

Agriculture and Rural Life

by **Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and Universal House of Justice**

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From the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Exert every effort in the fields of development and of civilization, in the acquisition of knowledge, the increase of trade, the improvement of agriculture and the promotion of modern discoveries.

(From a Tablet, translated from the Persian)

[1]

The friends must engage in the work of developing Persia, that is, they must exert great efforts in the promotion of agriculture, industry, trade, education, arts, and sciences.

(From a Tablet, translated from the Persian)

[2]

...and when thou passest by a field in which crops, flowers, blossoms and vegetables are blended in harmony, it is evident that the field or the flower bed hath been brought into existence and hath been arranged by an experienced farmer. And, when thou observest plants that are scattered, disordered and disarranged, it is clear they have been deprived of the skillful touch of an experienced farmer, and that they are naught but wild weeds.

(From a Tablet, translated from the Persian)

[3]

All the friends of God ... should contribute to the extent possible, however modest their offering may be. God doth not burden a soul beyond its capacity. Such contributions must come from all centres and all believers.... O friends of God! Be ye assured that in place of these contributions, your agriculture, your industry, and your commerce will be blessed by manifold increases, with goodly gifts and bestowals. He who cometh with one goodly deed will receive a tenfold reward. There is no doubt that the living Lord will abundantly confirm those who expend their wealth in His path.

(From a Tablet, translated from the Persian)

[4]

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.

(From a Tablet, translated from the Persian)

[5]

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.

(The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit

to the United States and Canada in 1912 (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 283)
[6]

From Letters Written by and on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

The responsibilities of the members of the Spiritual Assemblies that are engaged in teaching the Cause of God in Eastern lands have been clearly laid down in the holy Texts.

These bid them to work towards the improvement of morals and the spread of learning; to strive to eradicate ignorance and unenlightenment, eliminate prejudice, and reinforce the foundation of true faith in people's hearts and minds; to seek to develop self-reliance and avoidance of blind imitation; to aim to enhance the efficient management of their affairs, and observe purity and refinement in all circumstances; to show their commitment to truthfulness and honesty, and their ability to conduct themselves with frankness, courage and resolution.

They similarly enjoin them to lend their support to agricultural and industrial development, to consolidate the foundations of mutual assistance and co-operation, to promote the emancipation and advancement of women and support the compulsory education of both sexes, to encourage application of the principles of consultation among all classes, and to adhere in all dealings to a standard of scrupulous integrity.

(30 January 1926, to the Local Spiritual Assemblies of Iran, translated from the Persian) [7]

Its high ideals are "to improve the characters of men; to extend the scope of knowledge; to abolish ignorance and prejudice; to strengthen the foundations of true religion in all hearts; to encourage self-reliance, and discourage false imitation; ... to uphold truthfulness, audacity, frankness, and courage; to promote craftsmanship and agriculture; ... to educate, on a compulsory basis, children of both sexes; to insist on integrity in business transactions; to lay stress on the observance of honesty and piety; ... to acquire mastery and skill in the modern sciences and arts, to promote the interests of the public; ... to obey outwardly and inwardly and with true loyalty the regulations enacted by state and government; ... to honour, to extol and to follow the example of those who have distinguished themselves in science and learning"....to help the needy from every creed or sect, and to collaborate with the people of the country in all welfare services.

(30 January 1926, to the Local Spiritual Assemblies of Iran, translated from the Persian) [8]

The crisis that exists in the world is not confined to the farmers. Its effects have reached every means of livelihood. The farmers are in a sense better off because they at least have food to eat. But on the whole the crisis is serving a great purpose. It is broadening the outlook of man, teaching him to think internationally, forcing him to take into consideration the welfare of his neighbours if he wishes to improve his own condition. In short it is forcing humanity to appreciate the significance of and follow the precepts laid by Bahá'u'lláh.

(February 3, 1932 [note: as submitted, the date given in this citation was "2 March 1932," but the 2004 edition of *Lights of Guidance*, page 130 quote 436, gives the 1932 date], written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [9]

Shoghi Effendi was very glad to hear of your work among the ranchers. He sincerely hopes that they will advance in spirituality and become imbued with the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh. Country people should be much readier for the Message, for they are not so completely carried away by material civilization and its

blinding influence. They ought to be more receptive and more pure in heart.

(13 May 1932, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

[10]

From Letters Written by and on Behalf of the Universal House of Justice

One of the characteristics of the 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.

(Naw-Rúz 1974, from the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies) [11]

There are, at the present time, many villages in India, the Philippines, Africa, Latin America, etc., where the Bahá'ís form a majority or even the entire population of the village. One of the goals of the Five Year Plan, as you will recall, is to develop the characteristics of Bahá'í community life, and it is, above all, to such villages that the goal is directed. 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 Bahá'í consultation, and through such Bahá'í 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. For this they will need the assistance of Bahá'í experts from other lands. This is a major undertaking, and is being started gradually wherever and whenever possible.

(27 July 1976, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [12]

There are two principles which the House of Justice feels are fundamental to the generality of such projects of social and economic development, although, of course, there will be exceptions. The first is that they should be built on a substructure of existing, sufficiently strong local Bahá'í communities. The second is that the long-term conduct of the project should aim at self-sufficiency and not be dependent upon continuing financial support from outside.

The first principle implies that the projects of social and economic development now to be undertaken are a natural stage of the growth of the Bahá'í community and are needed by the community itself, although they will, of course, benefit a much wider segment of society. The Bahá'í world is in no position, financially or from the point of view of manpower, to launch undertakings for the economic and social development of populations in areas where there are but few believers. The greatest need of all peoples is for the Faith itself, so that they may know the destiny towards which they as individuals and as members of society must strive, and will learn from the teachings those virtues and methods which will enable them to work together in harmony, forbearance and trustworthiness.

A symbol of this process may be seen in the House of Worship and its dependencies. The first part to be built is the central edifice which is the spiritual heart of the community. Then, gradually, as the outward expression of this spiritual heart, the various dependencies, those "institutions of social service as

shall afford relief to the suffering, sustenance to the poor, shelter to the wayfarer, solace to the bereaved, and education to the ignorant" are erected and function. This process begins in an embryonic way long before a Bahá'í community reaches the stage of building its own *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*, for even the first local centre that a Bahá'í community erects can begin to serve not only as the spiritual and administrative centre and gathering place of the community, but also as the site of a tutorial school and the heart of other aspects of community life. The principle remains, however, that the spiritual precedes the material. First comes the illumination of hearts and minds by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and then the grass roots stirring of the believers wishing to apply these teachings to the daily life of their community. Such stirrings can be fostered, encouraged and assisted by the national and continental institutions of the Faith, but without them any activities introduced from above might well prove abortive.

The second principle must take into account that any project started by the Cause should be designed to grow soundly and steadily, and not to collapse from attrition. In other words, external assistance and funds, Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í, may be used for capital acquisitions, to make surveys, to initiate activities, to bring in expertise, but the aim should be for each project to be able to continue and to develop on the strength of local Bahá'í labour, funds and enthusiasm even if all external aid should be cut off. (8 May 1984, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [13]

With regard to the concept of the Bahá'í community as a model, one of the distinguishing features of our community is its "unshakeable consciousness of the oneness of mankind".^[1] This awareness is coupled with the commitment of the believers to endeavour to uphold spiritual principles "by which solutions can be found for every social problem",^[2] and the practice of which "induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures".^[3] In keeping with the evolutionary nature of organic change, the Bahá'í community represents a model for the potential and gradual resolution of prejudices and other social ills, but cannot now present an example of achievement in absolute terms. We see in the Bahá'í community not only an example of diversity which is intrinsically attractive and hope inducing, but also the will and desire to work for change and the initial effects of such change, particularly in the discernible emergence of a new way of life and in the embryonic operation of the administrative and social structures being erected. Individual initiative is reinforced by the Bahá'í community at large and is channelled into constructive social action by the process of consultation. Clearly, the Bahá'í experience addresses problems at a fundamental level and realizes the means for their resolution; however, in presenting the Bahá'í community as a model, care must of course be taken to avoid giving the impression that all problems have been solved and all challenges met.

(23 September 1986, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [14]

When the Bahá'í community in a village is a significant proportion of the population, it has a wide range of opportunities to be an example and an encouragement of means of improving the quality of life in the village. Among the initiatives which it might take are measures to foster child education, adult literacy and the training of women to better discharge their responsibilities as mothers and to play an enlarged role in the administrative and social life of the village; encouragement of the people of the village to join together in devotions, perhaps in the early morning, irrespective of their varieties of religious belief; support of efforts to improve the hygiene and the health of the village, including attention to the provision of pure water, the preservation of cleanliness in the village environment, and education in the harmful effects of narcotic and intoxicating substances. No doubt other possibilities will present themselves to the village Bahá'í community and its Local Spiritual Assembly.

(25 July 1988, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [15]

Basically, "people of capacity" are those individuals, no matter in what walk of life they are found, and no matter what their level of education, who demonstrate capacity in various ways. For example, among any group of people there are those who are outstanding because they show a capacity for

understanding, for work, for efficient action, for leadership, for drawing other people together, for self-sacrificing and devoted service -- for any number of qualities which enable them to respond actively to the needs of their environment and make a difference to it. In some cases this capacity has already been demonstrated; in others it is still latent but can be developed. It is for such people that we should search, since they can quickly become either devoted and active Bahá'ís or valued collaborators in the work of promoting Bahá'í ideals.

(6 November 1994, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[16]

Notes:

1. From "The Promise of World Peace" (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1985), p. 13.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.