

The Foundations of Social and Economic Development In the Baha'i Faith

A Compilation From The Blue Ridge Initiative

ENGAGEMENT AND DEED

Say, O brethren! Let deeds, not words, be your adorning.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh, Part II From the Persian, No. 5.

The essence of faith is fewness of words and abundance of deeds; he whose words exceed his deeds, know verily his death is better than his life.

Bahá'u'lláh, 'Words of Wisdom', Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 156.

O SON OF MY HANDMAID!

Guidance hath ever been given by words, and now it is given by deeds. Every one must show forth deeds that are pure and holy, for words are the property of all alike, whereas such deeds as these belong only to Our loved ones. Strive then with heart and soul to distinguish yourselves by your deeds. In this wise We counsel you in this holy and resplendent tablet.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh, Part II From the Persian, No. 76.

For verily I say, this is the Day spoken of by God in His book: "On that day will We set a seal upon their mouths; yet shall their hands speak unto Us, and their feet shall bear witness to that which they shall have done."

The Báb, 'Address To the Letters of the Living', The Dawn-Breakers, p. 92.



Love manifests its reality in deeds, not only in words – these alone are without effect. In order that love may manifest its power there must be an object, an instrument, a motive.

`Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 35.

O people of God! Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns; let your thoughts be fixed upon that which will rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men. This can best be achieved through pure and holy deeds, through a virtuous life and a goodly behavior. Valiant acts will ensure the triumph of this Cause, and a saintly character will reinforce its power.

Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XLIII, pp. 93-94.

It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which has been written into reality and action.... That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the entire human race.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 115-116.

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TRANSFORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Is not the object of every Revelation 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? For if the character of mankind be not changed, the futility of God's universal Manifestations would be apparent.

Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, pp. 240-241.

Renewal is the order of the day. And all this newness hath its source in the fresh out-pourings of wondrous grace and favour from the Lord of the Kingdom, which have renewed the world. The people, therefore, must be set completely free from their old patterns of thought, that all their attention may be focused upon these new principles, for these are the light of this time and the very spirit of this age.

`Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections From the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, No. 205, p. 253.

God willing, this terrestrial world may become as a celestial mirror upon which we may behold the imprint of the traces of Divinity, and the fundamental qualities of a new creation may be reflected from the reality of love shining in human hearts. From the light and semblance of God in us may it be, indeed, proved and witnessed that God has created man after His own image and likeness.

`Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 235.



Souls must be transformed, communities thereby consolidated, new models of life thus attained. Transformation is the essential purpose of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, but it lies in the will and effort of the individual to achieve it in obedience to the Covenant. Necessary to the progress of this life-fulfilling transformation is knowledge of the will and purpose of God through regular reading and study of the Holy Word.

The Universal House of Justice, Message to the Baha'is of the World, Ridván 1989.

ENGAGEMENT IN THE WORLD

The friends must never mistake the Bahá'í administration for an end in itself. It is merely the instrument of the spirit of the Faith. This Cause is a cause which God has revealed to humanity as a whole. It is designed to benefit the entire human race, and the only way it can do this is to re-form the community life of mankind, as well as seeking to regenerate the individual.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Local Spiritual Assemblies, p. 3.

These rising impulses for change must be seized upon and channeled into overcoming the remaining barriers that block realization of the age-old dream of global peace.... This response of the world's people themselves to the crying needs of the age echoes the call that Bahá'u'lláh raised over a hundred years ago: 'Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.' The transformation in the way that great numbers of ordinary people are coming to see themselves – a change that is dramatically abrupt in the perspective of the history of civilization – raises fundamental questions about the role assigned to the general body of humanity in the planning of our planet's future. ...The

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earth's inhabitants are now challenged to draw on their collective inheritance to take up, consciously and systematically, the responsibility for the design of their future....

The Prosperity of Humankind, statement of the Bahá'í International Community, United Nations Global Summit on Social and Economic Development, Copenhagen, 1994.

Central to the capacity of a Bahá'í community to lead a process of transformation is the ability of its members and institutions to apply the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh to various aspects of life and thereby establish consistent patterns of change. In fact, learning to apply the Teachings to achieve progress could be taken as the very definition of Bahá'í social and economic development.

In the villages of the world, the Bahá'í community should become the spearhead of spiritual, social and economic transformation.

Bahá'í Social and Economic Development: Prospects for the Future, a statement approved by the Universal House of Justice, September 16, 1993.



Social and economic development, rather than being a separate process, is inherent in the development of the Bahá'í community and can no more be separated from this development than acts of service can be separated from the character of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Bahá'í communities are communities of service to humankind.

Developing Patterns of Community Life, A Guide to Consultation, 1999, MDS, a social and economic agency of the NSA of the United States.

Although the time has not come for the building of local Mashriqu'l-Adhkars, the holding of regular meetings for worship open to all and the involvement of Bahá'í communities in projects of humanitarian service are expressions of this element of Bahá'í life and a further step in the implementation of the Law of God.

Letter to the Bahá'ís of the World, The Universal House of Justice, December 28, 1999.

As we survey the Bahá'í world, we see a greatly strengthened community, internally sound and notably reinforced. Its achievements in reaching the general public, governments and organizations of civil society and in winning trust in all these circles are striking. Agencies specialized in external affairs, following a well-defined strategy, have broadened the range of the Faith's influence nationally and internationally, and projects of social and economic development, which seek the spiritual and material upliftment of entire communities, are penetrating society at the grassroots.

Letter to the Bahá'ís of the World, The Universal House of Justice, November 26, 1999.

THE CHALLENGE OF ENGAGEMENT

The effort of will required for such a task cannot be summoned up merely by appeals for action against the countless ills afflicting society. It must be galvanized by a vision of human prosperity in the fullest sense of the term – an awakening to the possibilities of the spiritual and material well-being now brought within grasp. Its beneficiaries must be all the planet's inhabitants, without distinction....

Because the relationship between the individual and society is a reciprocal one, the transformation now required must occur simultaneously within human consciousness and the

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structure of social institutions. It is in the opportunities afforded by this twofold process of change that a strategy of global development will find its purpose. At this crucial stage of history, that purpose must be to establish enduring foundations on which planetary civilization can gradually take shape.

The Prosperity of Humankind, statement of the Bahá'í International Community, United Nations Global Summit on Social and Economic Development, Copenhagen, 1994.

Every region of the world has its own particular challenges in raising itself to the standard set by Bahá'u'lláh. One of the greatest challenges facing many of the friends [in the United States] is our frenetic schedule of activities. Often, families are racing just to keep up with work, school, hobbies, travel, and the pressure of everyday life. In America, excessive "stress" is now a public health crisis, and the Bahá'í Community is not immune from the lethargy and paralysis that surrounds us. American Bahá'ís, in spite of the fact that we are called by the Master to "arise," still confront the formidable obstacles that stand in the path of every would-be warrior in the service of Bahá'u'lláh.

Regional Bahá'í Council for the Northeastern States, Ridván 1998.



A Bahá'í community which is consistent in its fundamental life-giving, life-sustaining activities will at its heart be serene and confident; it will resonate with spiritual dynamism, will exert irresistible influence, will set a new course in social evolution, enabling it to win the respect and eventually the allegiance of admirers and critics alike. These profound possibilities reside in the will of the individual to take initiative, to act in accordance with the guidance offered by Bahá'í institutions, and to maintain such action regardless of the myriad distractions posed by the disintegration of a society adrift in a sea of materialism.

Universal House of Justice, Letter to a National Spiritual Assembly, Ridván 1984.

FAITH IN ACTION

Let your actions cry aloud to the world that you are indeed Bahá'ís, for it is actions that speak to the world and are the cause of the progress of humanity.

If we are true Bahá'ís speech is not needed. Our actions will help on the world, will spread civilization, will help the progress of science, and cause the arts to develop.... It is not through lip-service only that the elect of God have attained to holiness, but by patient lives of active service they have brought light into the world.

Therefore strive that your actions day by day may be beautiful prayers. Turn toward God, and seek always to do that which is right and noble. Enrich the poor, raise the fallen, comfort the sorrowful, bring healing to the sick, reassure the fearful, rescue the oppressed, bring hope to the hopeless, shelter the destitute!

This is the work of a true Bahá'í, and this is what is expected of him. If we strive to do all this, then are we true Bahá'ís, but if we neglect it, we are not followers of the light and we have no right to the name.

Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, pp. 80-81 (emphasis in original).

"O Yahyá! Let deeds, not words, testify to thy faith, if thou art a man of true learning. Cease idly repeating the traditions of the past, for the day of service, of steadfast action, is come. Now is the

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time to show forth the true signs of God, to rend asunder the veils of idle fancy, to promote the Word of God, and to sacrifice ourselves in His path. Let deeds, not words, be our adorning!"
Táhirih, quoted by `Abdu'l-Bahá, Memorials of the Faithful, p. 200.

On the outspread tablet of this world, ye are the verses of His singleness; and atop lofty palace towers, ye are the banners of the Lord.... Ye are the birds that soar upward into the firmament of knowledge, the royals falcons on the wrist of God..

Why then are ye quenched, why silent, why leaden and dull? Ye must shine forth like the lightning, and raise up a clamouring like unto the great sea. Like a candle must ye shed your light, and even as the soft breezes of God must ye blow across the world. Even as sweet breaths from heavenly bowers, as musk-laden winds from the gardens of the Lord, must ye perfume the air for the people of knowledge, and even as the splendours shed by the true Sun, must ye illumine the hearts of humankind. For ye are the life-laden winds, ye are the jessamine-scents from the garden of the saved. Bring then life to the dead, and awaken those who slumber. In the darkness of the world be ye radiant flames; in the sands of perdition, be ye wellsprings of the water of life, be ye guidance from the Lord God. Now is the time to serve, now is the time to be on fire. Know ye the value of this chance, this favourable juncture that is limitless grace, ere it slip from your hands.

Soon will our handful of days, our vanishing life, be gone, and we shall pass empty-handed, into the hollow that is dug for those who speak no more; wherefore must we bind our hearts to the manifest Beauty, and cling to the lifeline that faileth never. We must gird ourselves for service, kindle love's flame, and burn away in its heat.... Well is it with the doers of great deeds.

`Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections From the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, No. 210, pp. 266-267.