

## LEARNING TO APPLY THE WRITINGS TO ACHIEVE PROGRESS IN AGRICULTURE: A COMPONENT OF GLOBAL PROSPERITY

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In the Tablet of the World, Bahá'u'lláh makes a remarkable statement concerning the role of agriculture in the “advancement of mankind.” He instructs the Shah of Persia on “this vital and important matter:”

*Whilst in the Prison of 'Akka, We revealed in the Crimson Book that which is conducive to the advancement of mankind and to the reconstruction of the world. The utterances set forth therein by the Pen of the Lord of creation include the following which constitute the fundamental principles for the administration of the affairs of men:*  
*First: 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.*  
*Second: Languages must be reduced to one common language to be taught in all the schools of the world.*  
*Third: It behoveth man to adhere tenaciously unto that which will promote fellowship, kindness and unity.*  
*Fourth: 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.*  
*Fifth: Special regard must be paid to agriculture. Although it hath been mentioned in the fifth place, unquestionably it precedeth the others.*

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 89-90

Bahá'u'lláh's guidance for “the advancement of mankind” and “the reconstruction of the world” gives us pause to reflect on present conditions. Would not most of us agree that the profession of agriculture is now held in very low regard by much of humanity? Yet, here is a list of “fundamental principles for the administration of the affairs of men” that states, “special regard must be paid to agriculture;” even claiming that it “precedeth” the promotion of the Lesser Peace. Should we arise to act on this Teaching which directly elevates the station of agriculture? What if we have no interest in agriculture? Do we have any responsibility?

In the 1993 statement, commonly known as Prospects for the Future, we read:

*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. Such learning has to occur locally, regionally, nationally and internationally and become the axis around which our development efforts are organized at all levels. Learning in this sense is not limited to study and evaluation. It comes about in combination with action.*

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

What is the role of our national and local institutions if they decide to “apply the Revelation” in this matter?

*Progress in the development field will largely depend on natural stirrings at the grassroots, and it should receive its driving force from those sources rather than from an imposition of plans and programs from the top. The major task of National Assemblies, therefore, is to increase the local communities' awareness of the needs and possibilities, and to guide and coordinate the efforts resulting from such awareness. Already in many areas the friends are witnessing the confirmations of their initiatives in such pursuits as the founding of tutorial and other schools, the promotion of literacy, the launching of rural development programs, the inception of educational radio stations, and the operation of agricultural and medical projects.*

Universal House of Justice to the Baha'is of the World, 20 October 1983

*The Local Spiritual Assemblies of such villages must gradually widen the scope of their activities, not only to develop every aspect of the spiritual life of the believers within their jurisdiction, but also, through Baha'i consultation and*

*through such principles as harmony between science and religion, the importance of education, and work as a form of worship, to promote the standards of agriculture and other skills in the life of the people.*

Written on behalf of the House of Justice to an individual believer,  
27 July 1976. Research Department, Agriculture and Rural Life, p. 3

If a community decides to take action, it appears that 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggests when to inaugurate it.

*During such blessed days, institutions should be founded that may be of permanent benefit and value to the people so that in current conversation and in history it may become widely known that such a good work was inaugurated on such a feast day. Therefore, the intelligent must search and investigate reality 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, however, the community is in need of widening the circle of commerce or industry or agriculture they should start the means so that the desired aim may be attained...in this wonderful dispensation, philanthropic affairs are for all humanity, without any exception, because it is the manifestation of the mercifulness of God.*

'Abdu'l-Bahá, LOG, pp. 304-305

But what if we individuals in these communities are not necessarily interested in agriculture? Or for that matter crafts or trades. How do we respond to the following Words of Bahá'u'lláh?

*Thou hadst made reference in thy letter to agriculture. On this matter He hath laid down the following universal rule: that it is incumbent upon everyone, even should he be a resident in a particular land for no more than a single day, to become engaged in some craft or trade, or agriculture, and that the very pursuit of such a calling is, in the eyes of the one true God, identical with worship. This rule was exemplified by the Baha'i community at the time when they were facing exile from Iraq, for, while they were making arrangements for their journey, they occupied themselves in cultivating the land; and when they set out, instructions were given for the fruits of their labours to be distributed amongst the friends.*

Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet to an individual believer.  
Research Department; Economics, Agriculture and Related Subjects, p. 1

Is it beyond reason that, in the future, multitudes of travelers will cultivate crops which they will never reap, for individuals whom they may never meet, even as they pursue other endeavors? What practical steps would have to be in place for that to happen? What transformation in the character of mankind would implementation of this "universal rule" imply? What role will the farmer and agriculture in the community have then? Can we gain insight from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's following statements?

*The fundamental basis of the community is agriculture, tillage of the soil.*

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 217

*The farmer is the primary factor in the body politic.*

'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited by Balyuzi in 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 239

If honor and recognition is given the farmer, will our economic viewpoints change? What will be our response to instruction from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to address the condition of the farmer first? Will we welcome His design for the village storehouse?

*First and foremost is the principle that to all the members of the body politic shall be given the greatest achievements of the world of humanity. Each one shall have the utmost welfare and well-being. To solve this problem 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. In every village there must be established a general storehouse which will have a number of revenues.....As to the first, 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.....*

Foundations of World Unity, pp. 39 - 40

What about the provision for emergencies in agriculture which 'Abdu'l-Bahá' directs the governing board of the storehouse to oversee? Will all agree on farm assistance?

*Then there must be considered such emergencies as follows: a certain farmer whose expenses run up to ten thousand dollars and whose income is only five thousand, he will receive necessary expenses from the storehouse. Five thousand dollars will be allotted to him so he will not be in need .....*

*Hence the expenses or expenditures of the general storehouse are now made clear and its activities made manifest. The income of this general storehouse has been shown. Certain trustees will be elected by the people in a given village to look after these transactions. 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...*

Foundations of World Unity, p. 40

If society becomes so transformed that the farming profession is treated with great dignity and respect, what will be the response of young people as they search for a career?

*Since thy dear child is taking his examinations, my fervent wish at the divine Threshold is that, by the grace and favour of God, he may meet with success, and that in the future he may go on to study agriculture and master its various branches, practical and theoretical. Agriculture is a noble science and, should thy son become proficient in this field, he will become a means of providing for the comfort of untold numbers of people.*

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet to an individual believer.

Research Department; Economics, Agriculture and Related Subjects, p. 7

*Woman must especially devote her energies and abilities toward the industrial and agricultural sciences, seeking to assist mankind in that which is most needful. By this means she will demonstrate capability and ensure recognition of equality in the social and economic equation.*

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 283

There is nothing today which can be called Bahá'í agriculture. However, if we are to move toward learning to apply the Writings to achieve progress in agriculture, is it not our duty to investigate our Sacred Text and to study the guidance from our institutions regarding this "noble science"? Regardless of our own interest in the science of agriculture, is it not our responsibility pay "special regard" to this profession which is so highly esteemed by the Central Figures of our Faith?

If, we answer "Yes!", let us bear in mind this guidance of the Guardian as we take action.

*He does not think that we can yet go so far as to write commentaries and lengthy treatises on the relation of the Bahá'í teachings to Education, Economics, etc., as the world knows these subjects at present. We have our basic principles, but ... (unreadable) We cannot say in detail what the "Bahá'í" system will be. It has yet to grow and mature. However, articles on these matters, where our general ideas are correlated to present knowledge and usage, and compared, would be good because not too much detail could be gone into.*

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 11 June 1948,  
Lights of Guidance Vol.2, pp. 77-78

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*O God, my God! Illumine the brows of Thy true lovers, and support them with angelic hosts of certain triumph. Set firm their feet on Thy straight path, and out of Thine ancient bounty open before them the portals of Thy blessings; for they are expending on Thy pathway what Thou has bestowed upon them, safeguarding Thy Faith, putting their trust in their remembrance of Thee, offering up their hearts for love of Thee, and withholding not what they possess in adoration for Thy Beauty and in their search for ways to please Thee.*

*O my Lord! Ordain for them a plenteous share, a destined recompense and sure reward.*

*Verily, Thou art the Sustainer, the Helper, the Generous, the Bountiful, the Ever-Bestowing.*

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i Prayers, US Edition, pp. 84-85

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*Every man of discernment, while walking upon the earth, feeleth indeed abashed, inasmuch as he is fully aware that the thing which is the source of his prosperity, his wealth, his might, his exaltation, his advancement and power is, as ordained by God, the very earth which is trodden beneath the feet of all men.*

Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 44

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