

Regarding the Poor

1. "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 Persian Hidden Words, #54)

2. "He was most generous, giving abundantly to the poor. **None who came to Him were turned away.** The doors of His house **were open to all.** He always had many guests. This unbounded generosity was conducive to greater astonishment from the fact that He sought neither position nor prominence. In commenting upon this, His friends said He would become impoverished, for His expenses were many and His wealth becoming more and more limited. 'Why is he not thinking of his own affairs?', they inquired of each other; but some who were wise declared: 'This personage is connected with another world; he has something sublime within him that is not evident now; the day is coming when it will be manifested.' In truth the Blessed Perfection was a refuge for every weak one, a shelter for every fearing one, kind to every indigent one, lenient and loving to all creatures." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i World Faith - p. 220)

2. "Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá walked to the entrance and, standing there, shook hands with every one of those four hundred: the flotsam and jetsam of humanity. At the same time He put a coin or two in each palm. He had done the same for years, on Fridays, outside His own house in Akká -- meeting the poor, dispensing aid, imparting to stunted lives the balm of care and affection and love. In the street others had gathered and there were also a number of children. 'Abdu'l-Bahá went forth to greet them and offer them also a coin or two. But what mattered most was not the price of a bed He was giving them, but that balm of love and care which healed the wounds of the spirit.

Back in the Hotel Ansonia 'Abdu'l-Bahá encountered a chambermaid, who had been deeply moved by His gift of roses to her; He emptied into her apron the bag containing the remainder of the coins. A Bahá'í told the chambermaid that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had been giving money to the poor at the Bowery Mission. 'I will do the same with this money. I too will give it,' she said. Later that evening 'Abdu'l-Bahá was seated with a number of visitors to whom He was saying as He laughed: 'Assuredly give to the poor! If you give them only words, when they put their hands into their pockets they will find themselves none the richer for you,' when the chambermaid came in. Her eyes were tear-laden and approaching 'Abdu'l-Bahá she said: 'I came to say goodbye, sir, and to thank you for all your goodness to me... I never expected such goodness. And to ask you -- to pray for me!'"

(H.M. Balyuzi, Abdu'l-Baha - The Centre of the Covenant, p. 177)

3. "**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. When a rich man believes and follows the Manifestation of God, it is a proof that his wealth is not an obstacle and does not prevent him from attaining the pathway of salvation. After he has been tested and tried, it will be seen whether his possessions are a hindrance in his religious life. **But the poor are especially beloved of God. Their lives are full of difficulties, their trials continual, their hopes are in God alone. Therefore, you must assist the poor as much as possible, even by sacrifice of yourself. No deed of man is greater before God than helping the poor.** Spiritual conditions are not dependent upon the possession of worldly treasures or

the absence of them. When one is physically destitute, spiritual thoughts are more likely. Poverty is a stimulus toward God. **Each one of you must have great consideration for the poor and render them assistance.** Organize in an effort to help them and prevent increase of poverty.” (Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 216)

4. “The condition of the destitute in the country villages as well as in London impressed 'Abdu'l-Bahá greatly. In an earnest talk with the Rector of a Parish, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said: ‘I find England awake; there is spiritual life here. But your poor are so very poor! This should not be. On the one hand you have wealth, and great luxury; on the other hand men and women are living in the extremities of hunger and want. This great contrast of life is one of the blots on the civilization of this enlightened age.’

You must turn attention more earnestly to the betterment of the conditions of the poor. Do not be satisfied until each one with whom you are concerned is to you as a member of your family. Regard each one either as a father, or as a brother, or as a sister, or as a mother, or as a child. If you can attain to this, your difficulties will vanish, you will know what to do. This is the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London, p. 91)

5. “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 is expended for philanthropic purposes.** Above all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of 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.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Secret of Divine Civilization, pp. 24-25)

6. “**O thou who art turning thy face to God! Thy letter was received. From its contents it became known that thy wish is to serve the poor. What wish better than this! Those souls who are of the Kingdom eagerly wish to be of service to the poor, to sympathize with them, to show kindness to the miserable and to make their lives fruitful. Happy art thou that thou hast such a wish.**” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 116)

7. “**Those souls who during the war have served the poor and have been in the Red Cross Mission work, their services are accepted at the Kingdom of God and are the cause of their everlasting life.** Convey to them these glad tidings.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 116)

8. “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. It lighteth up the world; it bestoweth honour upon humankind.**” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 114)

9. **“Oh, friends of God! If ye will trust in the Word of God and be strong; if ye will follow the precepts of Bahá'u'lláh to tend the sick, raise the fallen, care for the poor and needy, give shelter to the destitute, protect the oppressed, comfort the sorrowful and love the world of humanity with all your hearts, then I say unto you that ere long this meeting-place will see a wonderful harvest. Day by day each member will advance and become more and more spiritual.** But ye must have a firm foundation and your aims and ambitions must be clearly understood by each member.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 72)

10. **“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 institution, 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.”**

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual Believer, March 11, 1942)
(Compilations, Lights of Guidance, p. 124)

11. **“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-Adhkar. **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.” (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual Believer, March 11, 1942 - - Compilation: Lights of Guidance, p. 120)

12. “We have been asked to share with you the following extract from one of the Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the subject of begging: “By the Sacred Verse: **‘Begging is forbidden, and it is also prohibited to dispense alms to a beggar’ is meant that mendicancy is forbidden and that giving charity to people who take up begging as their profession is also prohibited. The object is to wipe out mendicancy altogether.** However, if a person is disabled, stricken by dire poverty or becomes helpless, then it is incumbent upon the rich or the trustees to provide him with a monthly allowance for his subsistence. When the House of Justice comes into being it will set up homes for the incapacitated. Thus no one will be obliged to beg, even as the supplementary part of the Blessed Verse denotes: ‘It is enjoined upon everyone to earn his livelihood’; then He says: ‘As to those who are disabled, it devolveth upon the trustees and the rich to make adequate provision for them.’ By 'trustees' is meant the representatives of the people, that is to say the members of the House of Justice.”

“The Universal House of Justice does not wish to go beyond the elucidation given by the Master in the above passage and wishes, **for the time being, to leave any matter not entirely**

covered by this text to the conscience of individual believers.” (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, August 13, 1974 - - Compilation: Lights of Guidance, p. 120)

13. “Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. **Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer to the cry of the needy,** a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. **Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression.** Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. **Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive.”** (Bahá’u’lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 93)

14. “Again, is there any deed in the world that would be nobler than service to the common good? Is there any greater blessing conceivable for a man, than that he should become the cause of the education, the development, the prosperity and honor of his fellow-creatures? No, by the Lord God! The highest righteousness of all is for blessed souls to take hold of the hands of the helpless and deliver them out of their ignorance and abasement and poverty, and with pure motives, and only for the sake of God, to arise and energetically devote themselves to the service of the masses, forgetting their own worldly advantage and working only to serve the general good. ‘They prefer them before themselves, though poverty be their own lot.’[1] ‘The best of men are those who serve the people; the worst of men are those who harm the people.’” [1 Qur’án 59:9.] (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 103)

15. “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. 43)

Prepared by Tod Ewing for workshop and deepening purposes.