's bounties. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 353. Palo Alto, California, 8 October 1912.

Shall he, then, remain its captive, even failing to qualify under the natural law which commands the survival of the fittest? That is to say, shall he continue to live upon the level of the animal kingdom without distinction between them and himself in natural impulses and ferocious instincts? -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 353. Palo Alto, California, 8 October 1912.

The World's Equilibrium

The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System - the

like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed. -Bahá'u'lláh: The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, para. 181, p. 85; Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Chapter LXX, p. 136; and The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 118.

Say: This is the infallible Balance which the Hand of God is holding, in which all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth are weighed, and their fate determined, if ye be of them that believe and recognize this truth. -

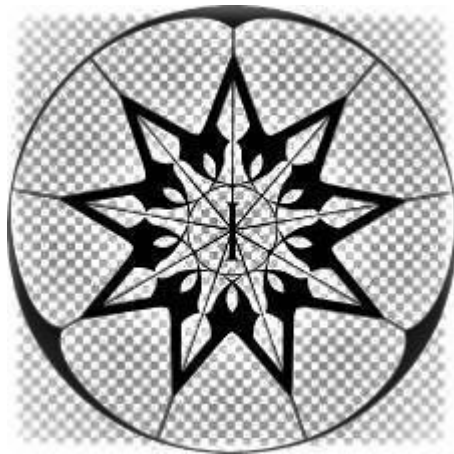
Bahá'u'lláh: The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, para. 183, p. 86; Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 136–137; and The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 119.

Economy is the foundation of human prosperity. The spendthrift is always in trouble. Prodigality on the part of any person is an unpardonable sin. We must never live on others like a parasitic plant. Every person must have a profession, whether it be literary or manual, and must live a clean, manly, honest life, an example of purity to be imitated by others. It is more kingly to be satisfied with a crust of stale bread than to enjoy a sumptuous dinner of many courses, the money for which comes out of the pockets of others. The mind of a contented person is always peaceful and his heart at rest. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Quoted by J. E. Esselmont in Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era, Simple Life section, p. 98.

Chapter 7

Guidelines for Economic Living

*A compilation of the messages from the Universal House of Justice
related to economics*



Introduction

It is such a blessing to be assured the Divine guidance is always there to help humanity find its way to an ever-advancing civilization.

To understand the Universal House of Justice's uniqueness is not an easy task, and trying to explain it is even harder, so who is more qualified than the House of Justice itself.

“The legislation enacted by the Universal House of Justice is different from interpretation. Authoritative interpretation, as uttered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian, is a divinely guided statement of what the Word of God means. The divinely inspired legislation of the Universal House of Justice does not attempt to say what the revealed Word means—it states what must be done in cases where the revealed Text or its authoritative interpretation is not explicit. It is, therefore, on quite a different level from the Sacred Text, and the Universal House of Justice is empowered to abrogate or amend its own legislation whenever it judges the conditions make this desirable. Moreover, the attitude to legislation is different in the Bahá’í Faith. The human tendency in past Dispensations has been to want every question answered and to arrive at a binding decision affecting every small detail of belief or practice. The tendency in the Bahá’í Dispensation, from the time of Bahá’u’lláh Himself, has been to clarify the governing principles, to make binding pronouncements on details which are considered essential, but to leave a wide area to the conscience of the individual. The same tendency appears also in administrative matters. The Guardian used to state that the working of National Spiritual Assemblies should be uniform in essentials but that diversity in secondary matters was not only permissible but desirable. For this reason, a number of points are not expressed in the National Bahá’í Constitution (the Declaration of Trust and By-Laws of National Assemblies); these are left to each National Spiritual Assembly to decide for itself.” -

The Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1982

How fortunate we are to live in an era in which not only do we have the Holy Writings revealed by the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh, Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi to guide us, but also the continuous flow of guidance from the Universal House of Justice to help us with all areas of our lives that includes our economic life. I have tried my best to select the Writings from the messages that directly or indirectly are related (in my mind) to the topic of economics. It was not an easy task to accomplish. I hope this compilation helps the readers who are interested in the subject of economics.

What a bounty it is to have all the guidance we need to face whatever challenges life brings us in this amazing time.

Baha'i Economic System

“Although Bahá’u’lláh does not set out in His Revelation a detailed economic system, a constant theme throughout the entire corpus of His teachings is the reorganization of human society. Consideration of this theme inevitably gives rise to questions of economics. Of course, the future order conceived by Bahá’u’lláh is far beyond anything that can be imagined by the present generation. Nevertheless, its eventual emergence will depend on strenuous effort by His followers to put His teachings into effect today. With this in mind, we hope that the comments below will stimulate thoughtful, ongoing reflection by the friends. The aim is to learn about how to participate in the material affairs of society in a way that is consistent with the divine precepts and how, in practical terms, collective prosperity can be advanced through justice and generosity, collaboration and mutual assistance.”- *The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017*

“As one studies these words, one begins to understand the processes at work in the gradual unfoldment and establishment of the Bahá’í System.

Clearly the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth is a “political” enterprise, and the Teachings of the Faith are filled with “political” principles—using the word in the sense of the science of government and of the organization of human society. At the same time the Bahá’í world community repeatedly and emphatically denies being a “political” organization, and Bahá’ís are required, on pain of deprivation of their administrative rights, to refrain from becoming involved in “political” matters and from taking sides in “political” disputes. In other words, the Bahá’ís are following a completely different path from that usually followed by those who wish to reform society. They eschew political methods towards the achievement of their aims, and concentrate on revitalizing the hearts, minds and behavior of people and on presenting a working model as evidence of the reality and practicality of the way of life they propound.

The Bahá’í Administrative Order is the “nucleus and pattern” of the divinely intended future political system of the world, and undoubtedly non-Bahá’í governments will benefit from learning how this system works and from adopting its procedures and principles in overcoming the problems they face. Nevertheless, this Administration is primarily the framework and structure designed to be a channel for the flow of the spirit of the Cause and for the application of its Teachings.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 27 April 1995*

Bahá'í scholarship and Bahá'í scholars

“The House of Justice wishes to avoid use of the terms “Bahá'í scholarship” and “Bahá'í scholars” in an exclusive sense, which would effectively establish a demarcation between those admitted into this category and those denied entrance to it. It is clear that such terms are relative, and that what is a worthy scholarly endeavor by a Bahá'í, when compared to the activities of those with whom he is in contact, may well be regarded as of vastly lesser significance when measured against the accomplishments of the outstanding scholars which the Faith has produced. The House of Justice seeks the creation of a Bahá'í community in which the members encourage each other, where there is respect for accomplishment, and a common realization that every one is, in his or her own way, seeking to acquire a deeper understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and to contribute to the advancement of the Faith.”-The Universal House of Justice, 19 October 1993

“The Universal House of Justice has read with great interest the report of your seminar. It regards Bahá'í scholarship as of great potential importance for the development and consolidation of the Bahá'í community as it emerges from obscurity. It noted that there are a number of problems with which you have been grappling, and while it feels that it should, in general, leave the working out of solutions to Bahá'í scholars themselves, the House of Justice has the impression that it would be helpful to provide you, at this relatively early stage of the development of Bahá'í scholarship, with a few thoughts on matters raised during your seminar. Reports of your seminar were therefore referred to the Research Department, and the Universal House of Justice commends to your study the enclosed memorandum which that Department has prepared.

The House of Justice also urges you not to feel constrained in any way in consulting it about problems, whether theoretical or practical, that you meet in your work. It has noted, for example, the difficulties presented by the current temporary requirement for the review of publications, and in this connection it asks us to inform you that it has already established the policy that doctoral theses do not have to be reviewed unless there is a proposal to publish them in larger quantities than is required by the examining body.

You are still in the early stages of a very challenging and promising development in the life of the Bahá'í community, and the Universal House of Justice is eager to foster and assist your work in whatever ways it can. We are to assure you of its prayers in the Sacred Shrines on behalf of you all and of the progress of Bahá'í scholarship.” -The Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1979

Bahá'í World Commonwealth

“Bahá'u'lláh's principal mission in appearing at this time in human history is the realization of the oneness of mankind and the establishment of peace among the nations; therefore, all the forces which are focused on accomplishing these ends are influenced by His Revelation. We know, however, that peace will come in stages. First, there will come the Lesser Peace, when the unity of nations will be achieved, then gradually the Most Great Peace—the spiritual as well as social and political unity of mankind, when the Bahá'í World Commonwealth, operating in strict accordance with the laws and ordinances of the Most Holy Book of the Bahá'í Revelation, will have been established through the efforts of the Bahá'ís.” *-The Universal House of Justice, 31 January 1985*

“You have asked whether it is possible to have a World Federation when not all countries have attained their independence. The answer is in the negative. Both 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi likened the emergence of the American Republic and the unification of the “diversified and loosely related elements” of its “divided” community into one national entity, to the unity of the world and the incorporation of its federated units into “one coherent system.” Just as the American Constitution does not allow one state to be more autonomous than another, so must the nations of the world enjoy equal status in any form of World Federation. Indeed one of the “candles” of unity anticipated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá is “unity in freedom.” *-Universal House of Justice, 7 July 1976*

Contribution to the Baha'i Fund

“The House of Justice has never gone to the extreme of telling the friends that now is the time to give their long-range savings to the Fund. It sets forth the needs of the Cause, and calls upon the believers to sacrifice, but the degree and manner of his sacrifice depends on each believer's own faith and good judgment in light of his responsibilities. Again and again in His Writings Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes the need for moderation in all things, and He upholds the importance of using wisdom in all we do and say.

Devoted believers in every age have found it challenging to decide how much of their worldly wealth they should give to the Cause of God, and how much they should use to meet their many responsibilities of life, such as educating their children, preparing for their old age so that they will not be a burden on others, and so forth. You will recall the story of the Muslim who asked Muhammad whether he should tie up his camel or trust in God that it would

not run away. Muhammad's answer was that he should tie up the camel *and* trust in God! In this Dispensation, by the institution of Huqúqu'lláh, Bahá'u'lláh has provided us with a measure. We are all obliged to pay that portion of our savings that is God's Right. What remains thereafter is ours to use at our own discretion, for the promotion of the work of the Cause and for helping others less fortunate than ourselves." -*The Universal House of Justice, 1 July 1993*

"Thus to earn a livelihood is a spiritual obligation, and one should not consciously place oneself in a position where one would have to beg others for material support.

It is against this background of responsibility for oneself and one's family that each person must estimate the degree to which he or she can sacrifice for the Funds of the Faith. The range of options and decisions that the believers can make regarding the management of their personal finances without jeopardizing their future security are great, and can only be evaluated by each individual." -*The Universal House of Justice, 1 July 1993*

"This is the immediate need. Beyond this there is, we believe, a worldwide need for appreciation of this basic principle of our Faith: that contributing to the Fund should constitute an integral part of the spiritual life of every Bahá'í and be regarded as the fulfillment of a fundamental spiritual obligation. In too many countries we have encountered a reluctance among the teachers of the Cause to include, in their presentation of the Teachings, support of the Fund as a natural part of Bahá'í life. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh more than once refers to the necessity for combining spiritual and material means in achieving the purposes of the Faith. Shoghi Effendi, for his part, referred to the Fund as the life-blood of the Cause.

We urge all the friends to give deep thought to the importance of supporting the Cause financially and to the effect that Bahá'í activities have on the condition of the entire human race." -*The Universal House of Justice, 18 November 1991*

"The provisions set out in the letter of 17 July 1978 written to your National Spiritual Assembly on behalf of the House of Justice remain applicable, including the principle that it is improper for Bahá'ís to solicit funds from non-Bahá'ís in the name of the Faith for any purpose.

... There is, however, a wide range of fund-raising activities in which Bahá'ís may engage. For example, Bahá'í institutions are free to approach governments or institutions which hold themselves out as wishing to fund charitable activities, to apply for grants to assist in specific humanitarian projects. A Bahá'í school which has both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í pupils is free to raise funds for its own development by such activities as concerts, etc., or by appeals to parents; in this instance, a humanitarian institution is clearly identified, and the funds are being collected in its name rather than in the name of the Faith. Another example is that of a Bahá'í who wishes to sell an

item he owns to the general public for a fair market price; he is free to use the proceeds for any purpose he wishes, including contributing them all, or in part, to the Bahá'í Fund, provided he does not represent to the public that the sale is being conducted for the benefit of the Faith.

There would be no objection to the Bahá'í community's joining with others to give a concert or undertake some other similar activity to raise funds for a deserving charity. Such activities or even the making of donations to humanitarian work should be, and should be seen to be, acts of sincere assistance and cooperation. In choosing to engage in such fund-raising, a Bahá'í community would need to ensure that assisting the charity would not have partisan political implications or support purposes contrary to the interests of the Faith. It would need to watch carefully that its involvement in such activities does not divert its energies from the vital work of teaching the Faith and consolidating its Institutions.” -*The Universal House of Justice, Department of the Secretariat, 20 August 1987*

“This letter and the annexed memorandum of comments are addressed primarily to those National Spiritual Assemblies whose communities include large numbers of materially poor people but inasmuch as the principles expressed, as distinct from some of the procedures suggested, are of universal application, they are being sent to all National Assemblies.

There is a profound aspect to the relationship between a believer and the Fund, which holds true irrespective of his or her economic condition. When a human soul accepts Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this age and enters into the divine Covenant, that soul should progressively bring his or her whole life into harmony with the divine purpose—he becomes a co-worker in the Cause of God and receives the bounty of being permitted to devote his material possessions, no matter how meager, to the work of the Faith.

Giving to the Fund, therefore, is a spiritual privilege not open to those who have not accepted Bahá'u'lláh, of which no believer should deny himself. It is both a responsibility and a source of bounty. This is an aspect of the Cause which, we feel, is an essential part of the basic teaching and deepening of new believers. The importance of contributing resides in the degree of sacrifice of the giver, the spirit of devotion with which the contribution is made and the unity of the friends in this service; these attract the confirmations of God and enhance the dignity and self-respect of the individuals and the community.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 7 August 1985*

“A primary requisite for all who have responsibility for the care of the funds of the Faith is trustworthiness. This, as Bahá'u'lláh has stressed, is one of the most basic and vital of all human virtues, and its exercise has a direct and profound influence on the willingness of the believers to contribute to the Fund.

Conditions vary from country to country and, therefore, in educating the believers and developing the Fund, each National Spiritual Assembly needs to tailor its actions to the conditions of its area of jurisdiction.

In many parts of the world gifts of produce and handicrafts may be a large potential source of regular donations and could well be encouraged, proper arrangements being made for their collection and sale and the disposition of the proceeds.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 7 August 1985*

Deputise Financing

“Just as one deputizes another to teach in one’s stead by covering the expenses of a pioneer or traveling teacher, one can deputize a teacher serving an institute, who is, of course, a teacher of teachers. To do so, one may make contributions to the Continental Bahá’í Fund, as well as to the Local, National and International Funds, earmarked for this purpose.” -*The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1996*

“To administer a budget provided from the Bahá’í International Fund, allocating therefrom monies for the development of institutes, the implementation of various types of teaching projects, and the production and distribution of literature and audiovisual materials, as well as the operations of the Continental Boards of Counselors. To also administer the expenditure of the International Deputization Fund and to see to it that pioneers and traveling teachers are deployed in areas of need, with the help of the Continental Pioneer Committees, whose work it directs.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 10 June 1998*

“We then stated that deputizing a teacher serving an institute would be one way of fulfilling this responsibility and indicated that the friends could contribute to the Continental Bahá’í Fund, as well as the Local, National and International Funds, for this purpose.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 6 August 1996*

Economic Crisis

“Over the same period, cumulative instances of political upheaval and economic turmoil on various continents have shaken governments and peoples. Societies have been brought to the brink of revolution, and in notable cases over the edge. Leaders are finding that neither arms nor riches

guarantee security. Where the aspirations of the people have gone unfulfilled, a store of indignation has accrued. We recall how pointedly Bahá'u'lláh admonished the rulers of the earth: “Your people are your treasures. Beware lest your rule violate the commandments of God, and ye deliver your wards to the hands of the robber.” A word of caution: No matter how captivating the spectacle of the people’s fervour for change, it must be remembered that there are interests which manipulate the course of events. And, so long as the remedy prescribed by the Divine Physician is not administered, the tribulations of this age will persist and deepen. An attentive observer of the times will readily recognize the accelerated disintegration, fitful but relentless, of a world order lamentably defective.” *-The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2011*

“One of the signs of the breakdown of society in all parts of the world is the erosion of trust and collaboration between the individual and the institutions of governance. In many nations the electoral process has become discredited because of endemic corruption. Contributing to the widening distrust of so vital a process are the influence on the outcome from vested interests having access to lavish funds, the restrictions on freedom of choice inherent in the party system, and the distortion in public perception of the candidates by the bias expressed in the media. Apathy, alienation, and disillusionment are a consequence, too, as is a growing sense of despair of the unlikelihood that the most capable citizens will emerge to deal with the manifold problems of a defective social order. Evident everywhere is a yearning for institutions which will dispense justice, dispel oppression, and foster an enduring unity between the disparate elements of society.” *-The Universal House of Justice, 25 March 2007*

“There is no need to comment extensively on the impotence of statesmanship, another theme treated so masterfully by the Guardian in his World Order letters. The widening economic divide between the rich and the poor, the persistence of age-old animosities among nations, the swelling numbers of the displaced, the extraordinary rise in organized crime and violence, the pervasive sense of insecurity, the breakdown of basic services in so many regions, the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources—these are but a few of the signs of the inability of world leaders to devise viable schemes to alleviate humanity’s ills. This is not to say that sincere efforts have not been exerted, in fact, have not multiplied decade after decade.” *-The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2006*

“The world in which our efforts are taking place is likewise undergoing profound changes. On the one hand, the vast network of agencies and individuals that promote understanding and cooperation among diverse peoples affirms ever more powerfully the growing recognition that the “earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.” On the other hand, it is equally clear that the world is moving through a period of social paralysis, tyranny and anarchy, a period marked by the widespread neglect of both governmental and personal responsibility, the ultimate consequences of which no one on earth can foresee. The effect of both developments, as Shoghi Effendi also pointed out, will be to awaken in the hearts of those who share

this planet with us a longing for unity and justice that can be met only by the Cause of God.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 24 May 2001*

“The economic crises so widely reported seem destined to grow even worse, but neither the economic nor other pressing problems confronting humanity will ultimately be resolved unless the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh is given due regard by nations and peoples and unless it receives the adequate material support of its avowed adherents. May the friends everywhere consider, together with their Bahá’í institutions and individually, undaunted by the uncertainties, the perils and the financial stringency afflicting nations, what must now be done by each and all to meet this inescapable, sacred responsibility resting upon them.” -*The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1993*

Economic Life

“Our call to examine the implications of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh for economic life is intended to reach Bahá’í institutions and communities but is directed more especially to the individual believer. If a new model of community life, patterned on the teachings, is to emerge, must not the company of the faithful demonstrate in their own lives the rectitude of conduct that is one of its most distinguishing features? Every choice a Bahá’í makes—as employee or employer, producer or consumer, borrower or lender, benefactor or beneficiary—leaves a trace, and the moral duty to lead a coherent life demands that one’s economic decisions be in accordance with lofty ideals, that the purity of one’s aims be matched by the purity of one’s actions to fulfil those aims. Naturally, the friends habitually look to the teachings to set the standard to which to aspire. But the community’s deepening engagement with society means that the economic dimension of social existence must receive ever more concentrated attention. Particularly in clusters where the community-building process is beginning to embrace large numbers, the exhortations contained in the Bahá’í Writings should increasingly inform economic relationships within families, neighbourhoods, and peoples. Not content with whatever values prevail in the existing order that surrounds them, the friends everywhere should consider the application of the teachings to their lives and, using the opportunities their circumstances offer them, make their own individual and collective contributions to economic justice and social progress wherever they reside. Such efforts will add to a growing storehouse of knowledge in this regard.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017*

“The relative prosperity enjoyed by the Bahá’ís of Iran in the past can be attributed to a culture that lays great emphasis on education and learning and which recognizes as an act of worship the assiduous and honest pursuit of a useful trade or profession, undertaken in the spirit of service.” -*The Universal*

“In our letter to you of 24 November 2009, we addressed the subject of the family and its role in the advancement of civilization, drawing attention to the need to rear children that see their own welfare as inseparable from the welfare of others. While stressing the importance of family solidarity, particularly as it pertains to social progress, we called for caution in this respect, lest devotion to family interests diminish one’s commitment to justice and compassion for all or provide an excuse for perpetuating a harmful mentality of “us and them”. Many, indeed, are the ways in which the family can contribute to the life of society—for example, as an economic unit it can play a significant part in alleviating a variety of problems born of the economic inequalities so prevalent in the world today.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010*

“Nevertheless, there are certainly practices a Bahá’í would eschew, such as dishonesty in one’s transactions or the economic exploitation of others. Faithful adherence to the divine admonitions demands there be no contradiction between one’s economic conduct and one’s beliefs as a Bahá’í. By applying in one’s life those principles of the Faith that relate to fairness and equity, a single soul can uphold a standard far above the low threshold by which the world measures itself. Humanity is weary for want of a pattern of life to which to aspire; we look to you to foster communities whose ways will give hope to the world.” -*The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2012*

“Reflect on the significance of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words, at once complex and subtle. Quite apart from the already formidable obstacles to employment and service that certain fanatical elements have placed in your path, a host of negative forces, generated by the materialism and corruption so widespread in the world, present yet a further challenge in upholding the Bahá’í standard of conduct with respect to financial affairs. Nevertheless, following in the footsteps of your spiritual forebears, you remain undaunted, striving sincerely to reinforce within your families, particularly in your children, attitudes towards material wealth founded on Divine guidance. The members of the younger generation would do well to ponder the above statement of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in which He conditions the acquisition of wealth on diligent work and the grace of God. Let them weigh carefully in their hearts and minds the difference between gaining wealth through earnest effort in fields such as agriculture, commerce, the arts, and industry, on the one hand, and, on the other, obtaining it without exertion or through dishonourable means. Let them consider the consequences of each for the spiritual development of the individual, as well as the progress of society, and ask themselves what possibilities exist for generating income and acquiring wealth that will draw down confirmations from on high. It will surely become evident, as they do so, that what will attract God’s blessings and ensure true happiness both in this world and in the next is the development of spiritual qualities, such as honesty, trustworthiness, generosity, justice, and consideration for others, and the recognition that material means are to be expended for the betterment of the world.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010*

“Only if you demonstrate the rectitude of conduct to which the writings of the Faith call every soul will you be able to struggle against the myriad forms of corruption, overt and subtle, eating at the vitals of society. Only if you perceive honour and nobility in every human being—this independent of wealth or poverty—will you be able to champion the cause of justice. And to the extent that administrative processes of your institutions are governed by the principles of Bahá’í consultation will the great masses of humanity be able to take refuge in the Bahá’í community.” *-The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2008*

Future and Economics

“The future civilization envisaged by Bahá’u’lláh is a prosperous one, in which the vast resources of the world will be directed towards humanity’s elevation and regeneration, not its debasement and destruction. The act of contributing to the Fund, then, is imbued with profound meaning: it is a practical way of hastening the advent of that civilization, and a necessary one, for as Bahá’u’lláh Himself has explained, “He Who is the Eternal Truth—exalted be His glory—hath made the fulfilment of every undertaking on earth dependent on material means.” Bahá’ís conduct their lives in the midst of a society acutely disordered in its material affairs. The process of community building they are advancing in their clusters cultivates a set of attitudes towards wealth and possessions very different from those holding sway in the world. The habit of regularly giving to the Funds of the Faith—including in-kind contributions particularly in certain places—arises from and reinforces a sense of personal concern for the welfare of the community and the progress of the Cause. The duty to contribute, just like the duty to teach, is a fundamental aspect of Bahá’í identity which strengthens faith. The sacrificial and generous contributions of the individual believer, the collective consciousness promoted by the community of the needs of the Fund, and the careful stewardship of financial resources exercised by the institutions of the Faith can be regarded as expressions of the love that binds these three actors more closely together. And ultimately, voluntary giving fosters an awareness that managing one’s financial affairs in accordance with spiritual principles is an indispensable dimension of a life lived coherently. It is a matter of conscience, a way in which commitment to the betterment of the world is translated into practice.” *-The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015*

“The key to resolving these social ills rests in the hands of a youthful generation convinced of the nobility of human beings; eagerly seeking a deeper understanding of the true purpose of existence; able to distinguish between divine religion and mere superstition; clear in the view of science and religion as two independent yet complementary systems of knowledge that propel human progress; conscious of and drawn to the beauty and power of unity in diversity; secure in the knowledge that real glory is to be found in

service to one's country and to the peoples of the world; and mindful that the acquisition of wealth is praiseworthy only insofar as it is attained through just means and expended for benevolent purposes, for the promotion of knowledge and toward the common good. Thus must our precious youth prepare themselves to shoulder the tremendous responsibilities that await them. And thus will they prove immune to the atmosphere of greed that surrounds them and press forward unwavering in the pursuit of their exalted goals." -The Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010

"Whatever suffering and turmoil the years immediately ahead may hold, however dark the immediate circumstances, the Bahá'í community believes that humanity can confront this supreme trial with confidence in its ultimate outcome. Far from signaling the end of civilization, the convulsive changes towards which humanity is being ever more rapidly impelled will serve to release the "potentialities inherent in the station of man" and reveal "the full measure of his destiny on earth, the innate excellence of his reality." -The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

Golden Rule

"The teaching that we should treat others as we ourselves would wish to be treated, an ethic variously repeated in all the great religions, lends force to this latter observation in two particular respects: it sums up the moral attitude, the peace-inducing aspect, extending through these religions irrespective of their place or time of origin; it also signifies an aspect of unity which is their essential virtue, a virtue mankind in its disjointed view of history has failed to appreciate." -The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

Huqúqu'lláh

"Your third and fourth questions concern the "spiritual" portion of a Bahá'í will, that is, that portion of a believer's will which is a statement of faith, rather than a statement about the material or, to use your word, "ordinary" aspects of a will, such as distribution of one's possessions and provision for the upbringing of one's children. It would seem that your understanding that the individual believer should draft the "spiritual" portion of his or her will, rather than asking a lawyer to do so, is in keeping with the same paragraph of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas referred to earlier, paragraph 109, which provides guidance as to the "spiritual" content and, additionally, makes a specification regarding how the individual should head the document: "Unto everyone hath

been enjoined the writing of a will. The testator should head this document with the adornment of the Most Great Name, bear witness therein unto the oneness of God in the Dayspring of His Revelation, and make mention, as he may wish, of that which is praiseworthy, so that it may be a testimony for him in the kingdoms of Revelation and Creation and a treasure with his Lord, the Supreme Protector, the Faithful.” -*The Universal House of Justice, July 1996*

“Your fifth question centers on the provision for Huqúqu’lláh in Bahá’í wills. Your understanding that the obligation to pay Huqúqu’lláh arises during one’s lifetime and is normally to be carried out with lifetime giving is correct, although at the same time it is true that there may be cases where a believer dies without having made provision in his or her will for payment of the unpaid portion of Huqúqu’lláh, if any. The event of death does not remove from a believer the obligation to pay Huqúqu’lláh. Whatever portion is due to be paid is therefore a debt due from the believer’s estate at the time of his or her death. The cost of the funeral and burial, the payment of the debts of the deceased, and the payment of whatever portion of Huqúqu’lláh remains due are prior charges on the estate which must be met before arriving at the amount of the property which has to be divided in accordance with the provisions of the law of inheritance. Thus, whether or not a person makes a will or, having made a will, whether he or she makes provision in it for the payment of Huqúqu’lláh, the Huqúqu’lláh should be paid, like all debts, before the rest of the estate is divided.

In light of this, it is certainly advisable for a believer to make the necessary arrangements for payment of Huqúqu’lláh prior to his or her death, in order to avoid complications or confusions which could arise. It should be noted that the question of a legal wording to include provision in a will for the payment of Huqúqu’lláh after a believer has died is dependent upon so many factors, that it would be preferable to seek legal advice so that wording which is appropriate and in accordance with the laws governing inheritance can be used. Obviously, unless the believer leaves a clear accounting of his or her property and payment of Huqúqu’lláh to date, if any, it will not be possible for anyone to calculate accurately what remains to be paid at the time of death. While the application of the principles involved in payment of Huqúqu’lláh may well require subsidiary legislation by the House of Justice in the future, at the present time it falls to the executor or administrator of an estate to apply them to the extent possible, using his or her best judgment and taking into account the information available. Finally, while the payment of Huqúqu’lláh is each individual’s own responsibility, a believer may be referred to the nearest Representative of the Trustee of Huqúqu’lláh, who could advise him or her in the light of any specific circumstances.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 1 July 1996*

Indigenous People

“The House of Justice is deeply concerned about the condition and needs of the indigenous people . . . Although there is no doubt that increased material resources would be helpful in resolving some of the problems which exist there, they will not suffice to bring about a fundamental and enduring solution. This can only come about through a realization that, at a basic level, the issues which you face are essentially spiritual, dealing with values, attitudes, and behavior. Hence, a spiritual solution is required.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 6 April 1999*

Individual Social and Economic Actions

“Viewed in this light, many seemingly ordinary economic activities gain new significance because of their potential to add to human welfare and prosperity. “Every person must have an occupation, a trade or a craft,” explains the Master, “so that he may carry other people’s burdens, and not himself be a burden to others.” The poor are urged by Bahá’u’lláh to “exert themselves and strive to earn the means of livelihood”, while they who are possessed of riches “must have the utmost regard for the poor”. “Wealth”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has affirmed, “is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual’s own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes.” At the same time, the Hidden Words is replete with warnings of its perilous allure, that wealth is a “mighty barrier” between the believer and the proper Object of his adoration. No wonder, then, that Bahá’u’lláh extols the station of the wealthy one who is not hindered by riches from attaining the eternal kingdom; the splendour of such a soul “shall illuminate the dwellers of heaven even as the sun enlightens the people of the earth!” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declares that “if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement”. For wealth is most commendable “provided the entire population is wealthy.” Examining one’s life to determine what is a necessity and then discharging with joy one’s obligation in relation to the law of Huqúqu’lláh is an indispensable discipline to bring one’s priorities into balance, purify whatever wealth one possesses, and ensure that the share which is the Right of God provides for the greater good. At all times, contentment and moderation, benevolence and fellow feeling, sacrifice and reliance on the Almighty are qualities that befit the God-fearing soul.” - *The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017*

“Let those seriously concerned about the state and fate of the world give due attention to the claims of Bahá’u’lláh. Let them realize that the storms battering at the foundations of society will not be stilled unless and until spiritual principles are actively engaged in the search for solutions to social problems.”

-*The Universal House of Justice, 26 November 1992*

“The society in the midst of which you are called upon to work is undergoing radical changes in every aspect of its life, changes which are but a concentration of the problems with which every country, and world society as a whole, is grappling. The underlying cause of this transformation is that this is the age of the Oneness of Mankind, and therefore every people, whether of the USSR or in other parts of the world, must find its way to the unity in diversity, the harmony of formerly conflicting elements, which Shoghi Effendi held forth as the goal towards which mankind is striving.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 21 November 1990*

“It is portentous of the profound change in the structure of present-day society which attainment to the Lesser Peace implies. Hopeful as are the signs, we cannot forget that the dark passage of the Age of Transition has not been fully traversed; it is as yet long, slippery and tortuous. For godlessness is rife, materialism rampant. Nationalism and racism still work their treachery in men’s hearts, and humanity remains blind to the spiritual foundations of the solution to its economic woes. For the Bahá’í community the situation is a particular challenge, because time is running out and we have serious commitments to keep.” -*The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1990*

“The words, the deeds, the attitudes, the lack of prejudice, the nobility of character, the high sense of service to others—in a word, those qualities and actions which distinguish a Bahá’í must unfailingly characterize their inner life and outer behavior, and their interactions with friend or foe.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 8 May 1985*

“Intimations in the non-Bahá’í world of a rapidly growing realization that mankind is indeed entering a new stage in its evolution present us with unprecedented opportunities to show that the Bahá’í world community is not only “the nucleus but the very pattern” of that world society which it is the purpose of Bahá’u’lláh to establish and towards which a harassed humanity, albeit largely unconsciously, is striving.

The time has come for the Bahá’í community to become more involved in the life of the society around it, without in the least supporting any of the world’s moribund and divisive concepts, or slackening its direct teaching efforts, but rather, by association, exerting its influence towards unity, demonstrating its ability to settle differences by consultation rather than by confrontation, violence or schism, and declaring its faith in the divine purpose of human existence.” -*The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1985*

“These are momentous times. The institutions of the old world order are crumbling and in disarray. Materialism, greed, corruption and conflict are infecting the social order with a grave malaise from which it is helpless to extricate itself. With every passing day it becomes more and more evident that no time must be lost in applying the remedy prescribed by Bahá’u’lláh, and it is to this task that Bahá’ís everywhere must bend their energies and commit their resources.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 2 September 1982*

“One of the great obstacles to progress is the tendency of Bahá’ís to be sucked into the general attitudes and disputes that surround them, to be influenced ...” -The Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1982

Inheritance

“You mention the provision in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas regarding inheritance, in which the eldest son receives preferential treatment. As you no doubt know, the duty of making a will is enjoined upon all Bahá’ís, and in such a will a believer is free to bequeath his or her property in whatever way he or she wishes (see note 25 on page 60 of the *Synopsis and Codification*). Every system of law, however, needs to make provision for the disposal of a person’s property if he or she dies without having made a will, and it is in cases of intestacy that the specific provisions stated in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas are applied. These provisions give expression to the law of primogeniture, which, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated, has invariably been upheld by the Law of God. In a Tablet to a follower of the Faith in Persia He wrote: “In all the Divine Dispensations the eldest son hath been given extraordinary distinctions. Even the station of prophethood hath been his birthright.” With the distinctions given to the eldest son, however, go concomitant duties. For example, with respect to the law of inheritance ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has explained in one of His Tablets that the eldest son has the responsibility to take into consideration the needs of the other heirs. Similar considerations no doubt apply to the provisions that, in intestacy, limit the shares due to half-brothers and half-sisters of the deceased on his or her mother’s side; they will, of course, be due to receive inheritance from their own father’s estate.

Your statement that “Gifts to a wife are included in the man’s property to be given away after his death” is incorrect. It is clear from the passage in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas that certain things that a husband buys for his wife are intended to be for the general household and certain are intended to be the wife’s personal property. These latter, that is to say the wife’s used clothing and gifts which have been made to her, are *not* included in the husband’s property.

The husband’s duty to send his wife home if differences arise between them while traveling is a part of the law of divorce, and relates to the husband’s obligation to support his wife during the year of waiting. -The *Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* reads as follows (at section (g) on pages 42 and 43):

Should differences arise between husband and wife while traveling, he is required to send her home, or entrust her to a dependable person, who will escort her there, paying her journey and her full year’s expenses.” -The *Universal House of Justice*, 24 July 1975

Interconnection of the Economic World

“In an increasingly interconnected world, more light is being cast on the social conditions of every people, giving greater visibility to their circumstances. While there are developments that give hope, there is much that should weigh heavy on the conscience of the human race. Inequity, discrimination, and exploitation blight the life of humanity, seemingly immune to the treatments applied by political schemes of every hue. The economic impact of these afflictions has resulted in the prolonged suffering of so many, as well as in deep-seated, structural defects in society. No one whose heart has been attracted to the teachings of the Blessed Beauty can remain unmoved by these consequences.” - *The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017*

“The welfare of any segment of humanity is inextricably bound up with the welfare of the whole. Humanity’s collective life suffers when any one group thinks of its own well-being in isolation from that of its neighbours or pursues economic gain without regard for how the natural environment, which provides sustenance for all, is affected. A stubborn obstruction, then, stands in the way of meaningful social progress: time and again, avarice and self-interest prevail at the expense of the common good. Unconscionable quantities of wealth are being amassed, and the instability this creates is made worse by how income and opportunity are spread so unevenly both between nations and within nations. But it need not be so. However much such conditions are the outcome of history, they do not have to define the future, and even if current approaches to economic life satisfied humanity’s stage of adolescence, they are certainly inadequate for its dawning age of maturity. There is no justification for continuing to perpetuate structures, rules, and systems that manifestly fail to serve the interests of all peoples. The teachings of the Faith leave no room for doubt: there is an inherent moral dimension to the generation, distribution, and utilization of wealth and resources.” - *The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017*

Internet

“The opportunity which electronic communication technology provides for more speedy and thorough consultation among the friends is highly significant. Without doubt, it represents another manifestation of a development eagerly anticipated by the Guardian when he foresaw the creation of “a mechanism of world intercommunication ... embracing the

whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvelous swiftness and perfect regularity.”

As you well appreciate, the extent to which such technology advances the work of the Faith depends, of course, on the manner in which it is used. As a medium for Bahá'ís to exchange views, it imposes on participants the same requirements of moderation, candor, and courtesy as would be the case in any other discussion. Likewise, those involved should avoid belittling the views of one another. In this regard, the House of Justice has noted your understandable repugnance at an apparent temptation to use misleading and invidious labels like “traditionalists” and “liberals,” which divide the Bahá'í community. To the extent that this divisive habit of mind may persist in the Bahá'í community, it is obviously a carryover from non-Bahá'í society and a manifestation of an immature conception of life. If Bahá'ís were to persist in this mode of thinking, it would bring to naught even the most worthwhile intellectual endeavor, as has so conspicuously been the case with societies of the past.

Most important of all, as with any exploration by Bahá'ís of the beliefs and practices of their Faith, electronic discussion will serve the interests of the Cause and its members only as it is conducted within the framework of the Bahá'í Teachings and the truths they enshrine. To attempt to discuss the Cause of God apart from or with disdain for the authoritative guidance inherent in these Teachings would clearly be a logical contradiction. To take the first point mentioned in your letter, it is obvious that seeking to impose limits on the universality of the authority of God's Manifestation would lead to the frustration of serious scholarly work and generate disharmony within an effort whose success depends precisely upon a spirit of unity and mutual trust.” *-The Universal House of Justice, 19 May 1995*

“The ease and relative impersonality of the electronic medium require in some ways an even higher level of self-discipline than is the case in situations where a spirit of unity is reinforced by the opportunity for direct personal contact and social interaction. In the pursuit of such a spirit of unity, Bahá'ís will, without doubt, wish to assist the consultative processes by sharing and discussing relevant Bahá'í texts. This will itself have the further effect of drawing attention back to the framework of Bahá'í belief.” *-The Universal House of Justice, 19 May 1995*

Mashriqú'l-Adhkár and Hazíratu'l-Quds

“If acquisition of a National Hazíratu'l-Quds is a responsibility assigned to you under the Five Year Plan, you should treat it as an urgent matter in view of the worldwide condition of inflation and rising property costs. Such a building, which must be suitable to serve as the seat of the National Spiritual

Assembly, should be purchased as economically as possible. Preferably it should be a freehold detached building, although if such is not obtainable, a semidetached house or an apartment may be considered, or even a property on a long-term lease.

A site for a future Mashriq'l-Adhkár can be as small as 8,000 square meters in area if a larger property would be too expensive. It should, if possible, be situated within the city designated or, if this is not feasible, within 25 kilometers from the city.

A national endowment should be regarded as an investment in real estate owned by the National Spiritual Assembly. It may be anywhere in the country and can be a small, inexpensive piece of land donated by one of the friends, or else acquired out of the resources of the National Fund.

Where we have given a goal to acquire a Hazíratu'l-Quds which is to serve the entire community in a certain country, it is to be a local Hazíratu'l-Quds at the present time but should be of a size and quality to serve as an administrative center and focal point for the whole community. We envisage that some of such Hazíratu'l-Quds may, at a later date, be converted into National Hazíratu'l-Quds, and this fact should be borne in mind when acquiring them.

In the goal for local Hazíratu'l-Quds given to some communities we state that a certain number should be large enough to accommodate activities of a number of communities in the surrounding district. While not being at all in the same category as the Hazíratu'l-Quds described in the last paragraph above, these particular buildings are intended to be rather more substantial structures than the average local Hazíratu'l-Quds, and should be located in areas which form easily accessible, central gathering places for districts in which large numbers of Bahá'ís are living. In addition to serving as a local Hazíratu'l-Quds for its own town or village, such a building can be used for district gatherings, for the holding of teaching institutes, conferences, deepening classes, etc., for the larger area, and could possibly accommodate the office of the district teaching committee.

In general we intend that the local Hazíratu'l-Quds called for in the Plan should be very simple structures to serve as focal points and meeting places for the local communities. It is hoped that land for them can be provided by local believers and that they can be built, for the most part, by the local friends. In certain instances the National Spiritual Assembly may feel justified in giving a small amount of assistance from the National Fund.

The acquisition of local endowments, which is given as a specific goal to some national communities, is intended to assist in the consolidation of local communities and to foster the spirit of unity and collaboration among the believers. A local endowment can be quite a small piece of land; it can be purchased by the Local Spiritual Assembly or is more usually the gift of one or more of the believers. If the Local Spiritual Assembly is incorporated, the

endowment should be registered in its name, but if it is not, the endowment can be held by one or more of the believers on behalf of the community. For example, if one of the believers gives a small piece of land he can continue to hold it in his name, but it will be known that he does so on behalf of the Local Spiritual Assembly and that the land will in time be transferred legally to the Assembly when that is possible. In some countries land is owned by the state or the tribe and only the use of the land can be assigned; in such places the goal can be considered achieved if the Local Spiritual Assembly can obtain the use of a plot of land in its own name. In some countries, even if the land can be purchased, government regulations require that within a specific time a building must be erected on land held by religious institutions. This problem can be met in several ways: it may be possible for the Spiritual Assembly to obtain the use of, or acquire, a plot of land for agricultural purposes, thus avoiding the need to erect a building; or if the most practical course is to erect on the land a Bahá'í institution such as a local Hazíratu'l-Quds, the Assembly could, in its own records, demarcate a portion of the land to be the endowment, distinct from the portion on which the Hazíratu'l-Quds stands.

One of the characteristics of Bahá'í society will be the gathering of the believers each day during the hours between dawn and two hours after sunrise to listen to the reading and chanting of the Holy Word. In many communities at the present time, especially in rural ones, such gatherings would fit naturally into the pattern of the friends' daily life, and where this is the case it would do much to foster the unity of the local community and deepen the friends' knowledge of the Teachings if such gatherings could be organized by the Local Spiritual Assembly on a regular basis. Attendance at these gatherings is not to be obligatory, but we hope that the friends will more and more be drawn to take part in them. This is a goal which can be attained gradually." -*The Universal House of Justice, Naw-Rúz 1974*

Materialism and its Effects

“The forces of materialism promote a quite contrary line of thinking: that happiness comes from constant acquisition, that the more one has the better, that worry for the environment is for another day. These seductive messages fuel an increasingly entrenched sense of personal entitlement, which uses the language of justice and rights to disguise self-interest. Indifference to the hardship experienced by others becomes commonplace while entertainment and distracting amusements are voraciously consumed. The enervating influence of materialism seeps into every culture, and all Bahá'ís recognize that, unless they strive to remain conscious of its effects, they may to one degree or another unwittingly adopt its ways of seeing the world. Parents must be acutely aware that, even when very young, children absorb the norms of their surroundings. The junior youth spiritual empowerment programme encourages thoughtful discernment at an age when the call of materialism

grows more insistent. With the approach of adulthood comes a responsibility, shared by one's generation, not to allow worldly pursuits to blind one's eyes to injustice and privation. Over time, the qualities and attitudes nurtured by the courses of the training institute, through exposure to the Word of God, help individuals to see past the illusions that, at every stage of life, the world uses to pull attention away from service and towards the self. And ultimately, the systematic study of the Word of God and the exploration of its implications raises consciousness of the need to manage one's material affairs in keeping with the divine teachings.” *-The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017*

“Today the world is assailed by an array of destructive forces. Materialism, rooted in the West, has now spread to every corner of the planet, breeding, in the name of a strong global economy and human welfare, a culture of consumerism. It skilfully and ingeniously promotes a habit of consumption that seeks to satisfy the basest and most selfish desires, while encouraging the expenditure of wealth so as to prolong and exacerbate social conflict. How vain and foolish a worldview! And meanwhile, a rising tide of fundamentalism, bringing with it an exceedingly narrow understanding of religion and spirituality, continues to gather strength, threatening to engulf humanity in rigid dogmatism. In its most extreme form, it conditions the resolution of the problems of the world upon the occurrence of events derived from illogical and superstitious notions. It professes to uphold virtue yet, in practice, perpetuates oppression and greed. Among the deplorable results of the operation of such forces are a deepening confusion on the part of young people everywhere, a sense of hopelessness in the ranks of those who would drive progress, and the emergence of a myriad social maladies.” *-The Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010*

“The questions raised in your letter go to the heart of the issues facing Bahá'ís everywhere at this critical point in world history. We are witnessing the disintegration of the great civilization which has, for over two centuries, dominated world history and shaped the behavior and attitudes of the most influential sectors of modern society. The defining characteristic of this civilization has been a materialistic view of reality, the conviction that both human consciousness and human society are essentially the products of material forces and that it is to these forces that we must look for the resolution of the great problems facing our world.

Clearly, this world view reflects a profound error about the nature of humankind. It has demonstrated conclusively its impotence to solve any significant problem facing the world's people today—political, social, economic, or moral. In the face of so massive a failure, a growing majority of

people everywhere are being forced to reexamine fundamental assumptions.”
-The Universal House of Justice, 13 May 1996

“Consider, when one looks about at the world and at the condition into which its peoples have fallen and the untold agony of human suffering, what could have caused such a lamentable state of affairs? Is it not a fair assumption that the reigning materialist worldview, with its inordinate emphasis on individual liberty and its discounting of ordering norms and mores, is at least partly to blame?” *-The Universal House of Justice, 1 August 1994*

“The time has come when those who preach the dogmas of materialism, whether of the east or the west, whether of capitalism or socialism, must give account of the moral stewardship they have presumed to exercise. Where is the “new world” promised by these ideologies? Where is the international peace to whose ideals they proclaim their devotion? Where are the breakthroughs into new realms of cultural achievement produced by the aggrandizement of this race, of that nation or of a particular class? Why is the vast majority of the world’s peoples sinking ever deeper into hunger and wretchedness when wealth on a scale undreamed of by the Pharaohs, the Caesars, or even the imperialist powers of the nineteenth century is at the disposal of the present arbiters of human affairs?

Most particularly, it is in the glorification of material pursuits, at once the progenitor and common feature of all such ideologies, that we find the roots which nourish the falsehood that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive. It is here that the ground must be cleared for the building of a new world fit for our descendants.

That materialistic ideals have, in the light of experience, failed to satisfy the needs of mankind calls for an honest acknowledgement that a fresh effort must now be made to find the solutions to the agonizing problems of the planet. The intolerable conditions pervading society bespeak a common failure of all, a circumstance which tends to incite rather than relieve the entrenchment on every side. Clearly, a common remedial effort is urgently required. It is primarily a matter of attitude. Will humanity continue in its waywardness, holding to outworn concepts and unworkable assumptions? Or will its leaders, regardless of ideology, step forth and, with a resolute will, consult together in a united search for appropriate solutions?” *-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

“Indeed, the chief reason for the evils now rampant in society is a lack of spirituality. The materialistic civilization of our age has so much absorbed the energy and interest of mankind, that people in general no longer feel the necessity of raising themselves above the forces and conditions of their daily material existence. There is not sufficient demand for things that we should call spiritual to differentiate them from the needs and requirements of our physical existence. The universal crisis affecting mankind is, therefore, essentially spiritual in its causes. The spirit of the age, taken on the whole, is irreligious. Man’s outlook upon life is too crude and materialistic to enable

him to elevate himself into the higher realms of the spirit.” *-The Universal House of Justice, 12 June 1984*

“We must always remember that in the cesspool of materialism, which is what modern civilization has to a certain extent become, Bahá’ís—that is some of them—are still to a certain extent affected by the society from which they have sprung. In other words, they have recognized the Manifestation of God, but they have not been believers long enough, or perhaps tried hard enough, to become “a new creation.” *-The Universal House of Justice, 22 July 1981*

“Yet another sacred duty is that of clinging to the cord of moderation in all things, lest they who are to be the essence of detachment and moderation be deluded by the trappings of this nether world or set their hearts on its adornments and waste their lives. If they are wealthy, they should make these bestowals a means of drawing nigh unto God’s Threshold, rather than being so attached to them that they forget the admonitions of the Pen of the Most High. The Voice of Truth has said, “Having attained the stage of fulfillment and reached his maturity, man standeth in need of wealth, and such wealth as he acquireth through crafts or professions is commendable and praiseworthy in the estimation of men of wisdom.” If wealth and prosperity become the means of service at God’s Threshold, it is highly meritorious; otherwise it would be better to avoid them. Turn to the Book of the Covenant, the Hidden Words, and other Tablets, lest the cord of your salvation become a rope of woe which will lead to your own destruction. How numerous are those negligent souls, particularly from among your own compatriots, who have been deprived of the blessings of faith and true understanding. Witness how, no sooner had they attained their newly amassed wealth and status, than they became so bewitched by them as to forget the virtues and true perfections of man’s station. They clung to their empty and fruitless lifestyle. They had naught else but their homes, their commercial success, and their ornamental trappings of which to be proud. Behold their ultimate fate. Many a triumphal arch was reduced to a ruin, many an imperial palace was converted into a barn. Many a day of deceit turned into a night of despair. Vast treasures changed hands and, at the end of their lives, they were left only with tears of loss and regret. “... all that perisheth and changeth is not, and hath never been, worthy of attention, except to a recognized measure.” Therefore the people of Bahá must not fall prey to the corruption of the ruthless, but rather cling to contentment and moderation. They must make their homes havens for the believers, folds for their gatherings and centers for the promulgation of His Cause and the diffusion of His love, so that people of all strata, whether high or low, may feel at home and be able to consort in an atmosphere of love and fellowship.” *-The Universal House of Justice, 10 February 1980*

“Rather is suggested a clearer apprehension of the purpose of God for man, and particularly of His immediate purpose as revealed and directed by Bahá’u’lláh, a purpose as far removed from current concepts of human well-being and happiness as is possible. We should constantly be on our guard lest the glitter and tinsel of an affluent society should lead us to think that such superficial adjustments to the modern world as are envisioned by humanitarian movements or are publicly proclaimed as the policy of

enlightened statesmanship—such as an extension to all members of the human race of the benefits of a high standard of living, of education, medical care, technical knowledge—will of themselves fulfill the glorious mission of Bahá'u'lláh.” *-The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1967*

Moderation

“Yet another sacred duty is that of clinging to the cord of moderation in all things, lest they who are to be the essence of detachment and moderation be deluded by the trappings of this nether world or set their hearts on its adornments and waste their lives. If they are wealthy, they should make these bestowals a means of drawing nigh unto God’s Threshold, rather than being so attached to them that they forget the admonitions of the Pen of the Most High. The Voice of Truth has said, “Having attained the stage of fulfillment and reached his maturity, man standeth in need of wealth, and such wealth as he acquireth through crafts or professions is commendable and praiseworthy in the estimation of men of wisdom.” If wealth and prosperity become the means of service at God’s Threshold, it is highly meritorious; otherwise it would be better to avoid them. Turn to the Book of the Covenant, the Hidden Words, and other Tablets, lest the cord of your salvation become a rope of woe which will lead to your own destruction. How numerous are those negligent souls, particularly from among your own compatriots, who have been deprived of the blessings of faith and true understanding. Witness how, no sooner had they attained their newly amassed wealth and status, than they became so bewitched by them as to forget the virtues and true perfections of man’s station. They clung to their empty and fruitless lifestyle. They had naught else but their homes, their commercial success, and their ornamental trappings of which to be proud. Behold their ultimate fate. Many a triumphal arch was reduced to a ruin, many an imperial palace was converted into a barn. Many a day of deceit turned into a night of despair. Vast treasures changed hands and, at the end of their lives, they were left only with tears of loss and regret. “... all that perisheth and changeth is not, and hath never been, worthy of attention, except to a recognized measure.” Therefore the people of Bahá must not fall prey to the corruption of the ruthless, but rather cling to contentment and moderation. They must make their homes havens for the believers, folds for their gatherings and centers for the promulgation of His Cause and the diffusion of His love, so that people of all strata, whether high or low, may feel at home and be able to consort in an atmosphere of love and fellowship.” *-The Universal House of Justice, 10 February 1980*

Morality and Economics

“Have not the evidences of selfishness, of suspicion, of fear and of fraud, which the Guardian perceived with such clarity, become so widespread as to be readily apparent to even the casual observer? Does not the threat of terrorism of which he spoke loom so large on the international scene as to preoccupy the minds of young and old alike in every corner of the globe? Have not the unquenchable thirst for, and the feverish pursuit after, earthly vanities, riches and pleasures so consolidated their power and influence as to assume authority over such human values as happiness, fidelity and love? Have not the weakening of family solidarity and the irresponsible attitude towards marriage reached such proportions as to endanger the existence of this fundamental unit of society?” -*The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2006*

“The Guardian lays the greatest share of the blame for humanity’s moral downfall on the decline of religion as a social force. “Should the lamp of religion be obscured,” he draws our attention to the words of Bahá’u’lláh, “chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness, of justice, of tranquility and peace cease to shine.” The decades that followed the writing of his letters have seen not only a continued deterioration in the ability of religion to exercise moral influence, but also the betrayal of the masses through the unseemly conduct of religious institutions. Attempts at reinvigorating it have only given rise to a fanaticism that, if left unchecked, could destroy the foundation of civilized relationships among people.” -*The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2006*

“You live in a society caught in the tightening grip of moral decadence on a vast scale. But this should come as no surprise to you. It is the unavoidable consequence of a pervasive godlessness; its symptoms and repercussions were described in painful detail by Shoghi Effendi in several of his letters to the Western friends. Inevitably, the American Bahá’í community is affected by this condition to some extent. The corrosive influence of an overbearing and rampant secularization is infecting the style of administration of the Faith in your community and threatening to undermine its efficacy.

The aggressiveness and competitiveness which animate a dominantly capitalist culture; the partisanship inherent in a fervidly democratic system; the suspicion of public-policy institutions and the skepticism towards established authority ingrained in the political attitude of the people and which trace their origins to the genesis of American society; the cynical disregard of the moderating principles and rules of civilized human relationships resulting from an excessive liberalism and its immoral consequences—such unsavory characteristics inform entrenched habits of American life, which imperceptibly at first but more obviously in the long run have come to exert too great a sway over the manner of management of the Bahá’í community and over the behavior of portions of its rank and file in relation to the Cause. This unwholesome influence must be arrested by immediate, deliberate effort—an effort which must surely begin within your Assembly itself. Further accommodation of it will severely impede the progress of your community, despite the abundant possibilities of an imminent breakthrough. It was due to this concern in particular that we anxiously welcomed your request for a meeting with us.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 19 May 1994*

“Collateral with these changes has been the breakdown of institutions, religious and political, which traditionally functioned as the guideposts for the stability of society. Even the most resilient of these seem to be losing their credibility as they have become preoccupied with their own internal disorder. This calls attention to the emptiness of the moral landscape and the feeling of futility deranging personal life. Thoughtful commentators write apprehensively about the fall of culture and the consequent disappearance of values, the loss of the fullness of the inner life, a technological civilization facing an increasingly serious crisis. They write, moreover, of the human species as being at the end with its wisdom and being unable to control itself, of the need for divine wisdom and foresight, and of the human psyche as being far removed from recognizing this need.” -*The Universal House of Justice*, 26 November 1992

“The inordinate disparity between rich and poor, a source of acute suffering, keeps the world in a state of instability, virtually on the brink of war. Few societies have dealt effectively with this situation. The solution calls for the combined application of spiritual, moral and practical approaches. A fresh look at the problem is required, entailing consultation with experts from a wide spectrum of disciplines, devoid of economic and ideological polemics, and involving the people directly affected in the decisions that must urgently be made. It is an issue that is bound up not only with the necessity for eliminating extremes of wealth and poverty but also with those spiritual verities the understanding of which can produce a new universal attitude. Fostering such an attitude is itself a major part of the solution.” -*The Universal House of Justice*, October 1985

“There are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. Any well-intentioned group can in a general sense devise practical solutions to its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is immanent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures. Leaders of governments and all in authority would be well served in their efforts to solve problems if they would first seek to identify the principles involved and then be guided by them.” -*The Universal House of Justice*, October 1985

“The decline of religious and moral restraints has unleashed a fury of chaos and confusion that already bears the signs of universal anarchy. Engulfed in this maelstrom, the Bahá’í world community, pursuing with indefeasible unity and spiritual force its redemptive mission, inevitably suffers the disruption of economic, social and civil life which afflicts its fellowmen throughout the planet.” -*The Universal House of Justice*, Naw-Rúz 1979

Natural Resources

“For the principle of the oneness of humankind, as proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh, asks not merely for cooperation among people and nations. It calls for a complete reconceptualization of the relationships that sustain society. The deepening environmental crisis, driven by a system that condones the pillage of natural resources to satisfy an insatiable thirst for more, suggests how entirely inadequate is the present conception of humanity’s relationship with nature; the deterioration of the home environment, ...” *-The Universal House of Justice, 2 March 2013*

“The teaching work is of primary importance for this reason: the most urgent need of human beings is to recognize the Manifestation of God and thereby to learn how to collaborate constructively. All over the world tremendous efforts are being made to improve the lot of mankind—or of parts of mankind, but most of these efforts are frustrated by the conflicts of aims, by corruption of the morals of those involved, by mistrust, or by fear. There is no lack of material resources in the world if they are properly used. The problem is the education of human beings in the ultimate and most important purpose of life and in how to weld the differences of opinion and outlook into a united constructive effort.” *-The Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1982*

Non-profit Organizations

“... As a national community grows, the activities undertaken by its members also increase in number and diversity. Some of these activities will be initiated and administered by the Bahá’í institutions. Others will fall in the realm of private initiative. When an initiative is in the form of a private business venture undertaken by an individual or group, the institutions of the Faith have little reason to interfere with their daily affairs. Only if difficulties arise among the friends involved in such an enterprise, if their activities could damage the good name of the Faith, or if they misrepresent their relationship to the Faith, would a Local or National Spiritual Assembly intervene. Bahá’í institutions, of course, applaud any effort by these private ventures to apply the Teachings to their operations and to use their position in society to further the interests of the Faith. Spiritual Assemblies would do well to offer them guidance, as requested or as circumstances require, and to help them develop their potential for the advancement of the Cause.

The private initiatives of believers need not, however, be limited to business ventures. The laws of most societies allow for the establishment of nonprofit organizations which, while private, are subject to special regulations and enjoy certain privileges. Customarily a board of trustees is responsible for all the affairs of such an organization and must ensure that its income is spent for the purpose stipulated in its by-laws. This board also oversees the functioning

of the projects of the organization and the work of those who are in charge of them. An increasing number of believers around the world are taking advantage of this possibility and creating organizations dedicated to the application of Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings to the analysis and resolution of important social and economic issues. The House of Justice looks with keen interest on this growing phenomenon in the Bahá'í world. It only cautions the friends that in establishing such organizations they should exercise care not to become a burden on the institutions or unduly divert the contributions of the believers from the essential and primary tasks of supporting the Funds of the Faith and the activities of the institutions. It expects them to conduct their affairs according to Bahá'í moral and ethical principles.

A question that often arises in relation to private organizations dedicated to social and economic development is whether they are “Bahá'í” or not. Such a question cannot be answered by a simple “yes” or “no.” Clearly, the fact that they have their own management structures puts them in a different category from projects and organizations administered by Bahá'í institutions. In that sense they are not “Bahá'í” enterprises. In another sense, to the extent that they are owned and directed by Bahá'ís and strive to apply the Teachings and serve the purposes of the Cause, they may indeed be regarded as “Bahá'í.” In referring to these organizations, we must avoid giving the impression that participating in their projects does not constitute legitimate service to the Cause. Otherwise sincere and devoted believers will be discouraged from engaging in activities that are “Bahá'í” in nature...” -*The Universal House of Justice, 2 September 1993*

Oneness of Mankind as the Solution

“World order can be founded only on an unshakable consciousness of the oneness of mankind, a spiritual truth which all the human sciences confirm. Anthropology, physiology, psychology, recognize only one human species, albeit infinitely varied in the secondary aspects of life. Recognition of this truth requires abandonment of prejudice—prejudice of every kind—race, class, color, creed, nation, sex, degree of material civilization, everything which enables people to consider themselves superior to others.

Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind. Universal acceptance of this spiritual principle is essential to any successful attempt to establish world peace. It should therefore be universally proclaimed, taught in schools, and constantly asserted in every nation as preparation for the organic change in the structure of society which it implies.” -*The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

Peace and Unity

“Even though the establishment of the Lesser Peace is not dependent on any Bahá’í plan or action, and although it will not represent the ultimate goal humanity is destined to reach in the Golden Age, our community has a responsibility to lend spiritual impetus to the processes towards that peace. The need at this exact time is to so intensify our efforts in building the Bahá’í System that we will attract the confirmations of Bahá’u’lláh and thus invoke a spiritual atmosphere that will accrue to the quickening of these processes. Two main challenges face us: one is to mount a campaign of teaching in which the broad membership of our community is enthusiastically, systematically and personally engaged, and in which the activation of an extensive training program will ensure the development of a mass of human resources; the other is to complete the construction projects on Mount Carmel towards which every sacrifice must be made to provide a liberal outpouring of material means. These twin foci, if resolutely pursued, will foster conditions towards the release of pent-up forces that will forge a change in the direction of human affairs throughout the planet. However short the path to peace, it will be tortuous; however promising the anticipated event that will set its course, it must mature through a long period of evolution, with its attendant tests, setbacks and conflicts, towards the moment when it will have emerged, under the direct influences of God’s Faith, as the Most Great Peace. In the meantime, people everywhere will often face despair and bewilderment before arriving at an appreciation of the transition in progress. We who have been enlightened by the new Revelation have the sacred Word to assure us, a Divine Plan to guide us, a history of valor to encourage us. Let us therefore take heart not only from the Word we treasure, but also from the deeds of heroism and sacrifice which even today shine resplendent in the land in which our Cause was born.” *-The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1996“*

The power released by Bahá’u’lláh works at a quickening pace, speeding the processes of change which must usher in the new order He proclaimed. The declining state of society demonstrates it, the global yearning for new solutions to human problems confirms it. Much is at stake: the fortunes of humankind hang precariously in the balance. The Bahá’í community bears grave responsibilities toward the near and far future as movement towards the Lesser Peace accelerates. Now is the time for the friends to seize new opportunities to extend the range and influence of the Faith, to reach a new level of action in expanding the community and fortifying its foundations. It is indeed time for audacious action undeterred by a fear of mistakes, fired by the urgency of ministering to the pressing needs of humanity.” *-The Universal House of Justice, 19 May 1994*

“Disunity is the crux of the problems which so severely afflict the planet. It permeates attitudes in all departments of life. It is at the heart of all major conflicts between nations and peoples. More serious still, disunity is common in the relations between religions and within religions, vitiating the very

spiritual and moral influence which it is their primary purpose to exert.” *-The Universal House of Justice, 26 November 1992*

“The Great Peace towards which people of goodwill throughout the centuries have inclined their hearts, of which seers and poets for countless generations have expressed their vision, and for which from age to age the sacred scriptures of mankind have constantly held the promise, is now at long last within the reach of the nations. For the first time in history it is possible for everyone to view the entire planet, with all its myriad diversified peoples, in one perspective. World peace is not only possible but inevitable. It is the next stage in the evolution of this planet—in the words of one great thinker, “the planetization of mankind.”

Whether peace is to be reached only after unimaginable horrors precipitated by humanity’s stubborn clinging to old patterns of behavior, or is to be embraced now by an act of consultative will, is the choice before all who inhabit the earth. At this critical juncture when the intractable problems confronting nations have been fused into one common concern for the whole world, failure to stem the tide of conflict and disorder would be unconscionably irresponsible.” *-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

“As the need for peace becomes more urgent, this fundamental contradiction, which hinders its realization, demands a reassessment of the assumptions upon which the commonly held view of mankind’s historical predicament is based. Dispassionately examined, the evidence reveals that such conduct, far from expressing man’s true self, represents a distortion of the human spirit. Satisfaction on this point will enable all people to set in motion constructive social forces which, because they are consistent with human nature, will encourage harmony and cooperation instead of war and conflict.

To choose such a course is not to deny humanity’s past but to understand it. The Bahá’í Faith regards the current world confusion and calamitous condition in human affairs as a natural phase in an organic process leading ultimately and irresistibly to the unification of the human race in a single social order whose boundaries are those of the planet. The human race, as a distinct, organic unit, has passed through evolutionary stages analogous to the stages of infancy and childhood in the lives of its individual members, and is now in the culminating period of its turbulent adolescence approaching its long-awaited coming of age.

A candid acknowledgement that prejudice, war and exploitation have been the expression of immature stages in a vast historical process and that the human race is today experiencing the unavoidable tumult which marks its collective coming of age is not a reason for despair but a prerequisite to undertaking the stupendous enterprise of building a peaceful world. That such an enterprise is possible, that the necessary constructive forces do exist,

that unifying social structures can be erected, is the theme we urge you to examine.” *-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

“The increasing attention being focused on some of the most deep-rooted problems of the planet is yet another hopeful sign. Despite the obvious shortcomings of the United Nations, the more than two score declarations and conventions adopted by that organization, even where governments have not been enthusiastic in their commitment, have given ordinary people a sense of a new lease on life. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and the similar measures concerned with eliminating all forms of discrimination based on race, sex or religious belief; upholding the rights of the child; protecting all persons against being subjected to torture; eradicating hunger and malnutrition; using scientific and technological progress in the interest of peace and the benefit of mankind—all such measures, if courageously enforced and expanded, will advance the day when the specter of war will have lost its power to dominate international relations. There is no need to stress the significance of the issues addressed by these declarations and conventions. However, a few such issues, because of their immediate relevance to establishing world peace, deserve additional comment.” *-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

“Two points bear emphasizing in all these issues. One is that the abolition of war is not simply a matter of signing treaties and protocols; it is a complex task requiring a new level of commitment to resolving issues not customarily associated with the pursuit of peace. Based on political agreements alone, the idea of collective security is a chimera. The other point is that the primary challenge in dealing with issues of peace is to raise the context to the level of principle, as distinct from pure pragmatism. For, in essence, peace stems from an inner state supported by a spiritual or moral attitude, and it is chiefly in evoking this attitude that the possibility of enduring solutions can be found.” *-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

“The courage, the resolution, the pure motive, the selfless love of one people for another—all the spiritual and moral qualities required for effecting this momentous step towards peace are focused on the will to act. And it is towards arousing the necessary volition that earnest consideration must be given to the reality of man, namely, his thought. To understand the relevance of this potent reality is also to appreciate the social necessity of actualizing its unique value through candid, dispassionate and cordial consultation, and of acting upon the results of this process. ...

The very attempt to achieve peace through the consultative action he proposed can release such a salutary spirit among the peoples of the earth that no power could resist the final, triumphal outcome.” *-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

“The holding of this mighty convocation is long overdue.

With all the ardor of our hearts, we appeal to the leaders of all nations to seize this opportune moment and take irreversible steps to convoke this world meeting. All the forces of history impel the human race towards this act which will mark for all time the dawn of its long-awaited maturity.

Will not the United Nations, with the full support of its membership, rise to the high purposes of such a crowning event?

Let men and women, youth and children everywhere recognize the eternal merit of this imperative action for all peoples and lift up their voices in willing assent. Indeed, let it be this generation that inaugurates this glorious stage in the evolution of social life on the planet.” *-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

“The source of the optimism we feel is a vision transcending the cessation of war and the creation of agencies of international cooperation. Permanent peace among nations is an essential stage, but not, Bahá’u’lláh asserts, the ultimate goal of the social development of humanity. Beyond the initial armistice forced upon the world by the fear of nuclear holocaust, beyond the political peace reluctantly entered into by suspicious rival nations, beyond pragmatic arrangements for security and coexistence, beyond even the many experiments in cooperation which these steps will make possible lies the crowning goal: the unification of all the peoples of the world in one universal family.

Disunity is a danger that the nations and peoples of the earth can no longer endure; the consequences are too terrible to contemplate, too obvious to require any demonstration. “The well-being of mankind,” Bahá’u’lláh wrote more than a century ago, “its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.” In observing that “mankind is groaning, is dying to be led to unity, and to terminate its age-long martyrdom,” Shoghi Effendi further commented that: “Unification of the whole of mankind is the hallmark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life.”

All contemporary forces of change validate this view. The proofs can be discerned in the many examples already cited of the favorable signs towards world peace in current international movements and developments. The army of men and women, drawn from virtually every culture, race and nation on earth, who serve the multifarious agencies of the United Nations, represent a planetary “civil service” whose impressive accomplishments are indicative of the degree of cooperation that can be attained even under discouraging conditions. An urge towards unity, like a spiritual springtime, struggles to

express itself through countless international congresses that bring together people from a vast array of disciplines. It motivates appeals for international projects involving children and youth. Indeed, it is the real source of the remarkable movement towards ecumenism by which members of historically antagonistic religions and sects seem irresistibly drawn towards one another. Together with the opposing tendency to warfare and self-aggrandizement against which it ceaselessly struggles, the drive towards world unity is one of the dominant, pervasive features of life on the planet during the closing years of the twentieth century.

The experience of the Bahá'í community may be seen as an example of this enlarging unity. It is a community of some three to four million people drawn from many nations, cultures, classes and creeds, engaged in a wide range of activities serving the spiritual, social and economic needs of the peoples of many lands. It is a single social organism, representative of the diversity of the human family, conducting its affairs through a system of commonly accepted consultative principles, and cherishing equally all the great outpourings of divine guidance in human history. Its existence is yet another convincing proof of the practicality of its Founder's vision of a united world, another evidence that humanity can live as one global society, equal to whatever challenges its coming of age may entail. If the Bahá'í experience can contribute in whatever measure to reinforcing hope in the unity of the human race, we are happy to offer it as a model for study.

In contemplating the supreme importance of the task now challenging the entire world, we bow our heads in humility before the awesome majesty of the divine Creator, who out of His infinite love has created all humanity from the same stock; exalted the gemlike reality of man; honored it with intellect and wisdom, nobility and immortality; and conferred upon man the "unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him," a capacity that "must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation."

We hold firmly the conviction that all human beings have been created "to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization"; that "to act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man"; that the virtues that befit human dignity are trustworthiness, forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all peoples. We reaffirm the belief that 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." These are the motivations for our unshakable faith that unity and peace are the attainable goal towards which humanity is striving.

At this writing, the expectant voices of Bahá'ís can be heard despite the persecution they still endure in the land in which their Faith was born. By their example of steadfast hope, they bear witness to the belief that the imminent realization of this age-old dream of peace is now, by virtue of the transforming effects of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation, invested with the force of divine authority. Thus we convey to you not only a vision in words: we

summon the power of deeds of faith and sacrifice; we convey the anxious plea of our coreligionists everywhere for peace and unity. We join with all who are the victims of aggression, all who yearn for an end to conflict and contention, all whose devotion to principles of peace and world order promotes the ennobling purposes for which humanity was called into being by an all-loving Creator.

In the earnestness of our desire to impart to you the fervor of our hope and the depth of our confidence, we cite the emphatic promise of Bahá'u'lláh: "These fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come." -*The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

Purpose of Life

"Bahá'is believe that God has revealed the purpose of life, has shown us how to attain it, has provided the ways in which we can work together and, beyond that, has given mankind the assurance both of continuing divine guidance and of divine assistance. As people learn and follow these teachings their efforts will produce durable results. In the absence of these teachings, a lifetime of effort only too often ends in disillusionment and the collapse of all that has been built." -*The Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1982*

Science and Religion

"...that science and religion are two complementary systems of knowledge and practice by which human beings come to understand the world around them and through which civilization advances; that religion without science soon degenerates into superstition and fanaticism, while science without religion becomes the tool of crude materialism; that true prosperity, the fruit of a dynamic coherence between the material and spiritual requirements of life, will recede further and further out of reach as long as consumerism continues to act as opium to the human soul; that justice, as a faculty of the soul, enables the individual to distinguish truth from falsehood and guides the investigation of reality, so essential if superstitious beliefs and outworn traditions that impede unity are to be eliminated; that, when appropriately brought to bear on social issues, justice is the single most important instrument for the establishment of unity; that work performed in the spirit of service to one's fellow human beings is a form of prayer, a means of worshipping God." -*The Universal House of Justice, 2 March 2013*

Science and Technology

“The scientific and technological advances occurring in this unusually blessed century portend a great surge forward in the social evolution of the planet, and indicate the means by which the practical problems of humanity may be solved. They provide, indeed, the very means for the administration of the complex life of a united world. Yet barriers persist. Doubts, misconceptions, prejudices, suspicions and narrow self-interest beset nations and peoples in their relations one to another.” -*The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

Self-interest and Competition

“The stresses emerging out of the long-term process of transition from a divided world to a united one are being felt within international relations as much as in the deepening fractures that affect societies large and small. With prevailing modes of thought found to be badly wanting, the world is in desperate need of a shared ethic, a sure framework for addressing the crises that gather like storm clouds. The vision of Bahá’u’lláh challenges many of the assumptions that are allowed to shape contemporary discourse—for instance, that self-interest, far from needing to be restrained, drives prosperity, and that progress depends upon its expression through relentless competition.” - *The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017*

Social Actions and justice

“Social justice will be attained only when every member of society enjoys a relative degree of material prosperity and gives due regard to the acquisition of spiritual qualities. The solution, then, to prevailing economic difficulties is to be sought as much in the application of spiritual principles as in the implementation of scientific methods and approaches. The family unit offers an ideal setting within which can be shaped those moral attributes that contribute to an appropriate view of material wealth and its utilization.

Referring to the exigencies of the material world, Bahá’u’lláh has affirmed that to every end has been assigned a means for its accomplishment. A natural conclusion to be drawn from reflection on this fundamental principle is that

vigilance must be exercised in distinguishing “means” from “ends”; otherwise, what is intended as a mere instrument could easily become the very goal of an individual’s life. The acquisition of wealth is a case in point; it is acceptable and praiseworthy to the extent that it serves as a means for achieving higher ends—for meeting one’s basic necessities, for fostering the progress of one’s family, for promoting the welfare of society, and for contributing to the establishment of a world civilization. But to make the accumulation of wealth the central purpose of one’s life is unworthy of any human being.

An idea closely related to the above, and well in accord with the spirit of the Bahá’í teachings, is that the end does not serve to justify the means. However constructive and noble the goal, however significant to one’s life or to the welfare of one’s family, it must not be attained through improper means. Regrettably, a number of today’s leaders—political, social, and religious—as well as some of the directors of financial markets, executives of multinational corporations, chiefs of commerce and industry, and ordinary people who succumb to social pressure and ignore the call of their conscience, act against this principle; they justify any means in order to achieve their goals.” *-The Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010*

“Many would readily acknowledge that the acquisition of wealth should be governed by the requirements of justice, which, as a principle, can be expressed to varying degrees, on different levels. An employer and employee, for example, are bound by the laws and conventions that regulate their work, and each is expected to carry out his or her responsibilities with honesty and integrity. At another level, however, if the deeper implications of justice are to be realized, the other two preconditions to the legitimate acquisition of wealth mentioned above must be taken into account, and prevailing norms reassessed in their light. Here, the relationship between minimum wage and the cost of living merits careful evaluation—this, especially in light of the contribution workers make to a company’s success and their entitlement, as noted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, to a fair share of the profits. The wide margin, often unjustifiable, between the production costs of certain goods and the price at which they are sold likewise requires attention, as does the question of the generation of wealth through measures that “enrich the generality of the people”. What such reflection and inquiry will no doubt make abundantly clear is that certain approaches to obtaining wealth—so many of which involve the exploitation of others, the monopolization and manipulation of markets, and the production of goods that promote violence and immorality—are unworthy and unacceptable.” *-The Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010*

“Injustice is rife. Throughout the world it afflicts every department of life whether in the home, at the workplace, or in the public sphere as a consequence of the ill conduct of individuals, groups, or governments. Lamenting the horrors it breeds, Bahá’u’lláh made this poignant remark: “Justice is, in this day, bewailing its plight, and Equity groaneth beneath the yoke of oppression. The thick clouds of tyranny have darkened the face of the earth, and enveloped its peoples.” *-The Universal House of Justice, 21 December 2006*

“...Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablets to the kings and rulers of the world, has come as a propitious reminder of the dire consequences of ignoring His warnings against injustice, tyranny and corruption. The violent shocks being inflicted on the consciousness of people everywhere emphasize the urgency of the remedy He has prescribed. We, the scattered bands of His loyal servants, have thus come again to a time of irresistible opportunities—opportunities to teach His Cause, to build up His wondrous System, to provide sacrificially the urgently needed material means on which the progress and execution of spiritual activities inevitably depend.” *-The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2002*

“A time of challenge for the stalwart upholders of the Cause of God has now come upon us at the very moment when the world is grappling with tremendous problems, moral, social, economic and ecological. The Bahá’í community has grown in size and influence to the point where it is put to the test on all sides and at all levels. The opportunities are immense but we now face the question of whether to push forward with all speed, or to hold back because the resources available to us are inadequate for the purpose.” *-The Universal House of Justice, 18 November 1991*

“The House of Justice feels that the task before the Bahá’ís is to prepare the ground for the transition from the present system of national sovereignty to a system of world government. This requires a number of related activities which have been indicated in the goals of previous and present Plans of the community based on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablets of the Divine Plan. The activities which will indirectly prepare the world to make the final stride include the following.” *-The Universal House of Justice, Department of the Secretariat, 10 March 1987*

“With the entrenchment of this view, a paralyzing contradiction has developed in human affairs. On the one hand, people of all nations proclaim not only their readiness but their longing for peace and harmony, for an end to the harrowing apprehensions tormenting their daily lives. On the other, uncritical assent is given to the proposition that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive and thus incapable of erecting a social system at once progressive and peaceful, dynamic and harmonious, a system giving free play to individual creativity and initiative but based on cooperation and reciprocity.” *-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

“Is it not an evidence of the justice of God that each of us, whether materially comfortable or struggling for physical survival, is assessed in terms of the efforts we have made to seize whatever opportunities existed in our lives, to develop and use our allotted talent, be it large or small? “Each shall receive his share from thy Lord,” is Bahá’u’lláh’s assurance. Thus, if we bestir ourselves, we will all have access to the rewards of this life and the next.” *-The Universal House of Justice, 14 March 1985*

“The Faith of God is the sole source of salvation for mankind today. The true cause of the ills of humanity is its disunity. No matter how perfect may be the machinery devised by the leaders of men for the political unity of the world, it

will still not provide the antidote to the poison sapping the vigor of present-day society. These ills can be cured only through the instrumentality of God's Faith. There are many well-wishers of mankind who devote their efforts to relief work and charity and to the material well-being of man, but only Bahá'ís can do the work which God most wants done. When we devote ourselves to the work of the Faith we are doing a work which is the greatest aid and only refuge for a needy and divided world." -The Universal House of Justice, 8 February 1970

Social and Economic Development

"Eventually the strength of the institute process in the village, and the enhanced capabilities it has fostered in individuals, may enable the friends to take advantage of methods and programmes of proven effectiveness, which have been developed by one or another Bahá'í-inspired organization and which have been introduced into the cluster at the suggestion of, and with support from, our Office of Social and Economic Development." -The Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010

"The Bahá'í world community will expand its endeavors in both social and economic development and external affairs, and thus continue to collaborate directly with the forces leading towards the establishment of order in the world. By improving its coordinating capacity, the Office of Social and Economic Development will assist in building, as resources and opportunity permit, on the progress already made with hundreds of development projects around the world. In the arena of external affairs, efforts will be aimed at influencing the processes towards world peace, particularly through the community's involvement in the promotion of human rights, the status of women, global prosperity, and moral development. In the pursuit of these themes, the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office will seek ways to reinforce the ties between the Bahá'ís and the United Nations. Similarly, the Office of Public Information will assist the Bahá'í institutions to utilize these themes towards greater proclamation of the Faith. Defense of the rights of the Bahá'ís in Iran and increased efforts to emancipate the Faith in that country and other countries where it is proscribed will constitute a vital part of our dealings with governments and nongovernmental organizations. In all such respects the Bahá'í friends and institutions are urged to be alert to the importance of activities in external affairs and to give renewed attention to them." -The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1996

"No occasion has more sharply conveyed this melancholy outlook than the recent World Summit for Social Development, the latest in a series of international gatherings of world leaders called by the United Nations. But however little may be the immediate influence of such events on the policies of governments, however much the vast majority of the world's population may

disregard or be unaware of them, their successive occurrence indicates to any Bahá'í observer a gradual movement towards the ultimate fulfillment of the will of Bahá'u'lláh that the rulers of nations meet to consult and decide on the outstanding issues confronting an increasingly global society.” -*The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1995*

“... Bahá'í projects of social and economic development have greatly multiplied and brought much credit to the community in the examples of the power of group initiative and voluntary consultative action that have been set in numerous places. Activities in this respect involved more than one thousand projects in the areas of education, agriculture, health, literacy, the environment and improvement of the status of women. In a number of instances the projects benefited from collaboration with or assistance from governments and international nongovernmental organizations, as, for example, the projects for the improvement of the status of women undertaken by five National Spiritual Assemblies with the financial assistance of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and those projects in other fields receiving assistance from the Canadian, Indian, German and Norwegian governments. Some projects have been so distinguished in their achievements as to be given public notice through the citations and awards of governments and international nongovernmental agencies.” -*The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1992*

“The application and development of the social aspects of the Teachings is dependent on the stage of growth of the Bahá'í community in each area, and on worldwide priorities. We are living in an age of transition, and as ‘Abdu'l-Bahá explained, we must, in order to succeed in our aims, sacrifice the important for the most important. The House of Justice, for example, had to turn down the request of certain believers to establish Bahá'í schools in a Western country which already had a functioning state educational system; those Bahá'í funds which are available for educational projects must be spent on the establishment and running of schools in areas where there are large Bahá'í communities of poor people, with no adequate system of education available to them. In its answer, the House of Justice pointed out that if these friends, on their own initiative, wished to establish their own school, run on Bahá'í lines, and financially self-supporting, they were entirely free to do so. This highlights an aspect of the matter which is often overlooked. The social services of Bahá'ís are not restricted to what they do as a community. Every Bahá'í has a duty to work and earn his living, and in choosing a career a Bahá'í should consider not only its earning capacity but also the benefit of the work to his fellowmen. All over the world Bahá'ís are rendering outstanding services in this way.

When a Bahá'í community is very small, there is little that it can do to implement the social teachings of the Faith (beyond their impact on the behavior of individual believers), because such a community with the resources in funds and manpower at its disposal is but a drop in the ocean in comparison with the many large agencies, governmental and private, which are engaged in social improvement. When the Bahá'í community grows sufficiently large, however, its activities can and must proliferate and

diversify. This development is already taking place in many parts of the world. In India, for example, the New Era School in Panchgani, which has been developing remarkably for a number of years, is closely associated with a rural development project in the villages close by that is having dramatically favorable results in the life of the villagers. In the province of Madhya Pradesh, where there are hundreds of thousands of Bahá'ís, the Rabbani School in Gwalior is educating children from the villages of the area in the Teachings of the Faith, in academic subjects and in agriculture, so that when they return to their home villages, these pupils not only promote the Faith but will influence their growth and development in every way. In Ecuador, as you no doubt know, the size of the Bahá'í community, scattered over inaccessible terrain in the high Andes, made it both necessary and possible some years ago to establish a Bahá'í radio station. "Radio Bahá'í," as it is known, broadcasts not only about the Faith, but has programs concerning health, agriculture, literacy and so on. It has now become so well established and highly regarded that it has been able to apply for and receive a Canadian Government grant through C.I.D.A to finance the development of certain social service activities. Thus it can be seen that once the Bahá'í community attains a certain stature it is able to work in fruitful collaboration with non-Bahá'í agencies in its social activities.

A further aspect of this kind of work is the collaboration between the Bahá'í International Community and the United Nations. Having consultative status with both ECOSOC and UNICEF, and long association with the Department of Public Information, the Bahá'í International Community is able to take part in conferences and consultations on many aspects of human development, both from the point of view of the Bahá'í Teachings and with the background of its extensive experience in meeting the problems of developing countries, such as illiteracy, the status of women, tribalism, racial prejudice, and so on." *-The Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1982*

"One could say, however, that the Bahá'í communities could assist in social development from a very early stage in their development by supporting the activities of other groups who are, at this point, more numerous and powerful. To some extent this is true, provided that such involvement does not divert the efforts of the friends from the more fundamentally important teaching work or involve them in the disputes of non-Bahá'í rival groups." *-The Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1982*

Sufferings in the World

"The world is clearly beset by ills and is groaning under the burden of appalling suffering. The trials of the innocent are indeed heartrending and constitute a mystery that the mind of man cannot fathom. Even the Prophets of God Themselves have borne Their share of grievous afflictions in every age.

Yet in spite of the evidence of all this suffering, God's Manifestations, Whose lives and wisdom show Them to have been far above human beings in understanding, unitedly bear testimony to the justice, love and mercy of God.

To understand the condition of the world it is necessary to step back, so to speak, to gain a clearer view of the panorama of God's great redemptive Major Plan, which is shaping the destiny of mankind according to the operation of the divine Will. It should not be surmised that the calamitous events transpiring in all corners of the globe are random and lack purpose, though individually they may be difficult to comprehend. According to the words of our beloved Guardian: "The invisible hand is at work and the convulsions taking place on earth are a prelude to the proclamation of the Cause of God." We can confidently anticipate therefore, the arrival of the "new life-giving spring" once the destructive icy blasts of winter's tempests have run their course.

As Bahá'ís, we know that the "sovereign remedy" for each and every one of these ills lies in turning and submitting to the "skilled," the "all-powerful" and "inspired Physician." Bahá'u'lláh has assured us in His writings that God has not forsaken us. He is the All-Seeing and All-Knowing, the "prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God" to those who turn to Him in supplication, and He intervenes actively in human history by sending His Manifestations, Sources of knowledge and spiritual truth to "liberate the children of men from the darkness of ignorance" and to "ensure the peace and tranquillity of mankind." In this Age, God has determined to establish His everlasting Kingdom among men, and so, to this end, He sent us the spirit and message of the New Day through two successive Manifestations, Who alas, were rejected by the generality of people.

When we contemplate the fate of mankind, it is important to reflect on the very complex arena in which man plays out the drama of his existence. There are a number of elements involved. For example, man is a spiritual being located within the material creation; hence he is subjected to opposing forces, and has to live in accordance with values which refer to two worlds, the material world with all its imperfections and the spiritual world with its perfections. Tension derives from the fact that "In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone." Man's actions then have both a material and spiritual consequence. While the material effect of his actions is usually clearly perceptible, their spiritual effect can only be determined by reference to spiritual principles revealed by the Manifestation of God. Suffering and trials, sent by God to test and perfect His creatures, are another integral part of life. They contain the potential for man's progress or retrogression, depending on the individual's response."-*The Universal House of Justice, 14 March 1985*

Wealth and Poverty

“To view the worth of an individual chiefly in terms of how much one can accumulate and how many goods one can consume relative to others is wholly alien to Bahá’í thought. But neither are the teachings in sympathy with sweeping dismissals of wealth as inherently distasteful or immoral, and asceticism is prohibited. Wealth must serve humanity. Its use must accord with spiritual principles; systems must be created in their light.”- *The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017*

“...Beloved Friends: The extremes of wealth and poverty in the world are becoming ever more untenable. As inequity persists, so the established order is seen to be unsure of itself, and its values are being questioned. Whatever the tribulations that a conflicted world must confront in the future, we pray that the Almighty will help His loved ones to overcome every obstacle in their path and assist them to serve humanity. The larger the presence of a Bahá’í community in a population, the greater its responsibility to find ways of addressing the root causes of the poverty in its surroundings. Although the friends are at the early stages of learning about such work and of contributing to the related discourses, the community-building process of the Five Year Plan is creating everywhere the ideal environment in which to accrue knowledge and experience, gradually but consistently, about the higher purpose of economic activity. Against the background of the age-long work of erecting a divine civilization, may this exploration become a more pronounced feature of community life, institutional thought, and individual action in the years ahead.” - *The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017*

“The legitimacy of wealth depends, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has indicated, on how it is acquired and on how it is expended. In this connection, He has stated that “wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual’s own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, crafts and industry”, if the measures adopted by the individual in generating wealth serve to “enrich the generality of the people”, and if the wealth thus obtained is expended for “philanthropic purposes” and “the promotion of knowledge”, for the establishment of schools and industry and the advancement of education, and in general for the welfare of society.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010*

“In your letter of 11 September you say that the questions of how to help the Third World or the poor who are suffering under calamities are much discussed in your community and you wish to know whether to create a special fund for such needs, to ask for special contributions from time to time, or whether there are other ways in which you could help.

It is understandable that Bahá’ís who witness the miserable conditions under which so many human beings have to live, or who hear of a sudden disaster that has struck a certain area of the world, are moved to do something practical to ameliorate those conditions and to help their suffering fellow-mortals.

There are many ways in which help can be rendered. Every Bahá'í has the duty to acquire a trade or profession through which he will earn that wherewith he can support himself and his family; in the choice of such work he can seek those activities which are of benefit to his fellowmen and not merely those which promote his personal interests, still less those whose effects are actually harmful.

There are also the situations in which an individual Bahá'í or a Spiritual Assembly is confronted with an urgent need which neither justice nor compassion could allow to go unheeded and unhelped. How many are the stories told of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in such situations, when He would even take off a garment He was wearing and give it to a shivering man in rags.

But in our concern for such immediate obvious calls upon our succor we must not allow ourselves to forget the continuing, appalling burden of suffering under which millions of human beings are always groaning—a burden which they have borne for century upon century and which it is the mission of Bahá'u'lláh to lift at last. The principal cause of this suffering, which one can witness wherever one turns, is the corruption of human morals and the prevalence of prejudice, suspicion, hatred, untrustworthiness, selfishness and tyranny among men. It is not merely material well-being that people need. What they desperately need is to know how to live their lives—they need to know who they are, to what purpose they exist, and how they should act towards one another; and, once they know the answers to these questions they need to be helped to gradually apply these answers to everyday behavior. It is to the solution of this basic problem of mankind that the greater part of all our energy and resources should be directed. There are mighty agencies in this world, governments, foundations, institutions of many kinds with tremendous financial resources which are working to improve the material lot of human beings. Anything we Bahá'ís could add to such resources in the way of special funds or contributions would be a negligible drop in the ocean. However, alone among men we have the divinely given remedy for the real ills of mankind; no one else is doing or can do this most important work, and if we divert our energy and our funds into fields in which others are already doing more than we can hope to do, we shall be delaying the diffusion of the Divine Message which is the most important task of all.

Because of such an attitude, and also because of our refusal to become involved in politics, Bahá'ís are often accused of holding aloof from the “real problems” of their fellowmen. But when we hear this accusation let us not forget that those who make it are usually idealistic materialists to whom material good is the only “real” good, whereas we know that the working of the material world is merely a reflection of spiritual conditions and until the spiritual conditions can be changed there can be no lasting change for the better in material affairs.

We should also remember that most people have no clear concept of the sort of world they wish to build, nor how to go about building it. Even those who are concerned to improve conditions are therefore reduced to combating

every apparent evil that takes their attention. Willingness to fight against evils, whether in the form of conditions or embodied in evil men, has thus become for most people the touchstone by which they judge a person's moral worth. Bahá'ís, on the other hand, know the goal they are working towards and know what they must do, step by step, to attain it. Their whole energy is directed towards the building of the good, a good which has such a positive strength that in the face of it the multitude of evils—which are in essence negative—will fade away and be no more. To enter into the quixotic tournament of demolishing one by one the evils in the world is, to a Bahá'í, a vain waste of time and effort. His whole life is directed towards proclaiming the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, reviving the spiritual life of his fellowmen, uniting them in a divinely created World Order, and then, as the Order grows in strength and influence, he will see the power of that Message transforming the whole human society and progressively solving the problems and removing the injustices which have so long bedeviled the world.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 19 November 1974*

“With regard to the harmony of science and religion, the Writings of the Central Figures and the commentaries of the Guardian make abundantly clear that the task of humanity, including the Bahá'í community that serves as the “leaven” within it, is to create a global civilization which embodies both the spiritual and material dimensions of existence. The nature and scope of such a civilization are still beyond anything the present generation can conceive. The prosecution of this vast enterprise will depend on a progressive interaction between the truths and principles of religion and the discoveries and insights of scientific inquiry. This entails living with ambiguities as a natural and inescapable feature of the process of exploring reality. It also requires us not to limit science to any particular school of thought or methodological approach postulated in the course of its development. The challenge facing Bahá'í thinkers is to provide responsible leadership in this endeavor, since it is they who have both the priceless insights of the Revelation and the advantages conferred by scientific investigation.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 19 May 1995*

“In the wake of such horrendous disruptions, there have been unexampled advances in the realms of science, technology and social organization; a veritable explosion of knowledge; and an even more remarkable burgeoning in the awakening and rise of masses of humanity which were previously presumed to be dormant. These masses are claiming their rightful places within the community of nations which has greatly expanded. With the simultaneous development of communications at the speed of light and transportation at the speed of sound, the world has contracted into a mere neighborhood in which people are instantly aware of each other's affairs and have immediate access to each other. And yet, even with such miraculous advances, with the emergence of international organizations, and with valiant attempts and brilliant successes at international cooperation, nations are at woeful odds with one another, people are convulsed by economic upheavals, races feel more alienated than before and are filled with mistrust, humiliation and fear.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 26 November 1992*

World Crisis

“Flaws in the prevailing order are conspicuous in the inability of sovereign states organized as United Nations to exorcise the specter of war, the threatened collapse of the international economic order, the spread of anarchy and terrorism, and the intense suffering which these and other afflictions are causing to increasing millions. Indeed, so much have aggression and conflict come to characterize our social, economic and religious systems, that many have succumbed to the view that such behavior is intrinsic to human nature and therefore ineradicable.” -*The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

“However vital a force religion has been in the history of mankind, and however dramatic the current resurgence of militant religious fanaticism, religion and religious institutions have, for many decades, been viewed by increasing numbers of people as irrelevant to the major concerns of the modern world. In its place they have turned either to the hedonistic pursuit of material satisfactions or to the following of man-made ideologies designed to rescue society from the evident evils under which it groans. All too many of these ideologies, alas, instead of embracing the concept of the oneness of mankind and promoting the increase of concord among different peoples, have tended to deify the state, to subordinate the rest of mankind to one nation, race or class, to attempt to suppress all discussion and interchange of ideas, or to callously abandon starving millions to the operations of a market system that all too clearly is aggravating the plight of the majority of mankind, while enabling small sections to live in a condition of affluence scarcely dreamed of by our forebears.” -*The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

“Every discerning eye clearly sees that the early stages of this chaos have daily manifestations affecting the structure of human society; its destructive forces are uprooting time-honored institutions which were a haven and refuge for the inhabitants of the earth in bygone days and centuries, and around which revolved all human affairs. The same destructive forces are also deranging the political, economic, scientific, literary, and moral equilibrium of the world and are destroying the fairest fruits of the present civilization. Political machinations of those in authority have placed the seal of obsolescence upon the root principles of the world’s order. Greed and passion, deceit, hypocrisy, tyranny, and pride are dominating features afflicting human relations. Discoveries and inventions, which are the fruit of scientific and technological advancements, have become the means and tools of mass extermination and destruction and are in the hands of the ungodly. Even music, art, and literature, which are to represent and inspire the noblest sentiments and highest aspirations and should be a source of comfort and tranquillity for troubled souls, have strayed from the straight path and are now the mirrors of the soiled hearts of this confused, unprincipled, and disordered age.

Perversions such as these shall result in the ordeals which have been prophesied by the Blessed Beauty in the following words: "... the earth will be tormented by a fresh calamity every day and unprecedented commotions will break out." "The day is approaching when its [civilization's] flame will devour the cities." -*The Universal House of Justice, 10 February 1980*

"Among the many evidences which reveal this process may be cited, on the one hand, the continual increase of lawlessness, terrorism, economic confusion, immorality and the growing danger from the proliferation of weapons of destruction, and on the other, the worldwide, divinely propelled expansion, consolidation and rapid emergence into the limelight of world affairs of the Cause itself, ..." -*The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1983*

a. Racism

"Racism, one of the most baneful and persistent evils, is a major barrier to peace. Its practice perpetrates too outrageous a violation of the dignity of human beings to be countenanced under any pretext. Racism retards the unfoldment of the boundless potentialities of its victims, corrupts its perpetrators, and blights human progress. Recognition of the oneness of mankind, implemented by appropriate legal measures, must be universally upheld if this problem is to be overcome." -*The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

b. Nationalism

"Unbridled nationalism, as distinguished from a sane and legitimate patriotism, must give way to a wider loyalty, to the love of humanity as a whole. Bahá'u'lláh's statement is: "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens." The concept of world citizenship is a direct result of the contraction of the world into a single neighborhood through scientific advances and of the indisputable interdependence of nations. Love of all the world's peoples does not exclude love of one's country. The advantage of the part in a world society is best served by promoting the advantage of the whole. Current international activities in various fields which nurture mutual affection and a sense of solidarity among peoples need greatly to be increased." -*The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

c. Religious Strife

"Religious strife, throughout history, has been the cause of innumerable wars and conflicts, a major blight to progress, and is increasingly abhorrent to the

people of all faiths and no faith. Followers of all religions must be willing to face the basic questions which this strife raises, and to arrive at clear answers. How are the differences between them to be resolved, both in theory and in practice? The challenge facing the religious leaders of mankind is to contemplate, with hearts filled with the spirit of compassion and a desire for truth, the plight of humanity, and to ask themselves whether they cannot, in humility before their Almighty Creator, submerge their theological differences in a great spirit of mutual forbearance that will enable them to work together for the advancement of human understanding and peace.” -*The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

d. Weapons of Mass Destruction

“Banning nuclear weapons, prohibiting the use of poison gases, or outlawing germ warfare will not remove the root causes of war. However important such practical measures obviously are as elements of the peace process, they are in themselves too superficial to exert enduring influence. Peoples are ingenious enough to invent yet other forms of warfare, and to use food, raw materials, finance, industrial power, ideology, and terrorism to subvert one another in an endless quest for supremacy and dominion. Nor can the present massive dislocation in the affairs of humanity be resolved through the settlement of specific conflicts or disagreements among nations. A genuine universal framework must be adopted.” -*The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

e. Inequality of Man and Women

“The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world’s population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavor will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge.” -*The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

World Order

“The second fundamental principle which enables us to understand the pattern towards which Bahá’u’lláh wishes human society to evolve is the principle of organic growth which requires that detailed developments, and

the understanding of detailed developments, become available only with the passage of time and with the help of the guidance given by that Central Authority in the Cause to whom all must turn. In this regard one can use the simile of a tree. If a farmer plants a tree, he cannot state at that moment what its exact height will be, the number of its branches or the exact time of its blossoming. He can, however, give a general impression of its size and pattern of growth and can state with confidence which fruit it will bear. The same is true of the evolution of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 27 April 1995*

“In striving to attain a “clearer and fuller understanding” of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, we need to contemplate the operation of the Bahá'í principles of governance and social responsibility as they persist through changing sets of conditions, from the present time when the Bahá'í community constitutes a small number of people living in a variety of overwhelmingly non-Bahá'í societies, to the far different situation in future centuries when the Bahá'ís are becoming, and eventually have become, the vast majority of the people.

The Administrative Order is certainly the nucleus and pattern of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, but it is in embryonic form, and must undergo major evolutionary developments in the course of time. Certain passages in the writings on this subject establish matters of principle, certain ones describe the ultimate goal of the Most Great Peace, and certain of them relate to stages of development on the way to the attainment of that goal.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 27 April 1995*

“In answer to those who raise objections to this vision of a worldwide commonwealth inspired by a Divine Revelation, fearing for the freedom of minority groups or of the individual under such a system, we can explain the Bahá'í principle of upholding the rights of minorities and fostering their interests. We can also point to the fact that no person is ever compelled to accept the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh and moreover, unlike the situation in certain other religions, each person has complete freedom to withdraw from the Faith if he decides that he no longer believes in its Founder or accepts His Teachings. In light of these facts alone it is evident that the growth of the Bahá'í communities to the size where a non-Bahá'í state would adopt the Faith as the State Religion, let alone to the point at which the State would accept the Law of God as its own law and the National House of Justice as its legislature, must be a supremely voluntary and democratic process.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 27 April 1995*

“One of the major concerns of the Universal House of Justice, as the Bahá'í Administrative Order unfolds, will be to ensure that it evolves in consonance with the spirit of the Bahá'í Revelation. While many beneficial aspects of human society at large can be safely incorporated into Bahá'í Administration, the House of Justice will guard against the corrupting influence of those non-Bahá'í political and social concepts and practices which are not in harmony with the divine standard.

The House of Justice appreciates your concern about such a fundamental issue, and asks us to assure you of its prayers in the Holy Shrines for the confirmation of your services to the Cause of God.” -*The Universal House of Justice, 27 April 1995*

“Among the favorable signs are the steadily growing strength of the steps towards world order taken initially near the beginning of this century in the creation of the League of Nations, succeeded by the more broadly based United Nations Organization; the achievement since the Second World War of independence by the majority of all the nations on earth, indicating the completion of the process of nation building, and the involvement of these fledgling nations with older ones in matters of mutual concern; the consequent vast increase in cooperation among hitherto isolated and antagonistic peoples and groups in international undertakings in the scientific, educational, legal, economic and cultural fields; the rise in recent decades of an unprecedented number of international humanitarian organizations; the spread of women’s and youth movements calling for an end to war; and the spontaneous spawning of widening networks of ordinary people seeking understanding through personal communication.” -*The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

“There is, however, a paralysis of will; and it is this that must be carefully examined and resolutely dealt with. This paralysis is rooted, as we have stated, in a deep-seated conviction of the inevitable quarrelsomeness of mankind, which has led to the reluctance to entertain the possibility of subordinating national self-interest to the requirements of world order, and in an unwillingness to face courageously the far-reaching implications of establishing a united world authority. It is also traceable to the incapacity of largely ignorant and subjugated masses to articulate their desire for a new order in which they can live in peace, harmony and prosperity with all humanity.

The tentative steps towards world order, especially since World War II, give hopeful signs. The increasing tendency of groups of nations to formalize relationships which enable them to cooperate in matters of mutual interest suggests that eventually all nations could overcome this paralysis. The Association of South East Asian Nations, the Caribbean Community and Common Market, the Central American Common Market, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, the European Communities, the League of Arab States, the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of American States, the South Pacific Forum—all the joint endeavors represented by such organizations prepare the path to world order.” -*The Universal House of Justice, October 1985*

“We have no doubt that the Bahá’í world community will accomplish all these tasks and go forward to new achievements. The powers released by Bahá’u’lláh match the needs of the times. We may therefore be utterly confident that the new throb of energy now vibrating throughout the Cause will empower it to meet the oncoming challenges of assisting, as maturity and

resources allow, the development of the social and economic life of peoples, of collaborating with the forces leading towards the establishment of order in the world, of influencing the exploitation and constructive uses of modern technology, and in all these ways enhancing the prestige and progress of the Faith and uplifting the conditions of the generality of mankind.” -*The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1983*

Appendix

This document prepared by the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre approved by the Universal House of Justice and is related to the subject of economic activities. It is an important document that I had to add it to this compilation.

The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

26 November 2012

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Enclosed is a statement prepared by the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre on the subject of social action, which has been approved by the Universal House of Justice for distribution. We have been asked to provide you with a copy and to commend it to your study. As you will see, the statement offers a brief overview of the involvement of the Bahá'í community in the area of social and economic development, placing it in the context of current activity at the level of the cluster. In this connection, the House of Justice has requested us to make clear that the distribution of the document should not be seen as a call for widespread action in this area; it is intended as an instrument to raise further consciousness about the nature of social action and some of the methods it employs. The opening paragraph of the statement sets out the conditions, as explained by the House of Justice, that make engagement in this sphere of endeavour propitious.

You are encouraged to share the document with those friends and agencies in your communities you feel would do well to become acquainted with its content. For your information, the International Teaching Centre, at the request of the House of Justice, will be advising the Continental Counsellors to provide the statement to all members of the Auxiliary Boards for the Propagation and Protection of the Faith, that they might study it thoroughly and stand ready to lend the necessary assistance to the friends in clusters where the institute process is strong and human resources adequately abundant to support activity in this arena.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

SOCIAL ACTION

A paper prepared by the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre

26 November 2012

In its Ridván 2010 message, the Universal House of Justice called on the Bahá'ís of the world to reflect on the contributions that their growing, vibrant communities will make to the material and spiritual progress of society. In this connection, the House of Justice made reference to the process of community building set in motion in so many clusters across the globe by the core activities associated with the current series of global Plans. “A rich tapestry of community life”, it was noted, “begins to emerge in every cluster as acts of communal worship, interspersed with discussions undertaken in the intimate setting of the home, are woven together with activities that provide spiritual education to all members of the population—adults, youth and children.” “Social consciousness is heightened naturally as, for example,” the message went on to explain, “lively conversations proliferate among parents regarding the aspirations of their children and service projects spring up at the initiative of junior youth.” The House of Justice then made the following statement: “Once human resources in a cluster are in sufficient abundance, and the pattern of growth firmly established, the community’s engagement with society can, and indeed must, increase.” Later in the same message, the House of Justice defined the sphere of social action in these terms:

Most appropriately conceived in terms of a spectrum, social action can range from fairly informal efforts of limited duration undertaken by individuals or small groups of friends to programmes of social and economic development with a high level of complexity and sophistication implemented by Bahá'í-inspired organizations. Irrespective of its scope and scale, all social action seeks to apply the teachings and principles of the Faith to improve some aspect of the social or economic life of a population, however modestly.

To contribute to discussions under way at all levels of the Bahá'í community about the nature of its involvement in social action, we have prepared this paper on the basis of experience gained over the years in the area of social and economic development. The insights presented are drawn from relatively complex development endeavours, yet they shed light on the character of initiatives across the entire spectrum, as all instances of social action, irrespective of size, rely on a shared set of concepts, principles, methods, and approaches.

I. The Bahá'í world's involvement in social and economic development

The endeavours of the worldwide Bahá'í community can be seen in terms of a number of interacting processes—the spiritual enrichment of the individual, the development of local and national communities, the maturation of administrative institutions, to mention but a few—which trace their origins back to the time of Bahá'u'lláh Himself and which gathered strength during the ministries of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. Under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, these processes have continued to advance steadily: the scope of their influence has gradually been extended and new dimensions added to their operation. Social and economic development is among them. This particular process, pursued most notably through a variety of educational activities down the years, received considerable impetus in 1983, when the House of Justice, in a message dated 20 October, asked for “systematic attention” to be given to this area of activity following the rapid expansion of the Bahá'í community during the 1970s.

The 1983 message emphasized that progress in the development field would depend largely on natural stirrings at the grassroots of the community. It also announced the establishment of the Office of Social and Economic Development (OSED) at the Bahá'í World Centre to “promote and coordinate the activities of the friends” in this field. Bahá'ís in every continent sought to respond to the call raised in the message in a number of ways, and the ensuing ten years constituted a period of experimentation, characterized simultaneously by enthusiasm and hesitation, thoughtful planning and haphazard action, achievements and setbacks. While most projects found it difficult to escape the patterns of development practice prevalent in the world, some offered glimpses of promising paradigms of action. From this initial decade of diverse activity, then, the Bahá'í community emerged with the pursuit of social and economic development firmly established as a feature of its organic life and with enhanced capacity to forge over time a distinctly Bahá'í approach.

In September 1993, the document “Bahá'í Social and Economic Development: Prospects for the Future”, prepared at the World Centre, was approved by the Universal House of Justice for use by OSED in orienting and guiding the work in this area. It set the stage for the next ten years of activity and beyond. Drawing on the significant body of experience that had accumulated over the preceding decade, the document elaborated several features common to all such efforts. Awareness worldwide of the nature of Bahá'í social and economic development grew significantly during this period as a result, and a highly consistent, much more systematic approach began to take shape. The vision that emerged at the time called for the promotion of development activities at different levels of complexity. Most central to this vision was the question of capacity building. That activities should start on a modest scale and only grow in complexity in keeping with available human resources was a concept that gradually came to influence development thought and practice.

In 2001, the Universal House of Justice introduced to the Bahá'í world the concept of a cluster—a geographic construct, generally defined as a group of villages or as a city with its surrounding suburbs, intended to assist in planning and

implementing activities associated with community life. This step was made possible by the establishment of training institutes at the national and regional levels during the 1990s, which employed a system of distance education to reach large numbers with a sequence of courses designed to increase capacity for service. The House of Justice encouraged the Bahá'í world to extend this system progressively to more and more clusters in order to promote their steady progress, laying first the strong spiritual foundations upon which a vibrant community life is built. Efforts in a cluster were initially to focus on the multiplication of certain core activities, open to all of the inhabitants, but with a view to developing the collective capacity needed to address in due time various aspects of the social and economic life of the population as well.

In the decade that followed, then, social action would increasingly come to be conceived within the context of the cluster. The conception of grassroots social action that began to emerge was thus able to assume a much more pronounced collective dimension than had been previously articulated. During the same period, notable progress was also being made by OSED in its attempts to help systematize the experience of especially promising programmes and to learn about structures and methods required to enable communities around the world not only to benefit from them but to contribute to their further advancement. Today, in the establishment of continental and subcontinental offices—each serving either a network of sites for the dissemination of learning about the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme or a group of Bahá'í-inspired organizations dedicated to the promotion of some other educational programme—can be seen the first fruits of OSED's efforts to raise up structures across the globe to enhance collective capacity for this purpose. Underscoring the importance of what has been achieved so far, the Universal House of Justice wrote in its message dated 28 December 2010:

Eventually the strength of the institute process in the village, and the enhanced capabilities it has fostered in individuals, may enable the friends to take advantage of methods and programmes of proven effectiveness, which have been developed by one or another Bahá'í-inspired organization and which have been introduced into the cluster at the suggestion of, and with support from, our Office of Social and Economic Development.

Accomplishments over the past three decades in the area of social and economic development, then, combined with the consistent rise in human resources in clusters everywhere, have brought the Bahá'í world to a new stage in its efforts to engage in grassroots social action.

II. A framework for collective learning

The mode of operation adopted in the area of social and economic development, in common with other areas of Bahá'í activity, is one of learning in action. When efforts are carried out in a learning mode—characterized by constant action, reflection, consultation, and study—visions and strategies are re-examined time

and again. As tasks are accomplished, obstacles removed, resources multiplied, and lessons learned, modifications are made in goals and methods. The learning process, which is given direction through appropriate institutional arrangements, unfolds in a way that resembles the growth and differentiation of a living organism. Haphazard change is avoided, and continuity of action maintained.

On several occasions, the Universal House of Justice, referring to the way in which those serving at the level of the cluster will be drawn further and further into the life of society, has indicated: “In the approaches you take, the methods you adopt, and the instruments you employ, you will need to achieve the same degree of coherence that characterizes the pattern of growth presently under way.” How the first stirrings in the area of social action will manifest themselves in cluster after cluster where the dual process of expansion and consolidation is robust, the extent to which cultivation and direction from the institutions will be required, and the ways in which endeavours of social action will strengthen the fabric of community life—these are among the issues that will be the subject of an increasingly intense process of learning in the coming years.

Achieving progressively higher degrees of coherence both within and among the broad interconnected fields of endeavour in which the Bahá’í community is engaged is clearly a vital concern. It suggests that areas of activity are to be complementary, integrated, and mutually supportive. Further, it implies the existence of a common, overarching framework that gives shape to activities and which evolves and becomes more elaborate as experience accumulates. The expression of the divers elements of the framework will not, of course, be uniform in all spheres of action. In relation to any given area of activity, some elements move to the fore, while others act only in the background. The next three sections of this document describe a few of these, identified over many years of experience, as they find expression in social action.

Among the elements most relevant to social action are statements that define the character of progress—that civilization has both a material and a spiritual dimension, that humanity is on the threshold of its collective maturity, that there are destructive and constructive forces operating in the world which serve to propel humanity along the path towards its full maturity, that the relationships necessary to sustain society must be recast in the light of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation, that the transformation required must occur simultaneously within human consciousness and the structure of social institutions. Such statements shed light on the nature of Bahá’í development efforts, a topic taken up in Section III of the document.

Other elements that speak to the nature of social action are derived from a particular perspective on the role of knowledge in the development of society. The complementarity of science and religion, the imperative of spiritual and material education, the influence of values inherent to technology on the organization of society, and the relevance of appropriate technology to social progress are among the issues involved. Views related to the generation and application of knowledge have implications not only for the nature of development but also for the question of methodology, which is the theme of Section IV. Implicit in the discussions of Sections III and IV is yet another set of elements of the framework, namely, those

statements that analyse concepts such as individualism, power, authority, personal comfort, selfless service, work, and excellence.

Finally, at the heart of the conceptual framework for social action lie elements that describe beliefs about fundamental issues of existence, such as the nature of the human being, the purpose of life, the oneness of humanity, and the equality of men and women. While for Bahá'ís these touch on immutable convictions, they are not static—the way in which they are understood and find expression in various contexts evolves over time. Many of these convictions underlie the discussion elaborated throughout the document; a few are explicitly addressed in Section V to illustrate their implications for development work.

III. The nature of Bahá'í social and economic development

Bahá'í activity in the field of social and economic development seeks to promote the well-being of people of all walks of life, whatever their beliefs or background. It represents the efforts of the Bahá'í community to effect constructive social change, as it learns to apply the teachings of the Faith, together with knowledge accumulated in different fields of human endeavour, to social reality. Its purpose is neither to proclaim the Cause nor to serve as a vehicle for conversion. What follows below is a discussion of some of the elements of the conceptual framework that help to define its nature.

(i) Coherence between the spiritual and the material

An exploration of the nature of social action, undertaken from a Bahá'í perspective, must necessarily place it in the broad context of the advancement of civilization. That a global civilization which is both materially and spiritually prosperous represents the next stage of a millennia-long process of social evolution provides a conception of history that endows every instance of social action with a particular purpose: to foster true prosperity, with its spiritual and material dimensions, among the diverse inhabitants of the planet. A concept of vital relevance, then, is the imperative to achieve a dynamic coherence between the practical and spiritual requirements of life. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that while “material civilization is one of the means for the progress of the world of mankind,” until it is “combined with Divine civilization, the desired result, which is the felicity of mankind, will not be attained”. He continues:

Material civilization is like a lamp-glass. Divine civilization is the lamp itself and the glass without the light is dark. Material civilization is like the body. No matter how infinitely graceful, elegant and beautiful it may be, it is dead. Divine civilization is like the spirit, and the body gets its life from the spirit, otherwise it becomes a corpse. It has thus been made evident that the world of mankind is in need of the breaths of the Holy Spirit. Without the spirit the world of mankind is lifeless, and without this light the world of mankind is in utter darkness.

To seek coherence between the spiritual and the material does not imply that the material goals of development are to be trivialized. It does require, however, the rejection of approaches to development which define it as the transfer to all societies of the ideological convictions, the social structures, the economic practices, the models of governance—in the final analysis, the very patterns of life—prevalent in certain highly industrialized regions of the world. When the material and spiritual dimensions of the life of a community are kept in mind and due attention is given to both scientific and spiritual knowledge, the tendency to reduce development to the mere consumption of goods and services and the naive use of technological packages is avoided. Scientific knowledge, to take but one simple example, helps the members of a community to analyse the physical and social implications of a given technological proposal—say, its environmental impact—and spiritual insight gives rise to moral imperatives that uphold social harmony and that ensure technology serves the common good. Together, these two sources of knowledge tap roots of motivation in individuals and communities, so essential in breaking free from the shelter of passivity, and enable them to uncover the traps of consumerism.

Although the relevance of scientific knowledge to development efforts is readily acknowledged in the world at large, there appears to be less agreement on the part to be played by religion. Too often views about religion carry with them notions of division, strife, and repression, creating a reluctance to turn to it as a source of knowledge—even among those who question the adequacy of entirely materialistic approaches. Interestingly, the high esteem in which science is held does not necessarily imply that its practice and purpose are well understood. Its underlying meaning, too, is surrounded by misconception. Not infrequently it is conceived in terms of the application of certain techniques and formulas, which, as if by magic, lead to this or that effect. It is not surprising, then, that what is considered to be religious knowledge is not in harmony with science, and much of what is propagated in the name of science denies the spiritual capacities cultivated by religion.

Social action, of whatever size and complexity, should strive to remain free of simplistic and distorted conceptions of science and religion. To this end, an imaginary duality between reason and faith—a duality that would confine reason to the realm of empirical evidence and logical argumentation and which would associate faith with superstition and irrational thought—must be avoided. The process of development has to be rational and systematic—incorporating, for example, scientific capabilities of observing, of measuring, of rigorously testing ideas—and at the same time deeply aware of faith and spiritual convictions. In the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “faith compriseth both knowledge and the performance of good works.” Faith and reason can best be understood as attributes of the human soul through which insights and knowledge can be gained about the physical and the spiritual dimensions of existence. They make it possible to recognize the powers and capacities latent in individuals and in humanity as a whole and enable people to work for the realization of these potentialities.

(ii) Participation

A civilization befitting a humanity which, having passed through earlier stages of social evolution, is coming of age will not emerge through the efforts exerted by a select group of nations or even a network of national and international agencies. Rather, the challenge must be faced by all of humanity. Every member of the human family has not only the right to benefit from a materially and spiritually prosperous civilization but also an obligation to contribute towards its construction. Social action should operate, then, on the principle of universal participation.

Issues related to participation have been discussed at length in development literature. Yet, in both theory and practice, this vital principle has often been approached at the level of technique—for example, through the utilization of surveys and focus groups. Such tools, of course, have their merits, as do more ambitious efforts intended to increase participation in political processes or to offer training to the beneficiaries of services delivered by one or another governmental or non-governmental agency. Still, these measures seem to fall short of the kind of participation envisioned above. What appears to be called for in any given region, microregion or cluster is the involvement of a growing number of people in a collective process of learning, one which is focused on the nature and dynamics of a path that conduces to the material and spiritual progress of their villages or neighbourhoods. Such a process would allow its participants to engage in the generation, application, and diffusion of knowledge, a most potent and indispensable force in the advancement of civilization.

In this connection, it is important to realize that the application and propagation of existing knowledge is invariably accompanied by the generation of new knowledge—much of which takes the form of insights acquired through experience. Here the systematization of learning is crucial. As a group of people working at the grassroots begins to gain experience in social action, the first lessons learned may consist of little more than occasional stories, anecdotes, and personal accounts. Over time, patterns tend to emerge which can be documented and carefully analysed. To facilitate the systematization of knowledge, appropriate structures have to be put in place at the local level, among them institutions and agencies invested with authority to safeguard the integrity of the learning process and to ensure that it is not reduced to opinion or the mere collection of various experiences—in short, to see to it that veritable knowledge is generated. In this regard, the authority invested in the institutions of the Administrative Order working at the grassroots to harmonize individual volition with collective will endows the Bahá'í community with a remarkable capacity to nurture participation.

No matter how essential, a process of learning at the local level will remain limited in its effectiveness if it is not connected to a global process concerned with the material and spiritual prosperity of humanity as a whole. Structures are required, then, at all levels, from the local to the international, to facilitate learning about development. At the international level, such learning calls for a degree of conceptualization that takes into account the broader processes of global transformation under way and which serves to adjust the overall direction of development activities accordingly. In this respect, OSED sees itself as a learning

entity dedicated to the systematization of a growing worldwide experience made possible by the participation of increasing numbers of individuals, agencies, and communities. As this participation widens, the Office strives to develop its own capacity to observe activity at the grassroots, to identify and analyse patterns that emerge under one or more sets of circumstances, and to disseminate the knowledge thus generated, strengthening structures for this purpose and lending impetus to the process of learning at all levels. The approach to development that comes into focus, then, defies categorization into either “top-down” or “bottom-up”; it is one, rather, of reciprocity and interconnectedness.

(iii) Capacity building

When development is seen in terms of the participation of more and more people in a collective process of learning, then the concept of capacity building assumes particular importance. Thus, while any instance of social action would naturally aim at improving some aspect of the life of a population, it cannot focus simply on the provision of goods and services—an approach to development so prevalent in the world today, one which often carries with it attitudes of paternalism and which employs methods that disempower those who should be the protagonists of change. Setting and achieving specific goals to improve conditions is a legitimate concern of social action; yet, far more essential is the accompanying rise in the capacity of the participants in an endeavour to contribute to progress. Of course, the imperative to build capacity is not only relevant to the individual, important though that may be; it is equally applicable to institutions and the community, the other two protagonists in the advancement of civilization.

At the level of the individual, the influence of the training institute is vital. As it helps to equip individuals with the spiritual insights and knowledge, the qualities and attitudes, and the skills and abilities needed to carry out acts of service integral to Bahá’í community life, the institute creates a pool of human resources that makes it possible for endeavours of social and economic development to flourish. The participants in such endeavours are able to acquire, in turn, knowledge and skills pertinent to the specific areas of action in which they are engaged—health, agricultural production, and education, to name but a few—while continuing to strengthen those capacities already cultivated by the institute, for instance, fostering unity in diversity, promoting justice, participating effectively in consultation, and accompanying others in their efforts to serve humanity.

Similarly, the question of institutional capacity requires due attention. As the institutions of the Faith gain experience, particularly in the context of their efforts to ensure that the provisions of the global Plans are met, they become increasingly adept at offering assistance, resources, encouragement, and loving guidance to appropriate initiatives; at consulting freely and harmoniously among themselves and with people they serve; and at channelling individual and collective energies towards the transformation of society. So, too, must every effort pursued in the sphere of social action consider the question of institutional capacity. After all, even the smallest group of individuals labouring at the grassroots must be able to maintain a consultative environment characterized by qualities of honesty, fairness, patience, tolerance, and courtesy. At a higher level of complexity, an organization

dedicated to social action needs to develop the capacity to read society and identify the forces operating within it, to translate a vision of progress into projects and distinct, interconnected lines of action, to manage financial resources, and to interact with both governmental and non-governmental agencies.

The building of capacity in individuals and institutions goes hand in hand with the development of communities. In villages and neighbourhoods throughout the world, Bahá'ís are engaged in activities that enrich the devotional character of their communities, that tend to the spiritual education of children, that enhance the spiritual perception of junior youth and strengthen their powers of expression, and that enable increasing numbers to explore the application of the teachings of the Faith to their individual and collective lives. A process of community development, however, needs to reach beyond the level of activity and concern itself with those modes of expression and patterns of thought and behaviour that are to characterize a humanity which has come of age. In short, it must enter into the realm of culture. Viewed in this light, social action can become an occasion to raise collective consciousness of such vital principles as oneness, justice, and the equality of women and men; to promote an environment distinguished by traits such as truthfulness, equity, trustworthiness, and generosity; to enhance the ability of a community to resist the influence of destructive social forces; to demonstrate the value of cooperation as an organizing principle for activity; to fortify collective volition; and to infuse practice with insight from the teachings. For, in the final analysis, many of the questions most central to the emergence of a prosperous global civilization are to be addressed at the level of culture.

What seems necessary to acknowledge here is that the increase of capacity in each of these three protagonists does not occur in isolation; the development of any one is inextricably linked to the progress of the other two. The following statement of Shoghi Effendi speaks to this point:

We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.

(iv) Degrees of complexity

That the development process is inherently complex is undeniable. It can involve activity in areas such as agriculture and animal husbandry, manufacturing and marketing, the management of funds and natural resources, health and sanitation, education and socialization, communication and community organization. The knowledge that must be brought to bear on the development concerns of the communities of the world, then, does not fit into a single area or discipline. Interdisciplinary and multisectoral action is clearly called for. Yet the capacity to pursue such coordinated action will only appear in the Bahá'í community over the

course of decades, as will the capacity to address development issues at increasingly higher levels of complexity and effectiveness.

Social action can range from fairly informal efforts of limited duration undertaken by small groups of individuals to programmes of social and economic development with some level of complexity and sophistication implemented by Bahá'í-inspired organizations. Experience makes clear that the interplay of processes that give rise to social action does not lend itself to a single formulaic description. Irrespective of circumstances, however, the scope and complexity of social action at any given moment must be commensurate with the human resources available in a community to carry it forward. What is more, ownership of the undertaking rests with the community itself, which suggests the existence of a certain degree of collective will.

Efforts, whatever their specific nature, generally begin on a modest scale. Often, in a locality where the educational activities of the training institute are firmly established and a pronounced sense of community exists, the first stirrings of heightened social awareness can be observed in the emergence of a small group which, addressing a particular social and economic reality, initiates a simple set of appropriate actions. While some efforts of this kind will naturally come to a close when their objectives have been met, others will continue. Insistence on perpetuating or even expanding every initiative, whether in terms of number of participants, expenditure, geographical coverage or complexity of work, is counterproductive. Yet there may be circumstances in which efforts will, through a continuous process of consultation, action, and reflection, give rise to an endeavour of a more sustained nature. What is important in such cases is that those involved be allowed to increase the range of their activities in an organic fashion, without undue pressure from opinions that are often based solely on theoretical considerations. The process moves forward in a flexible way as they reflect on the results of experience. The Local Spiritual Assembly, of course, serves as the voice of moral authority to make certain that, as small groups of individuals strive to improve conditions, the integrity of their endeavours is not compromised. It also remains ever vigilant, ensuring that efforts do not run counter to the overall direction in which the community is moving.

At some point, members of the community may also be able to take advantage of educational programmes promoted by a Bahá'í-inspired organization operating in the region, supported by OSED. The steady expansion of such a programme in the community will serve to increase its human resources and to reinforce organizational structures that sustain ongoing work. Eventually many of those who benefit from such programmes will, in turn, bend their energies towards the implementation of the kind of grassroots social action mentioned above. Yet, here again, whatever the ultimate vision, care is taken to begin work in a single area of action and to expand activities gradually over time. A community school, for example, can in principle become a centre for activities such as agricultural production, health education, and family counselling. But, in most cases, it is advisable for it to start simply as a school, focusing all of its resources on the children it proposes to serve.

In this respect, OSED's efforts to strengthen the institutional capacity of Bahá'í-inspired organizations take on significance, and a few words should be added here about the appearance of such organizations worldwide. Whether in the practice of their professions, in the discharge of occupational responsibilities, or in dealings of other kinds, all Bahá'ís derive inspiration from the teachings and principles of the Faith and endeavour to reflect their high standards in day-to-day interactions. Further, given the nature of the field of development, a number of Bahá'ís will choose to associate themselves with one or another national or international agency working for the good of humankind and will, to the extent possible, bring Bahá'í teachings to bear on their operations. In this sense their efforts are inspired by the Faith. Yet, in the context of the work of the Bahá'í community itself, the term has come to be used in a very specific way. Typically brought into being by a small group of believers, a Bahá'í-inspired organization—while remaining under the general guidance and moral authority of Bahá'í institutions—can pursue a range of development initiatives in a region with a degree of latitude in administering its daily affairs. When such an organization is established, emphasis is naturally placed on the quality of its activities; clarity about an optimal size is gradually achieved as the notion that “bigger is better” is set aside. Bahá'í institutions and agencies, including OSED, provide encouragement and direction and, where appropriate, channel resources to these organizations. A small handful of these have, over many years, evolved into fully fledged development organizations with the capacity to engage in relatively complex areas of activity and to establish working relations with the agencies of government and civil society.

However useful the concept of a Bahá'í-inspired organization may be, its application under diverse circumstances requires careful consideration. The way that such an organization emerges from the life of a region and contributes to its progress is of paramount importance. Its establishment cannot be haphazard, nor can its creation proceed solely from the longing of two or three individuals to fulfil a personal, albeit altruistic, desire. A Bahá'í-inspired organization operating in a region derives meaning, in part, from its relationship to other activities; it is one of several interacting endeavours through which consistent progress is achieved. The value of such organizations in the different regions of the world to the development work is evident. Yet, the transformative power of thousands upon thousands of simple actions undertaken at the grassroots tied together in a common framework should not be underestimated.

(v) Flow of resources

All Bahá'í activity is carried forward in light of a fundamental belief in the oneness of humankind. All contribute their talents and resources to the advancement of a common purpose, and all share in the joy of progress. Clearly, then, the emphasis placed on local action should not be construed as favouring isolation.

Social and economic development requires the flow of resources, both material and intellectual. Bahá'í communities are linked by institutions and agencies at the local, regional, national, continental, and international levels, each committed to

upholding the principle of the oneness of humankind. These institutional arrangements allow for resources to flow in a structured and systematic manner, and communities in rural areas as well as in highly industrialized regions benefit equally from them. The practice of dividing the world into dichotomous groups of “the developed” and “the underdeveloped”, of “the advanced” and “the backward”, is foreign to Bahá’í efforts in the field of development—indeed, to all Bahá’í endeavours.

However, it should be acknowledged plainly that poverty cannot be alleviated without a just distribution of material wealth among the peoples of the world. In fact, the institution of Ḥuqúqu’lláh provides a powerful means for fostering the prosperity of humankind. As they observe the law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, which requires them to offer a percentage of their excess wealth, Bahá’ís across the globe understand that, by placing funds at the disposal of the Universal House of Justice, they are facilitating the transfer of material resources in ways that promote the welfare of society. At this point, the amounts available fall far short of the needs of the vast regions of the planet that lack the requisite financial means. Nevertheless, the observance of this law makes it possible for the House of Justice to provide funds to development projects under way in all continents.

Apart from the funds accessible through the institution of Ḥuqúqu’lláh and regular contributions made to other institutions, including those earmarked specifically for social action, efforts in the area of social and economic development can tap into resources available from governments and donor agencies. Yet, irrespective of their sources, in no way do such funds set the agenda for development efforts in the communities that accept assistance. The relationship of dependence so prevalent in the world today, whereby certain regions are beholden to others for access to resources, is unacceptable.

“Social change”, the Universal House of Justice made clear in its Riḍván 2010 message, “is not a project that one group of people carries out for the benefit of another”, and in general Bahá’ís from one area do not establish development projects for others. The movement of individuals from community to community, and across borders, does occur however, and here every Bahá’í is guided by the words of Bahá’u’lláh: “Shut your eyes to estrangement, then fix your gaze upon unity.” When Bahá’ís move residence or travel to another place in the context of some work, they form part of the collectivity of their new local communities, and all the others also see them as such. They now come under the guidance of local institutions, which are responsible for facilitating the flow of knowledge and for channelling the energies of every member of their communities; the idea of an expert from outside being allowed to impose his or her professional aspirations on the local population is thus avoided.

In the efforts of Bahá’ís everywhere, then, can be seen the emergence of a global community which, connected through its institutions, is striving to establish a pattern of activity that gives due respect to local autonomy without creating a sense of isolation from the whole, that attaches importance to material means without allowing them to become instruments of control, that provides for the flow of knowledge without introducing paternalistic attitudes, that strengthens capacity in

individuals without any regard for their economic background. While vigorously engaged in activities to improve their immediate surroundings, Bahá'ís feel part of a process of development that is global in scope and influence.

IV. The methodology of Bahá'í social and economic development

In addition to those elements of the conceptual framework that define the nature of Bahá'í development efforts, there are a number of concepts which shed light on the methods to be adopted. That the collective investigation of reality can best be undertaken in an atmosphere which encourages detachment from personal views, that such an ongoing investigation should give due importance to valid empirical information, that mere opinion should not be raised to the status of fact, that conclusions should correspond to the complexity of the issues at hand and not be broken up into a series of simplistic points, that the articulation of observations and conclusions should be presented in precise and dispassionate language, that progress in every area of endeavour is contingent upon the creation of an environment where powers are multiplied and manifest themselves in unified action—general concepts such as these, drawn from both science and religion, inform the specific methodological perspective discussed below.

(i) Reading society and formulating a vision

As mentioned earlier, endeavours in the sphere of social action frequently take the form of modest acts carried out by small groups of individuals residing in a locality. In a sense, these stirrings at the grassroots can be considered responses to readings of social reality, even though they are seldom expressed explicitly as such at that level. For more elaborate endeavours of social and economic development, reading society with higher and higher degrees of accuracy has to become an explicit element of the methodology of learning.

Every development effort can be said to represent a response to some understanding of the nature and state of society, its challenges, the institutions operating in it, the forces influencing it, and the capacities of its peoples. To read society in this way is not to explore every detail of the social reality. Nor does it necessarily involve formal studies. Conditions need to be understood progressively, both from the perspective of a particular endeavour's purpose and in the context of a vision of humanity's collective existence. Indeed, it is vital that the reading of society be consistent with the teachings of the Faith. That the true nature of a human being is spiritual, that every human being is a "mine rich in gems" of limitless potential, that the forces of integration and disintegration each in their own way are propelling humanity towards its destiny are but a few examples of teachings that would shape one's understanding of social reality. Bahá'í-inspired organizations supporting relatively complex lines of action need to continually refine their reading of society, using the methods of science to the best of their abilities.

It is important to note that reading the social reality of a population from within is different than studying it as an outsider. In instances where the population in question is relatively poor in material resources, outsiders with access to greater means frequently see only deprivation—the wealth of talent in the population, the aspirations of its members, and their capacity to arise and become the protagonists of change may all be overlooked. Furthermore, external observers of poverty are all too often unaware of the tendency to allow their own feelings of pity, fear, indignation or ambivalence to affect their reading of society and to base their proposed solutions on the value they place on their own experiences. However, when an effort is participatory, in the sense that it seeks to involve the people themselves in the generation and application of knowledge, as all forge together a path of progress, dualities such as “outsider-insider” and “knowledgeable-ignorant” quickly disappear.

According to their reading of society, those engaged in social action form and refine a vision of their work within the social space available to them. The word “vision” here does not simply mean a set of goals or a description of an idealized future condition. Particularly when a Bahá’í-inspired organization is involved, a vision has to express a general idea of how goals are to be achieved: the nature of the strategies to be devised, the approaches to be taken, the attitudes to be assumed, and even an outline of some of the methods to be employed. The vision of work articulated by such an organization is never complete; it has to become more and more precise, be able to accommodate constantly evolving and ever more complex action, and attain increasingly high levels of accuracy in its operation.

(ii) Consultation

If learning in action is to be the primary mode of operation in the area of social and economic development, the Bahá’í principle of consultation needs to be fully appreciated. Whether concerned with analysing a specific problem, attaining higher degrees of understanding on a given issue, or exploring possible courses of action, consultation may be seen as collective search for truth. Participants in a consultative process see reality from different points of view, and as these views are examined and understood, clarity is achieved. In this conception of the collective investigation of reality, truth is not a compromise between opposing interest groups. Nor does the desire to exercise power over one another animate participants in the consultative process. What they seek, rather, is the power of unified thought and action.

In the context of social action, the principle of consultation is expressed in a variety of forms, each appropriate to the space within which it occurs. Often, when a small group is engaged in an endeavour, every matter of concern is the subject of consultation. Yet, within an organization, the principle will find expression in different ways. What should be noted in this connection is that, at times, consultation is undertaken between those regarded as equals with the aim of reaching a joint decision, as in the case of the deliberations of a Spiritual Assembly. Under other circumstances, it takes the form of a discussion, as may be necessary, to draw out thoughts and information towards the enrichment of common understanding, but with the decision being made by those with authority.

It is this latter form that would distinguish the operations of a Bahá'í-inspired organization, where a degree of individual or group authority is given to those on whom responsibility has been conferred.

Clearly, then, not every person within an organization will participate equally in making every decision. Responsibility needs to be appropriately structured and defined. For example, there will be many spaces in which individuals involved in a particular component of the work will have the opportunity to share insights, reach higher levels of understanding, and make certain decisions pertaining to their area of functioning. In the case of an organization with a board and an executive director, they will often take decisions without the need to consult with every member of the organization. But theirs is also the responsibility to create an atmosphere in which relevant information and knowledge flow openly and in which the results of consultation in all the spaces of the organization are conveyed in ways that promote understanding and consensus among its members.

Beyond such considerations, a consultative spirit pervades the interactions of those engaged in social action, of whatever size and complexity, and the population they serve. This does not imply that formal mechanisms are necessarily in place for this purpose. It suggests, rather, that the aspirations of the people, their observations and ideas, are ever present and are consciously incorporated into plans and programmes.

(iii) Action and reflection on action

At the heart of every development endeavour is consistent, systematic action. Action, however, needs to be accompanied by constant reflection to ensure that it continues to serve the aims of the endeavour. Development strategies that are formulated simply in terms of projects with well-stated goals, followed by evaluation of how and why they were or were not achieved, have limitations. An approach to development defined in terms of learning does, at times, admit formal evaluation. Yet, it depends far more on structured reflection woven into a pattern of action, through which questions can emerge and methods and approaches be adjusted.

Given the multitude of humanity's needs and the enthusiasm with which programmes inspired by the teachings of the Faith are frequently received, it can be tempting for a Bahá'í-inspired organization to try to pursue every opportunity and become engaged in frenetic action. Learning to be systematic and focused is a challenge that all those involved in development efforts, from a small group to the community itself, have to meet.

A notion that has proven useful in this respect is that of a line of action. A line of action is conceived as a sequence of activities, each of which builds on the previous one and prepares the way for the next. Endeavours often begin with a single line of action, but gradually a number of interrelated lines emerge, constituting a whole area of action. For example, to be effective, even an effort at the grassroots focusing solely on the area of child education needs to simultaneously follow such lines of action as the training of teachers and

consciousness-raising in the community about education, as well as attending to the teaching-learning experience.

Focused, systematic thinking and persistent, meticulous labour do not, of course, detract from the spirit of service that animates social action. While paying attention to the smallest practical details, one can be occupied with the most profound spiritual matters. A distinguishing feature of any Bahá'í endeavour has to be the emphasis it places on the spirit with which action is undertaken. This requires from the participants purity of motive, rectitude of conduct, humility, selflessness, and respect for human dignity. As Bahá'u'lláh states:

One righteous act is endowed with a potency that can so elevate the dust as to cause it to pass beyond the heaven of heavens. It can tear every bond asunder, and hath the power to restore the force that hath spent itself and vanished.

(iv) Utilizing material means

To accomplish their aims, endeavours in the area of social action require material means. There is a tendency among many organizations in the world—including those working to achieve praiseworthy ends—to measure success principally in terms of the amount of money received and spent. Bahá'í development efforts are expected to set aside such criteria. In modest instances of social action, resources are typically contributed by the community. A more complex endeavour will have to acquire greater capacity to draw upon and utilize funds. In the case of a Bahá'í-inspired organization, this may extend, as mentioned earlier, to receiving grants from donor agencies. Here great care is required to ensure that, in attempting to secure funds, an organization is not distracted from its primary purpose: capacity building within a given population.

However modest the amounts expended may be, it is vital that a system be put in place to oversee the proper management of finances. The integrity of an endeavour is, of course, secured by the trustworthiness and honesty of its participants. Yet, a proven system of financial management within an organization serves to protect against an atmosphere of carelessness and imprecision that can open the door to temptation.

In addition to a sound financial system, the question of efficiency needs attention. What should be avoided are limited conceptions of efficiency, for instance, those that consider only the relation of output to material input, even when the latter includes some quantitative measure of effort. A more sophisticated understanding of efficiency seems to be required. With regard to input, for example, work that is motivated by a spirit of service and an inner urge to excel clearly has a different value than work that is used as a vehicle to advance one's personal interests. As to results, to give another example, the accomplishment of a particular task—say, the construction of a small facility for a school—may be far less important than the development of the participants' capacity to cooperate and engage in unified action.

There is also a wealth of spiritual and intellectual resources upon which endeavours can draw, whatever the material resources available. A number of these are mentioned in the Bahá'í writings, such as “unrelaxing resolve and harmonious cooperation”, “energy, loyalty and resourcefulness”, “determination”, “spirit of absolute consecration”, “organizing ability”, “zeal”, “tenacity, sagacity and fidelity”, “single-minded devotion”, “absolute dedication”, “perseverance”, “vigour”, “courage”, “audacity”, “consistency”, “tenacity of purpose”, “tenacity of resolution”, and “unrelaxing vigilance”. What the Bahá'í community has so far achieved in the work of expansion and consolidation with limited material means is a testimony to the efficacy of these spiritual resources, which should be increasingly extended to the sphere of social action.

Those involved in social action also need to be constantly aware of the solemn responsibility for the money that has been placed at their disposal. In this connection, it is helpful to keep in mind the attitude Bahá'ís evince in relation to the sacred funds of the Faith—contributions are offered liberally, joyfully, and sacrificially, and institutions observe prudence and a high degree of economy in the expenditure of that money.

V. Guiding principles

Social action, it has been suggested in this paper, is to be carried out in the context of a much larger enterprise—namely, the advancement of a civilization that ensures the material and spiritual prosperity of the entire human race. The fundamental teachings of the Faith that will inspire this civilization, some of which have been mentioned in these pages, need to find expression in the sphere of social action. Clearly, the application of the requisite principles to the social and material progress of communities involves a vast process of learning.

In general, a challenge for any instance of social action is to ensure consistency—among the explicit and implicit convictions which underpin an initiative, the values promoted by it, the attitudes adopted by its participants, the methods they employ, and the ends they seek. Achieving consistency between belief and practice is no small task: a deep-seated recognition of the oneness of humanity should prevent all efforts from fostering disunity, isolation, separateness or competition; an unshakeable conviction in the nobility of human beings, capable of subduing their lower passions and evincing heavenly qualities, should serve to protect against prejudice and paternalism, both of which violate the dignity of people; an immutable belief in justice should guide an endeavour to allocate resources according to the real needs and aspirations of the community rather than the whims and wishes of a privileged few; the principle of the equality of women and men should open the way not only for women to assume their role as protagonists of development and benefit from its fruits but also for the experience of that half of the world's population to be given more and more emphasis in development thought. These few examples illustrate how closely spiritual principles are to guide development practice.

If contradictions are to be avoided, the participants in an endeavour need to become increasingly aware of the environment within which their work advances. On the one hand, they are to freely draw insights from the range of philosophies, academic theories, community programmes and social movements within that environment and to keep current with the technological trends that influence progress. On the other hand, they should remain watchful lest they allow the teachings to be bent into conformity with this or that ideology, intellectual fad or fashionable practice. In this connection, the capacity to measure the value of prevalent approaches, ideas, attitudes, and methods in the balance of the Faith is vital. This capacity enables one, for example, to uncover the aggrandizement of self so often lying behind initiatives that are nominally concerned with empowerment, to discern the tendency of certain development efforts to foist upon the poor an entirely materialistic worldview, to perceive the subtle ways in which competitiveness and greed be promoted in the name of justice and prosperity, and ultimately to abandon the notion that one or another theory or movement which may fleetingly acquire some prominence in the wider society can provide a shortcut to meaningful change. The following passage written by the Universal House of Justice provides guidance in this connection:

Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is vast. It calls for profound change not only at the level of the individual but also in the structure of society. "Is not the object of every Revelation," He Himself proclaims, "to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions?" The work advancing in every corner of the globe today represents the latest stage of the ongoing Bahá'í endeavour to create the nucleus of the glorious civilization enshrined in His teachings, the building of which is an enterprise of infinite complexity and scale, one that will demand centuries of exertion by humanity to bring to fruition. There are no shortcuts, no formulas. Only as effort is made to draw on insights from His Revelation, to tap into the accumulating knowledge of the human race, to apply His teachings intelligently to the life of humanity, and to consult on the questions that arise will the necessary learning occur, and capacity is developed.