

# Social and Economic Development

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

translated by Research Department of the Universal House of Justice.  
published in *Compilation of Compilations*, Volume 3, pages 275-319  
2000

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## I. "... the concept of social and economic development is enshrined in the sacred Teachings of our Faith."

(*Universal House of Justice*, 20 October 1983)

459 ... 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* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), pp. 240-241)

460 They whom God hath endued with insight will readily recognise that the precepts laid down by God constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre), p. 11)

461 I testify that no sooner had the First Word proceeded, through the potency of Thy will and purpose, out of His mouth, and the First Call gone forth from His lips than the whole creation was revolutionised, and all that are in the heavens and all that are on earth were stirred to the depths. Through that Word the realities of all created things were shaken, were divided, separated, scattered, combined and reunited, disclosing, in both the contingent world and the heavenly kingdom, entities of a new creation, and revealing, in the unseen realms, the signs and tokens of Thy unity and oneness. Through that Call Thou didst announce unto all Thy servants the advent of Thy most great Revelation and the appearance of Thy most perfect Cause.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969), pp. 295-296)*

462 Every word that proceedeth Out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instil new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth. All the wondrous works ye behold in this world have been manifested through the operation of His supreme and most exalted Will, His wondrous and inflexible Purpose.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), p. 141)*

463 ... the still greater task of converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that We have been empowered to accomplish. The Force capable of such a transformation transcendeth the potency of the Elixir itself. The Word of God, alone, can claim the distinction of being endowed with the capacity required for so great and far-reaching a change.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), p. 200)*

464 The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind. He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy. Every age hath its own problem, and every soul its particular aspiration. The remedy the world needeth in its present-day afflictions can never be the same as that which a subsequent age may require. Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.

We can well perceive how the whole human race is encompassed with great, with incalculable afflictions. We see it languishing on its bed of sickness, sore-tried and disillusioned. They that are intoxicated by self conceit have interposed themselves between it and the Divine and infallible Physician. Witness how they have entangled all men, themselves included, in the mesh of their devices. They can neither discover the cause of the disease, nor have they any knowledge of the remedy. They have conceived the straight to be crooked, and have imagined their friend an enemy.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), p. 213)*

465 Religion is verily the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world and of tranquillity amongst its peoples ... The greater the decline of religion, the more grievous the waywardness of the ungodly. This cannot but lead in the end to chaos and confusion.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), pp 63-64)*

466 ... that which hath streamed forth from the Most Exalted Pen is conducive to the glory, the advancement and education of all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Indeed it is the sovereign remedy for every disease, could they but comprehend and perceive it.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), p. 73)*

467 O people of God! Give ear unto that which, if heeded, will ensure the freedom, well-being, tranquillity, exaltation and advancement of all men.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), p. 92)*

468 Unveiled and unconcealed, this Wronged One hath, at all times, proclaimed before the face of all the peoples of the world that which will serve as the key for unlocking the doors of sciences, of arts, of knowledge, of well-being, of prosperity and wealth.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), p. 96)*

469 The religion of God and His divine law are the most potent instruments and the surest of all means for the dawning of the light of unity amongst men. The progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquillity of peoples, and the peace of all who dwell on earth are among the principles and ordinances of God. Religion bestoweth upon man the most precious of all gifts, offereth the cup of prosperity, imparteth eternal life, and showereth imperishable benefits upon mankind.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 1982), pp. 129-130)*

470 All the peoples of Europe, notwithstanding their vaunted civilisation, sink and drown in this terrifying sea of passion and desire, and this is why all the phenomena of their culture come to nothing. Let no one wonder at this statement or deplore it. The primary purpose, the basic objective, in laying down powerful laws and setting up great principles and institutions dealing with every aspect of civilisation, is human happiness; and human happiness consists only in drawing closer to the Threshold of Almighty God, and in securing the peace and welling of every individual member, high and low alike, of the human race; and the supreme agencies for accomplishing these two objectives are the excellent qualities with which humanity has been endowed.

A superficial culture, unsupported by a cultivated morality, is as "a confused medley of dreams," and external lustre without inner perfection is "like a vapour in the desert which the thirsty dreameth to be water." For results which would win the good pleasure of God and secure the peace and well-being of man, could never be fully achieved in a merely external civilisation.

*(Abdu'l-Bahá, Secret of Divine Civilization (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975). p. 60-61)*

471 Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonising divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men. Verily, it is the penetrating power in all things, the mover of and the binder and regulator in the world of humanity.

*(Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), p. 292)*

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

*(Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 12)*

473 Until the heavenly civilisation is founded, no result will be forthcoming from material civilisation ...

*(Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 96)*

474 Material civilisation is likened to the body, whereas divine civilisation is the spirit in that body. A body not manifesting the spirit is dead; a fruitless tree is worthless.

*(Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 104)*

475 No matter how far the material world advances, it cannot establish the happiness of mankind. Only when material and spiritual civilisation are linked and coordinated will happiness be assured. Then material civilisation will not contribute its energies to the forces of evil in destroying the oneness of humanity, for in material civilisation good and evil advance together and maintain the same pace. For example consider the material progress of man in the last decade. Schools colleges, hospitals, philanthropic institutions, scientific academies temples of philosophy have been founded, but hand in hand with these evidences of development, the invention and production of means and weapons for human destruction have correspondingly increased...

All this is the outcome of material civilisation; therefore, although material advancement furthers good

purposes in life, at the same time it serves evil ends ... If the moral precepts and foundations of divine civilisation become united with the material advancement of man, there is no doubt that the happiness of the human world will be attained and from every direction the glad tidings of peace upon earth will be announced. Then humankind will achieve extraordinary progress, the sphere of human intelligence will be immeasurably enlarged, wonderful inventions will appear, and the spirit of God will reveal itself; all men will consort in joy and fragrance, and eternal life will be conferred upon the children of the Kingdom.

*(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 109-110)*

476 Material development may be likened to the glass of a lamp, whereas divine virtues and spiritual susceptibilities are the light within the glass. The lamp chimney is worthless without the light; likewise, man in his material condition requires the radiance and vivification of the divine graces and merciful attributes.

*(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 288)*

477 Who else can be the blissful if not the community of the Most Great Name, whose world-embracing, continually consolidating activities constitute the one integrating process in a world whose institutions, secular as well as religious, are for the most part dissolving? They indeed are "the people of the right," whose "noble habitation" is fixed on the foundations of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh—the Ark of everlasting salvation in this most grievous Day. Of all the kindreds of the earth they alone can recognise, amidst the welter of a tempestuous age, the Hand of the Divine Redeemer that traces its course and controls its destinies. They alone are aware of the silent growth of that orderly world polity whose fabric they themselves are weaving.

*(Shoghi Effendi, World Order of Bahá'u'lláh (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 194)*

478 We are indeed living in an age which, if we would correctly appraise it, should be regarded as one which is witnessing a dual phenomenon. The first signals the death-pangs of an order, effete and godless, that has stubbornly refused, despite the signs and portents of a century-old Revelation, to attune its processes to the precepts and ideals which that Heaven-sent Faith proffered it. The second proclaims the birth-pangs of an Order, divine and redemptive, that will inevitably supplant the former, and within Whose administrative structure an embryonic civilisation, incomparable and world-embracing, is imperceptibly maturing. The one is being rolled up, and is crashing in oppression, bloodshed, and ruin. The other opens up vistas of a justice, a unity, a peace, a culture, such as no age has ever seen. The former has spent its force, demonstrated its falsity and barrenness, lost irretrievably its opportunity, and is hurrying to its doom. The latter, virile and unconquerable, is plucking asunder its chains, and is vindicating its title to be the one refuge within which a sore-tried humanity, purged from its dross, can attain its destiny.

*(Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day is Come (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), p. 16)*

479 The primary consideration is the spirit that has to permeate our economic life and this will gradually crystallise itself into definite institutions and principles that would help to bring about the ideal condition foretold by Bahá'u'lláh.

*(From a letter dated 20 December 1931 written on behalf of the Guardian to a National Spiritual Assembly)*

480 Technocracy, as well as the other movements now existing in the world, every one of them, has some wonderful point that connects it very closely to the teachings of the Faith. But all these see the light partially. The spirit of the Cause pulsates in their veins but they have to become conscious of the center of inspiration and light if they desire to reform fully our corrupted and despairing society. Our troubles are not purely economic. There are also basic spiritual reforms that have to set in. There is the human heart that has to be changed.

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.

No movement in the world directs its attention upon both these aspects of human life and has full measures for their improvement save the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. And this is its distinctive feature. If we desire therefore the good of the world we should strive to spread those teachings and also practice them in our own life. Through them will the human heart be changed and also our social environment provides the atmosphere in which we can grow spiritually and reflect in full the light of God shining through the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

*(From letter dated 17 February 1933 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)*

481 Now is the time when every follower of Bahá'u'lláh must cling fast to the Covenant of God, resist every temptation to become embroiled in the conflicts of the world, and remember that he is the holder of a precious trust, the Message of God which, alone, can banish injustice from the world and cure the ills afflicting the body and spirit of man. We are the bearers of the Word of God in this day and, however dark the immediate horizons, we must go forward rejoicing in the knowledge that the work we are privileged to perform is God's work and will bring to birth a world whose splendour will outshine our brightest visions and surpass our highest hopes.

*(Universal House of Justice, Letter to the Bahá'ís of the World, Naw-Rúz 1979)*

482 A wider horizon is opening before us, illumined by a growing and universal manifestation of the inherent potentialities of the Cause for ordering human affairs. In this light can be discerned not only our immediate tasks but, more dimly, new pursuits and undertakings upon which we must shortly become engaged ... 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.

*(Universal House of Justice, Letter to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 140 B.E.)*

483 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 ... 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.

*(From a letter dated 8 May 1984, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)*

**II. "... the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, the spiritual centre of every Bahá'í community round which must flourish dependencies dedicated to the social, humanitarian, educational and scientific advancement of mankind."**

*(The Universal House of Justice, 20 October 1983)*

484 Although to outward seeming the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is a material structure, yet it hath a spiritual effect. It forgoeth bonds of unity from heart to heart; it is a collective centre for men's souls. Every city in which during the days of the Manifestation, a temple was raised up, hath created security and constancy and peace, for such buildings were given over to the perpetual glorification of God, and only in the remembrance of God can the heart find rest. Gracious God! The edifice of the House of Worship hath a powerful influence on every phase of life. Experience hath, in the east, clearly shown this to be a fact. Even if in some small village, a house was designated as the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár it produced a marked effect; how much greater would be the impact of one especially raised up.

(*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), pp. 95-96*)

485 The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár and its accessories; "When these institutions, college, hospital, hospice, and establishments for the incurables, university for the study of higher sciences and giving postgraduate courses, and other philanthropic buildings, are built, its doors will be open to all the nations and all religions. There will be drawn absolutely no line of demarcation. Its charities will be dispensed irrespective of colour and race. Its gates will be flung wide to mankind; prejudice toward none, love for all. The central building will be devoted to the purposes of prayer and worship. Thus for the first time religion will become harmonised with science and science will be the handmaid of religion, both showering their material and spiritual gifts on all humanity. In this way the people will be lifted out of the quagmires of slothfulness and bigotry."

(*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Star of the West, 21 (1), 1930, p. 20*)

486 The founding of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár will mark the inception of the Kingdom of God on earth.

(*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Star of the West, 6 (17), 1916, p. 137*)

487 But however inspiring the conception of Bahá'í worship, as witnessed in the central Edifice of this exalted Temple, it cannot be regarded as the sole, nor even the essential, factor in the part which the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, as designed by Bahá'u'lláh, is destined to play in the organic life of the Bahá'í community. Divorced from the social, humanitarian, educational and scientific pursuits centering around the Dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, Bahá'í worship, however exalted in its conception, however passionate in fervour, can never hope to achieve beyond the meagre and often transitory results produced by the contemplations of the ascetic or the communion of the passive worshipper. It cannot afford lasting satisfaction and benefit to the worshipper himself, much less to humanity in general, unless and until translated and transfused into that dynamic and disinterested service to the cause of humanity which it is the supreme privilege of the Dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár to facilitate and promote. Nor will the exertions, no matter how disinterested and strenuous, of those who within the precincts of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár will be engaged in administering the affairs of the future Bahá'í Commonwealth, fructify and prosper unless they are brought into close and daily communion with those spiritual agencies centring in and radiating from the central Shrine of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. Nothing short of direct and constant interaction between the spiritual forces emanating from this House of Worship centring in the heart of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, and the energies consciously displayed by those who administer its affair in their service to humanity can possibly provide the necessary agency capable of removing the ills that have so long and so grievously afflicted humanity. For it is assuredly upon the consciousness of the efficacy of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, reinforced on one hand by spiritual communion with His Spirit, and on the other by the intelligent application and the faithful execution of the principles and laws He revealed, that the salvation of a world in travail must ultimately depend. And of all the institutions that stand associated with His Holy Name, surely none save the institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár can most adequately provide the essentials of Bahá'í worship and service, both so vital to the regeneration of the world. Therein lies the secret of the loftiness, of the potency, of the unique position of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár as one of the outstanding institutions conceived by Bahá'u'lláh.

(*Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), pp. 185-186*)

488 From the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, ordained as a house of worship by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the representatives of Bahá'í communities, both local and national, together with the members of their respective committees, will, as they gather daily within its walls at the hour of dawn, derive the necessary inspiration that will enable them to discharge, in the course of their day-to-day exertions in the Hazíratu'l-Quds—the scene of their administrative activities—their duties and responsibilities as befits the chosen stewards of His Faith.

(*Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979), P. 340*)

489 In these days one of the essential requirements of the Faith which will attract divine blessings and lead to the protection of the servants at His Threshold, is to set aside a suitable place to serve as a centre for Bahá'í activities in each of the localities where believers reside. In such a centre, even if it is among the most modest of locations, all gatherings of the friends should be held, such as those for the reading of

the Tablets, for prayers and supplications, for the meetings of the Local Spiritual Assembly, for the teaching work, for the delivery of talks, for commemorations, for festivals and for the Feasts. If the location is suitable, it would be light upon light if in the future the edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár could also be erected on that spot. That centre should be named Hazíratu'l-Quds, so that the musk-scented breaths of the fervent prayers offered therein, and the sweet breeze of spiritual discussions and worthy enterprises wafted from the Hazíratu'l-Quds may spread to neighbouring regions, and impart healing and fragrance to the nostrils of a sorely-afflicted world.

*(Translated from a letter of Shoghi Effendi to the friends in Iran and the East, dated July 1925)*

490 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.

*(From a letter dated 8 May 1984, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)*

**III. "The steps to be taken must necessarily begin in the Bahá'í Community itself, with the friends endeavouring, through their application of spiritual principles, their rectitude of conduct and the practice of the art of consultation, to uplift themselves and thus become self-sufficient and self-reliant. Moreover, these exertions will conduce to the preservation of human honour, so desired by Bahá'u'lláh. In the process and as a consequence, the friends will undoubtedly extend the benefits of their efforts to society as a whole, until all mankind achieves the progress intended by the Lord of the Age.**

*(Universal House of Justice, 20 October 1983)*

#### **A. The Application of Spiritual Principles**

491 We prescribe unto all men that which will lead to the exaltation of the Word of God amongst His servants, and likewise, to the advancement of the world of being and the uplift of souls. To this end, the greatest means is education of the child. To this must each and all hold fast. We have verily laid this charge upon you in manifold Tablets as well as in My Most Holy Book. Well is it with him who deferreth thereto.

We ask of God that He will assist each and every one to obey this inescapable command that hath appeared and been caused to descend through the Pen of the Ancient of Days.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Bahá'í Education: A Compilation (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1978), p. 4) [Ed. - no. 6]*

492 Know thou that all men have been created in the nature made by God, the Guardian, the Self-Subsisting. Unto each one hath been prescribed a pre-ordained measure, as decreed in God's mighty and guarded Tablets. All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), p. 149)*

493 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 revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), p. 26)*

494 The first Taráz and the first effulgence which hath dawned from the horizon of the Mother Book is that man should know his own self and recognise that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty. 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 praise-worthy 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. They are, in truth, cup-bearers of the life-giving water of knowledge and guides unto the ideal way. They direct the peoples of the world to the straight path and acquaint them with that which is conducive to human upliftment and exaltation.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), pp. 34-35)*

495 The third Tajallí 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. Unto this beareth witness the Mother Book on the day of His return. Happy are those possessed of a hearing ear. In truth, knowledge is a veritable treasure for man, and source of glory, of bounty, of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto him. Thus hath the Tongue of Grandeur spoken in this Most Great Prison.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), pp. 51-52)*

496 The purpose of learning should be the promotion of the welfare of the people, and this can be achieved through crafts. It hath been revealed and is now repeated that the true worth of artists and craftsmen should be appreciated, for they advance the affairs of mankind. Just as the foundations of religion are made firm through the Law of God, the means of livelihood depend upon those who are engaged in arts and crafts. True learning is that which is conducive to the well-being of the world, not to pride and self-conceit, or to tyranny, violence and pillage.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, from a newly translated Tablet)*

497 ... 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. How well has it been said: "On my back is a garment which, were it sold for a penny, that penny would be worth far more; yet within the garment is a soul which, if you weighed it against all the souls in the world, would prove greater and nobler."

*(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Secret of Divine Civilization (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975). pp. 23-24)*

498 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 expanded 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, Secret of Divine Civilization (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975), pp. 24-25*)

499 The world of politics is like the world of man; he is a seed at first and then passes by degrees to the condition of embryo and foetus acquiring a bone structure, being clothed with flesh, taking on his own special form, until at last he reaches the plane where he can befittingly fulfil the words: "the most excellent of Makers." (Qur'án 23:14) Just as this is a requirement of creation and is based on the universal Wisdom, the political world in the same way cannot instantaneously evolve from the nadir of defectiveness to the zenith of rightness and perfection. Rather, qualified individuals must strive by day and by night, using all those means which will conduce to progress, until the government and the people develop along every line from day to day and even from moment to moment

(*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Secret of Divine Civilization (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975), pp. 107-108*)

500 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. The principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples is ignorance. Today the mass of the people are uninformed even as to ordinary affairs, how much less do they grasp the core of the important problems and complex needs of the time.

(*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Secret of Divine Civilization (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975), p. 109*)

591 It is, furthermore, a vital necessity to establish schools throughout Persia, even in the smallest country towns and villages, and to encourage the people in every possible way to have their children learn to read and write. If necessary, education should even be made compulsory. Until the nerves and arteries of the nation stir into life, every measure that is attempted will prove vain; for the people are as the human body, and determination and the will to struggle are as the soul, and a soulless body does not move. This dynamic power is present to a superlative degree in the very nature of the Persian people, and the spread of education will release it

(*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Secret of Divine Civilization (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975), pp. 111-112*)

502 To state the matter briefly, the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh advocate voluntary sharing, and this is a greater thing than the equalisation of wealth. For equalisation 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 (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), p. 115*)

503 O ye recipients of the favours of God! In this new and wondrous Age, the unshakeable foundation is the teaching of sciences and arts. According to explicit Holy Texts, every child must be taught crafts and arts, to the degree that is needful. Wherefore, in every city and village, schools must be established and every child in that city or village is to engage in study to the necessary degree.

It followeth that whatever soul shall offer his aid to bring this about will assuredly be accepted at the heavenly Threshold, and extolled by the Company on high.

Since ye have striven hard toward this all-important end, it is my hope that ye will reap your reward from the Lord of clear tokens and signs, and that the glances of heavenly grace will turn your way.

(*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), pp. 134-135*)

504 As preordained by the Fountainhead of Creation, the temple of the world hath been fashioned after the image and likeness of the human body. In fact each mirroreth forth the image of the other, wert thou but to observe with discerning eyes. By this is meant that even as the human body in this world which is outwardly composed of different limbs and organs, is in reality a closely integrated, coherent entity, similarly the structure of the physical world is like unto a single being whose limbs and members are inseparably linked together.

Were one to observe with an eye that discovereth the realities of all things, it would become clear that the greatest relationship that bindeth the world of being together lieth in the range of created things themselves, and that cooperation, mutual aid and reciprocity are essential characteristics in the unified body of the world of being inasmuch as all created things are closely related together and each is influenced by the other or deriveth benefit therefrom, either directly or indirectly.

Consider for instance how one group of created things constituteth the vegetable kingdom, and another the animal kingdom. Each of these two maketh use of certain elements in the air on which its own life dependeth, while each increaseth the quantity of such elements as are essential for the life of the other. In other words, the growth and development of the vegetable world is impossible without existence of the animal kingdom, and the maintenance of animal life is inconceivable without the co-operation of the vegetable kingdom. Of like kind are the relationships that exist among all created things. Hence it was stated that co-operation and reciprocity are essential properties which are inherent in the unified system of the world of existence, and without which the entire creation would be reduced to nothingness.

In surveying the vast range of creation thou shalt perceive that the higher a kingdom of created things is on the arc of ascent, the more conspicuous are the signs and evidences of the truth that cooperation and reciprocity at the level of a higher order are greater than those that exist at the level of a lower order. For example the evident signs of this fundamental reality are more discernible in the vegetable kingdom than in the mineral, and still more manifest in the animal world than in the vegetable.

And thus when contemplating the human world thou beholdest this wondrous phenomenon shining resplendent from all sides with the utmost perfection, inasmuch as in this station acts of cooperation, mutual assistance and reciprocity are not confined to the body and to the things that pertain to the material world, but for all conditions, whether physical or spiritual, such as those related to minds, thoughts, opinions, manners, customs, attitudes, understandings, feelings or other human susceptibilities. In all these thou shouldst find these binding relationships securely established. The more this inter-relationship is strengthened and expanded, the more will human society advance in progress and prosperity. Indeed without these vital ties it would be wholly impossible for the world of humanity to attain true felicity and success.

Now consider, if among the people who are merely the manifestations of the world of being this significant matter is of such importance, how much greater must be the spirit of co-operation and mutual assistance among those who are the essences of the world of creation, who have sought the sheltering shadow of the heavenly Tree, and are favoured by the manifestations of divine grace; and how the evidences of this spirit should, through their earnest endeavour, their fellowship and concord, become manifest in every sphere of their inner and outer lives, in the realm of the spirit and divine mysteries and in all related to this world and the next. Thus there can be no doubt that they must be willing even to offer up their lives for each other ...

We earnestly hope that in this Most Great Cycle the wondrous attributes of the All-Merciful may, through the infinite bounty and blessings of the King of Glory, find expression in the lives of the servants of God in such wise that the sweet savours thereof will shed fragrance all regions.

This matter needeth further details, but We have treated it in brief.

(*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Huqúqu'lláh: The Right of God (London; Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1989), pp. 20-21*) [Ed. - no. 61]

505 O ye friends of the east and the west!

One of the greatest foundations of the religion of God, the significance of the Word of God and the duty of the believers of God is mutual assistance and co-operation. For the world of humanity, nay, rather, all the infinite beings exist by this law of mutual action and helpfulness. Should this law of joint interchange of forces be removed from the arena of life, the existence would be entirely destroyed.

When we ponder deeply upon the connection and interdependence of beings, we clearly realise that the life of every being draws benefit and sustenance from all the other innumerable existences. This mutual helpfulness is realised either directly or through mediation, and if, for inking of an eye, this confirmation and assistance does not descend upon the living being, that one will become non-existent, for all the existing things are linked together and draw help from each other. Therefore, the greatest foundation of the world of existence is this co-operation and mutuality.

Liken the world of existence to the temple of man. All the limbs and organs of the human body assist each other, therefore life continues. When, in this wonderful organism, there is a disconnection, life is changed into death and the parts of the body disintegrate. Likewise, among the parts of existence, there is a wonderful connection and interchange of forces, which is the cause of the life of the world and the continuation of these countless phenomena ...

From this illustration, one can see the base of life is this mutual aid and helpfulness; and the cause of destruction and non-existence would be the interruption of this mutual assistance.

The more the world aspires to civilisation, the more this most important matter of co-operation and assistance becomes manifest. Therefore, in the world of humanity, one sees this matter of helpfulness attain to a high degree of efficiency; so much so, that the continuance of humanity entirely depends upon this interrelation. The believers of God must especially fortify the foundation of this reality among themselves, so that all may help each other under all circumstances, whether in the degree of truth and significances or in the stations of this world of matter and, especially, in founding public institutions which shall benefit all the people, and, still more, the founding Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, which is the greatest of the divine foundations.

(*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Star of the West, 6 (17), pp. 138-139*)

506 The education of each child is compulsory ... In addition to this widespread education each child must be taught a profession, art, or trade so that every member of the community will be enabled to earn his own livelihood. Work done in the spirit of service is the highest form of worship ...

(*'Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy (Boston: The Tudor Press, 1916), p. 78*)

507 Commerce, agriculture and industry should not, in truth, be a bar to service of the One True God. Indeed, such occupations are most potent instruments and clear proofs for the manifestation of the evidences of one's piety, of one's trustworthiness and of the virtues of the All-Merciful Lord.

(*Translated extract from a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*)

508 Human education signifies civilisation and progress—that is to say government, administration, charitable works, trades, arts and handicrafts, sciences, great inventions and discoveries and elaborate institutions, which are the activities essential to man as distinguished from the animal. Divine education is that of the Kingdom of God: it consists in acquiring divine perfections, and this is true education; for in this state man becomes the focus of divine blessings, the manifestation of the words, "Let Us make man in Our image, and after Our likeness." This is the goal of the world of humanity.

(*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), p. 8*)

509 The attainment of any object is conditioned upon knowledge, volition and action. Unless these three conditions are forthcoming there is no execution or accomplishment.

(*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979), p. 101*)

510 He (Bahá'u'lláh) has declared that in the estimation of God there is no distinction of sex. The one whose heart is most pure, whose deeds and service in the Cause of God are greater and nobler, is most acceptable before the divine threshold— whether male or female ... there must be no difference in the education of male and female in order that womankind may develop equal capacity and importance with man in the social and economic equation. Then the world will attain unity and harmony. In past ages humanity has been defective and inefficient because it has been incomplete. War and its ravages have blighted the world; the education of woman will be a mighty step toward its abolition and ending, for she will use her whole influence against war. Woman rears the child and educates the youth to maturity. She will refuse to give her sons for sacrifice upon the field of battle. In truth, she will be the greatest factor in establishing universal peace and international arbitration. Assuredly, woman will abolish warfare among mankind. Inasmuch as human society consists of two parts, the male and female, each the complement of the other, the happiness and stability of humanity cannot be assured unless both are perfected. Therefore, the standard and status of man and woman must become equalised.

(*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 108*)

511 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. As the rich man enjoys his life surrounded by ease and luxuries so the poor man must, likewise, have a home and be provided with sustenance and comforts commensurate with his needs. This readjustment of the social economy is of the greatest importance in as much as it ensures the stability of the world of humanity; and until it is effected, happiness and prosperity are impossible.

(*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), pp 181-182*)

512 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. 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, Promulgation of Universal Peace (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 238-239*)

513 Briefly, every nation has a day known as a holiday which they celebrate with joy. In the sacred laws of God, in every cycle and dispensation, there are blessed feasts, holidays and workless days. On such days all kinds of occupations, commerce, industry, agriculture etc., are not allowed. Every work is unlawful. All must enjoy a good time, gather together, hold general meetings, become as one assembly, so that the national oneness, unity and harmony may become personified in all eyes. As it is a blessed day it should not be neglected or 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 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. For example, if they find that the community needs morality, then they may lay down the foundation of good morals on that day. 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 start the means so that the desired aim may be attained. If the community needs protection, proper support and care of orphans, they should act upon the welfare of the orphans, etc. Such undertakings that 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..

In all the cycles of the prophets the philanthropic affairs were confined to their respective peoples only - with the exception of small matters, such as charity, which was permissible to extend to others. But in this wonderful dispensation, philanthropic affairs are for all humanity, without any exception, because it is the manifestation of the mercifulness of God. Therefore, every universal matter - that is, one that belongs to all the world of humanity - is divine; and every matter that is sectarian and special is not universal in character - that is, it is limited. Therefore, my hope is that the friends of God, every one of them, may become as the mercy of God to all mankind.

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Star of the West, Vol. 9, No. 1, 8-9 (March 1918))*

514 We must therefore rise to serve the members of the human race and educate first the individuals, so that the nations, which are composed of individuals, and the governments, which belong to these nations, may both be converted and guided, and that through this agency the unity of mankind may be established and its prosperity and success realised.

*(Shoghi Effendi, from a previously untranslated Tablet, January 1923)*

515 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.

*(From a letter dated 11 March 1942, written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)*

516 "Regard the world as the human body," wrote Bahá’u’lláh to Queen Victoria. We can surely regard the Bahá’í world, the army of God, in the same way. In the human body, every cell, every organ, every nerve has its part to play. When all do so the body is healthy, vigorous, radiant, ready for every call made upon it. No cell, however humble, lives apart from the body, whether in serving it or receiving from it. This is true of the body of mankind in which God "has endowed each humble being with ability and talent" and is supremely true of the body of the Bahá’í world community, for this body is already an organism, united in its aspirations, unified in its methods, seeking assistance and confirmation from the same Source, and illumined with the conscious knowledge of its unity. Therefore, in this organic, divinely guided, blessed, and illumined body the participation of every believer is of the utmost importance, and is a source of power and vitality as yet unknown to us. For extensive and deep as has been the sharing in the glorious work of the Cause, who would claim that every single believer has succeeded in finding his or her fullest satisfaction in the life of the Cause? The Bahá’í world community, growing like a healthy new body, develops new cells, new organs, new functions and powers as it presses on to its maturity, when every soul, living for the Cause of God, will receive from that Cause, health, assurance, and the overflowing bounties of Bahá’u’lláh which are diffused through His divinely ordained Order ...

The real secret of universal participation lies in the Master's oft-expressed wish that the friends should love each other, constantly encourage each other, work together, be as one soul in one body, and in so doing become a true, organic, healthy body animated and illumined by the spirit. In such a body all will receive spiritual health and vitality from the organism itself, and the most perfect flowers and fruits will be brought forth.

*(Universal House of Justice, Wellspring of Guidance (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 37-39)*

517 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.

*(Universal House of Justice, The Promise of World Peace (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1985), pp. 10-11) [Ed. - [here](#)]*

518 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 harmonises 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.

*(Universal House of Justice, The Promise of World Peace (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1985), p. 13) [Ed. - [here](#)]*

## **B. Rectitude of Conduct**

519 O Kamál! The heights which, through the most gracious favour of God, mortal man can attain, in this Day, are as yet unrevealed to his sight. The world of being hath never had, nor doth it yet possess the capacity for such a revelation ...

All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilisation. The Almighty beareth Me witness: To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Say: O friends! Drink your fill from this crystal stream that floweth through the heavenly grace of Him Who is the Lord of Names. Let others partake of its waters in My name, that the leaders of men in every land may fully recognise the purpose for which the Eternal Truth hath been revealed, and the reason for which they themselves have been created.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), pp. 214-215)*

520 Be most loving one to another. Burn away, wholly for the sake of the Well-Beloved, the veil of self with the flame of the undying Fire, and with faces joyous and beaming with light, associate with your neighbour ...

The Word of God hath set the heart of the world afire; how regrettable if ye fail to be enkindled with its flame! Please God, ye will regard this blessed night as the night of unity, will knit your souls together, and resolve to adorn yourselves with the ornament of a goodly and praiseworthy character. Let your principal concern be to rescue the fallen from the slough of impending extinction, and to help him embrace the ancient Faith of God. Your behavior towards your neighbour should be such as to manifest clearly the signs of the one true God, for ye the first among men to be re-created by His Spirit, the first to adore and bow the knee before Him, the first to circle round His throne of glory.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), pp. 31-37)*

521 It behoveth the people of Bahá to render the Lord victorious through the power of their utterance and to admonish the people by their goodly deeds and character, inasmuch as deeds exert greater influence than words.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), p. 57)*

522 Humility exalteth man to the heaven of glory and power, whilst pride abaseth him to the depths of wretchedness and degradation.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 1982), p. 64)*

523 This is the most great, the most joyful tidings imparted by the Pen of this Wronged One to mankind. Wherefore fear ye, O My well-beloved ones? Who is it that can dismay you? A touch of moisture sufficeth to dissolve the hardened clay out of which this perverse generation is moulded. The mere act of your gathering together is enough to scatter the forces of these vain and worthless people.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), pp. 84-85)*

524 O people of Justice! Be as brilliant as the light and as splendid as the fire that blazed in the Burning Bush. The brightness of the fire of your love will no doubt fuse and unify the contending peoples and kindreds of the earth, whilst the fierceness of the flame of enmity and hatred cannot but result in strife and ruin.

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), p. 88)*

525 The companions of God are, in this day, the lump that must leaven the peoples of the world. They must show forth such trustworthiness, such truthfulness and perseverance, such deeds and character, that all mankind may profit by their example.

*(Bahá'u'lláh quoted in Shoghi Effendi's "Advent of Divine Justice" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 23)*

526 The betterment of the world can be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds, through commendable and seemly conduct.

*(Bahá'u'lláh quoted in Shoghi Effendi's "Advent of Divine Justice" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), pp. 24-25)*

527 Thus, through the restoring waters of pure intention and unselfish effort, the earth of human potentialities will blossom with its own latent excellence and flower into praiseworthy qualities ...

*(Abdu'l-Bahá, Secret of Divine Civilization (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975), p. 4)*

528 ... if a soul is endowed with the attributes of true faith and characterised with spiritual qualities he will become to all mankind an emblem of the outstretched mercies of God. For the attributes of the people of faith are justice and fair-mindedness; forbearance and compassion and generosity; consideration for others; candour, trustworthiness, and loyalty; love and loving-kindness; devotion and determination and humanity. If therefore an individual is truly righteous, he will avail himself of all those means which will attract the hearts of men, and through the attributes of God he will draw them to the straight path of faith and cause them to drink from the river of everlasting life.

*(Abdu'l-Bahá, Secret of Divine Civilization (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975), pp. 55-56)*

529 It is certain that the greatest of instrumentalities for achieving the advancement and the glory of man, the supreme agency for the enlightenment and the redemption of the world, is love and fellowship and unity among all the members of the human race. Nothing can be effected in the world, not even conceivably, without unity and agreement, and the perfect means for engendering fellowship and union is true religion. "Hadst Thou spent all the riches of the earth, Thou couldst not have united their hearts; but God hath united them..."

*(Abdu'l-Bahá, Secret of Divine Civilization (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975), pp. 73-74)*

530 Sincerity is the foundation-stone of faith. That is, a religious individual must disregard his personal desires and seek in whatever way he can wholeheartedly to serve the public interests; 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.

*(Abdu'l-Bahá, Secret of Divine Civilization (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975), p. 96)*

531 If a small number of people gather lovingly together, with absolute purity and sanctity, with their hearts free of the world, experiencing the emotions of the Kingdom and the powerful magnetic forces of the Divine, and being at one in their happy fellowship, that gathering will exert its influence over all the earth. The nature of that band of people, the words they speak, the deeds they do, will unleash the

bestowals of Heaven, and provide a foretaste of eternal bliss. The hosts of the Company on high will defend them, and the angels of the Abhá Paradise, in continuous succession, will come down to their aid. (*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 1982), p. 81*)

532 In short, whatsoever thing is arranged in harmony and with love and purity of motive, its result is light, and should the least trace of estrangement prevail the result shall be darkness upon darkness. (*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), p. 88*)

533 Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family, the affairs of that family are conducted; what progress the members of that family make, how they prosper in the world. Their concerns are in order, they enjoy comfort and tranquillity, they are secure, their position is assured, they come to be envied by all. Such a family but addeth to its stature and its lasting honour, as day succeedeth day. And if we widen out the sphere of unity a little to include the inhabitants of a village who seek to be loving and united, who associate with and are kind to one another, what great advances they will be seen to make, how secure and protected they will be. Then let us widen out the sphere a little more, let us take the inhabitants of a city, all of them together: if they establish the strongest bonds of unity among themselves, how far they will progress, even in a brief period and what power they will exert. And if the sphere of unity be still further widened out, that is, if the inhabitants of a whole country develop peaceable hearts, and if with all their hearts and souls they yearn to co-operate with one another and to live in unity, and if they become kind and loving to one another, that country will achieve undying joy and lasting glory. Peace will it have, and plenty, and vast wealth.

(*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), p. 279*)

534 O ye beloved of God! Know ye, verily, that the happiness of mankind lieth in the unity and the harmony of the human race, and that spiritual and material developments are conditioned upon love and amity among all men.

(*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 1982), p. 286*)

535 The most vital duty, in this day, is to purify your characters, to correct your manners and improve your conduct. The beloved of the Merciful must show forth such character and conduct among His creatures, that the fragrance of their holiness may be shed upon the whole world, and may quicken the dead, in as much as the purpose of the Manifestation of God and the dawning of the limitless lights of the Invisible is to educate the souls of men, and refine the character of every living man."...

(*'Abdu'l-Bahá quoted in Shoghi Effendi's "Advent of Divine Justice" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 26*)

536 It is to unity that the Guardian has been continually calling the Friends. For where a united will exists, nothing can effectively oppose and hamper the forces of constructive development.

(*From a letter dated November 17, 1933 written, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer—"Bahá'í News" No. 190, December 1946*)

537 Your community is, undoubtedly, developing and it is hoped that it will come to play an increasingly important role in the Administration of the Faith throughout the American Continent. You should not attach much importance to your numerical strength, but should always try to foster among you the spirit of unity, of co-operation and of selfless service. For these alone constitute the true standard according to which activities should be judged and estimated.

(*From a letter dated 10 August 1933 written on behalf of the Guardian to a Local Spiritual Assembly*)

538 Bahá'u'lláh has brought a new system and new laws and standards of personal as well as social conduct into the world. Although outside agencies have been to a certain extent illumined by the radiance of His Message and doctrines, and are exerting efforts to bring the world into that orbit of universal peace and harmony He has set for it, these outside forces cannot achieve what only the followers of His Faith can. The believers must not take their eyes off their own immediate tasks of patiently consolidating their administrative institutions, building up new Assemblies ... and labouring to perfect the Bahá'í pattern of life, for these are things that no other group of people in the world can do or will do, and they alone are able to provide the spiritual foundation and example on which the larger world schemes must ultimately

rest. At the same time effort should be made to broadcast the Teachings at this time, and correlate them to the plight of humanity and the plans for its future ...

*(From a letter dated 29 March 1945 written on behalf of the Guardian to a National Spiritual Assembly)*

539 Our task is to build the Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Undeflected by the desperate expedients of those who seek to subdue the storm convulsing human life by political, economic, social or educational programs, let us with single-minded devotion and concentrating all our efforts on our objective, raise His Divine System and sheltered within its impregnable stronghold, safe from the darts of doubtfulness, demonstrate the Bahá'í way of life. Wherever a Bahá'í community exists, whether large or small, let it be distinguished for its abiding sense of security and faith, its high standard of rectitude, its complete freedom from all forms of prejudice, the spirit of love among its members and for the closely knit fabric of its social life. The acute distinction between this and present day society will inevitably arouse the interest of the more enlightened, and as the world's gloom deepens, the light of Bahá'í life will shine brighter and brighter until its brilliance must eventually attract the disillusioned masses and cause them to enter the haven of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, Who alone can bring them peace and justice and an ordered life.

*(Universal House of Justice, Messages of the Universal House of Justice: 1968-1973 (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 12)*

540 The Bahá'í community must demonstrate in ever-increasing measure its ability to redeem the disorderliness, the lack of cohesion, the permissiveness, the godlessness of modern society; the laws, the religious obligations, the observances of Bahá'í life, Bahá'í moral principles and standards of dignity, decency and reverence, must become deeply implanted in Bahá'í consciousness and increasingly inform and characterise this community...

*(Universal House of Justice, Messages of the Universal House of Justice: 1968-1973 (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 90)*

541 But in our concern for such immediate obvious calls upon our succour 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 behaviour. 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 fellow-men. 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.

*(From a letter dated 19 November 1974 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)*

542 Undoubtedly, it is within your power to contribute significantly to shaping the Societies of the coming century; youth can move the world.

*(Universal House of Justice, letter to the Bahá'í youth of the World, January 3, 1984)*

543 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)*

### **C. The Practice of the Art of Consultation**

544 Discussions must all be confined to spiritual matters that pertain to the training of souls, the instruction of children, the relief of the poor, the help of the feeble throughout all classes in the world, kindness to all peoples, the diffusion of the fragrances of God and the exaltation of His Holy Word. Should they endeavor to fulfill these conditions the Grace of the Holy Spirit shall be vouchsafed unto them, and that assembly shall become the center of the Divine blessings, the hosts of Divine confirmation shall come to their aid, and they shall day by day receive a new effusion of Spirit.

*('Abdu'l-Bahá quoted in Shoghi Effendi's "Bahá'í Administration" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), pp. 22-23)*

545 These Spiritual Assemblies are shining lamps and heavenly gardens, from which the fragrances of holiness are diffused over all regions, and the lights of knowledge are shed abroad over all created things. From them the spirit of life streameth in every direction. They, indeed, are the potent sources of the progress of man, at all times and under all conditions.

*('Abdu'l-Bahá quoted in Shoghi Effendi's "God Passes By" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979), p. 332)*

546 To promote knowledge is thus an inescapable duty imposed on every one of the friends of God. It is incumbent upon that Spiritual Assembly, that assemblage of God, to exert every effort to educate the children, so that from infancy they will be trained in Bahá'í conduct and the ways of God, and will, even as young plants, thrive and flourish in the soft-flowing waters that are the counsels and admonitions of the Blessed Beauty.

*('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Haifa: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 126)*

547 If this Society (Persian-American Educational Society) acts with independence and exerts itself in bringing about relations between the East and the West, it will become the foundation of the oneness of the world of humanity. Firmness is essential, for if small affairs can not be accomplished without firmness and steadfastness, how much more are these qualities needed for the undertaking of great matters! The friends of God must encourage each other to be firm and steadfast, to reason and consult with each other so that day by day this Society will progress.

*('Abdu'l-Bahá, Star of the West, Vol. 1, No. 5, p. 4 (June 1910)*

548 Few will fail to recognise that the Spirit breathed by Bahá'u'lláh upon the world, and which is manifesting itself with varying degrees of intensity through the efforts consciously displayed by His avowed supporters and indirectly through certain humanitarian organisations, can never permeate and exercise an abiding influence upon mankind unless and until it incarnates itself in a visible Order, which would bear His name, wholly identify itself with His principles, and function in conformity with His laws

...

For Bahá'u'lláh ... has ... laid down a set of Laws, established definite institutions, and provided for the essentials of a Divine Economy. These are destined to be a pattern for future society, a supreme instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace, and the one agency for the unification of the world, and the proclamation of the reign of righteousness and justice upon the earth.

*(Shoghi Effendi, World Order of Bahá'u'lláh (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 19)*

549 Dear friends! Feeble though our Faith may now appear in the eyes of men, who either denounce it as an offshoot of Islam, or contemptuously ignore it as one more of those obscure sects that abound in the West, this priceless gem of Divine Revelation, now still in its embryonic state, shall evolve within the shell of His law, and shall forge ahead, undivided and unimpaired, till it embraces the whole of mankind. Only those who have already recognised the supreme station Bahá'u'lláh, only those whose hearts have been touched by His love, and have become familiar with the potency of His spirit, can adequately appreciate the value of this Divine Economy—His inestimable gift to mankind.

*(Shoghi Effendi, World Order of Bahá'u'lláh (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 23-24)*

550 The onrushing forces so miraculously released through the agency of two independent and swiftly successive Manifestations are now under very eyes and through the care of the chosen stewards of a far-flung faith being gradually mustered and disciplined. They are slowly crystallising into institutions that will come to be regarded as the hall-mark and glory of the age we are called upon to establish and by our deeds immortalise. For upon our present-day efforts, and above all upon the extent to which we strive to remodel our lives after the pattern of sublime heroism associated with those gone before us, must depend the efficacy of instruments we now fashion—instruments that must erect the structure of that blissful Commonwealth which must signalise the Golden Age of our Faith.

*(Shoghi Effendi, World Order of Bahá'u'lláh (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 98)*

551 Conscious of their high calling, confident in the society-building power which their Faith possesses, they press forward, undeterred and undismayed, in their efforts to fashion and perfect the necessary instruments wherein the embryonic World Order of Bahá'u'lláh can mature and develop. It is this building process, slow and unobtrusive, to which the life of the world-wide Bahá'í Community is wholly consecrated, that constitutes the one hope of a stricken society. For this process is actuated by the generating influence of God's changeless Purpose, and is evolving within the framework of the Administrative Order of His Faith.

*(Shoghi Effendi, World Order of Bahá'u'lláh (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 195)*

552 The matter of Teaching, its direction, its ways and means, its extension, its consolidation, essential as they are to the interests of the Cause, constitute by no means the only issue which should receive the full attention of these Assemblies. A careful study of Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets will reveal that other duties, no less vital to the interests of the Cause, devolve upon the elected representatives of the friends in every locality.

It is incumbent upon them to be vigilant and cautious, discreet and watchful, and protect at all times the Temple of the Cause from the dart of the mischief-maker and the onslaught of the enemy.

They must endeavour to promote amity and concord amongst the friends, efface every lingering trace of distrust, coolness and estrangement from every heart, and secure in its stead an active and whole-hearted co-operation for the service of the Cause.

They must do their utmost to extend at all times the helping hand to the poor, the sick, the disabled, the orphan, the widow, irrespective of colour, caste and creed.

They must promote by every means in their power the material as well as the spiritual enlightenment of youth, the means for the education of children, institute, whenever possible, Bahá'í educational institutions, organise and supervise their work and provide the best means for their progress and development ...

They must undertake the arrangement of the regular meetings of the friends, the feasts and the anniversaries, as well as the special gatherings designed to serve and promote the social, intellectual and spiritual interests of their fellow-men.

*(Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), pp. 37-38)*

553 And as the progress and execution of spiritual activities is dependent and conditioned upon material means, it is of absolute necessity that immediately after the establishment of local as well as national Spiritual Assemblies, a Bahá'í Fund be established, to be placed under the exclusive control of the Spiritual Assembly. All donations and contributions should be offered to the Treasurer of the Assembly, for the express purpose of promoting the interests of the Cause, throughout that locality or country. It is the sacred obligation of every conscientious and faithful servant of Bahá'u'lláh who desires to see His Cause advance, to contribute freely and generously for the increase of that Fund. The members of the Spiritual Assembly will at their discretion expend it to promote the Teaching Campaign, to help the needy, to establish educational Bahá'í institutions, to extend in every way possible their sphere of service. (*Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), pp. 41-42*)

554 That I feel is chiefly the reason why such stress has been laid in the past upon the necessity for consultation on the part of individual believers with their elected national representatives in the matter of initiating plans of action above and beyond the plans which the deliberations of the National Spiritual Assembly have already evolved ... Nothing short of the spirit of earnest and sustained consultation with those whom we have prayerfully and on our own accord placed in the forefront of those who are the custodians of the priceless heritage bequeathed by Bahá'u'lláh; nothing less than persistent and strenuous warfare against our own instincts and natural inclinations, and heroic self-sacrifice in subordinating our own likings to the imperative requirements of the Cause of God, can insure our undivided loyalty to so sacred a principle—a principle that will for all time safeguard our beloved Cause from the allurements and the trivialities of the world without, and of the pitfalls of the self within. (*Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), pp. 140-141*)

555 Among the sacred obligations devolving upon the Spiritual Assemblies is the promotion of learning, the establishing of schools and creation of the necessary academic equipment and facilities for every boy and girl.

Every child without exception must from his earliest years make a thorough study of the art of reading and writing, and according to his own tastes and inclinations and the degree of his capacity and powers, devote extreme diligence to the acquisition of learning, beneficial arts and skills, various languages, speech and contemporary technology.

To assist the children of the poor in the attainment of these accomplishments, and particularly in learning the basic subjects, is incumbent upon the members of the Spiritual Assemblies, and is accounted as one of the obligations laid upon the conscience of the trustees of God in every land.

"He that bringeth up his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My Glory, My loving-kindness. My Mercy, that have compassed the world."

(*From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Bahá'í Education: A Compilation (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987). p. 49-50*) [Ed. - no. 105]

556 Administrative efficiency and order should always be accompanied by an equal degree of love, of devotion and of spiritual development. Both of them are essential and to attempt to dissociate one from the other is to deaden the body of the Cause. In these days, when the Faith is still in its infancy, great care must be taken lest mere administrative routine stifles the spirit which must feed the body of the Administration itself. That spirit is its propelling force and the motivating power of its very life.

But as already emphasized, both the spirit and the form are essential to the safe and speedy development of the Administration. To maintain full balance between them is the main and unique responsibility of the administrators of the Cause.

(*From a letter dated 10 December 1933 written on behalf of the Guardian to a National Spiritual Assembly*)

557 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 reform the community life of mankind, as well as seeking to regenerate the individual. The Bahá'í administration is only the first shaping what of in future will come to be the social life and laws of community living. As yet the believers are only first beginning to grasp and practice it properly. So we must have patience if at times it seems a little self-conscious and rigid in its workings. It is because we are learning something very difficult but very wonderful—how to live together as a community of Bahá'ís, according to the glorious teachings.

*(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, The Local Spiritual Assembly (A Compilation) (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust), p. 28) [Ed. no. 1405]*

558 Just as the individual believers are bound to support and sustain their spiritual assembly, for the preservation of the unity of the Faith and the strengthening of its as yet embryonic World Order, so must the local assemblies obey and sustain their national representatives. The closer the co-operation between the local and national assemblies, the greater will be the power and radiance which can and must stream forth from these institutions to the suffering ranks of humanity.

*(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, The Local Spiritual Assembly (A Compilation) (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust), p. 27) [Ed. no. 1403]*

559 He hopes you will devote as much of your spare time as possible to the work of the Cause, especially in impressing upon the believers the importance of the Administration and helping them to really understand its purpose and all it can achieve once they get it to function properly. In other words it is a perfect form which must be animated by the spirit of the Cause. It is the ideal instrument to make spiritual laws function properly in the material affairs of this world.

*(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, 16 June 1945)*

560 Among the more salient objectives to be attained by the Local Spiritual Assembly in its process of development to full maturity are to act as a loving shepherd to the Bahá'í flock, promote unity and concord among the friends, direct the teaching work, protect the Cause of God, arrange for Feasts, Anniversaries and regular meetings of the community, familiarise the Bahá'ís with its plans, invite the community to offer its recommendations, promote the welfare of youth and children, and participate, as circumstances permit, in humanitarian activities. In its relationship to the individual believer, the Assembly should continuously invite and encourage him to study the Faith, to deliver its glorious message, to live in accordance with its teachings, to contribute freely and regularly to the Fund, to participate in community activities, and to seek refuge in the Assembly for advice and help, when needed.

*(Universal House of Justice, from a letter dated 30 July 1972 to a National Spiritual Assembly)*

561 The divinely ordained institution of the Local Spiritual Assembly operates at the first levels of human society and is the basic administrative unit of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order. It is concerned with individuals and families whom it must constantly encourage to unite in a distinctive Bahá'í society, vitalised and guarded by the laws, ordinances and principles of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. It protects the Cause of God; it acts as the loving shepherd of the Bahá'í flock.

Strengthening and development of Local Spiritual Assemblies is a vital objective. Success in this one goal will greatly enrich the quality of Bahá'í life, will heighten the capacity of the Faith to deal with entry by troops which is even now taking place and, above all, will demonstrate the solidarity and ever-growing distinctiveness of the Bahá'í community, thereby attracting more and more thoughtful souls to the Faith and offering a refuge to the leaderless and hapless millions of the spiritually bankrupt, moribund present order ...

Such a firmly-founded, busy and happy community life as is envisioned when Local Spiritual Assemblies are truly effective, will provide a firm home foundation from which the friends may derive courage and strength and loving support in bearing the Divine message to their fellow-men and conforming their lives to its benevolent rule.

*(Universal House of Justice, Letter to the Bahá'ís of the World, dated Naw-Rúz 1974)*

562 We are confident that the institution of the Boards of Counsellors will lend its vital support and, through the Counsellors' own contacts with the friends, through their auxiliary Boards and their assistants, will nourish the roots of each local community, enrich and cultivate the soil of knowledge of the teachings and irrigate it with the living waters of love for Bahá'u'lláh. Thus will the saplings grow into mighty trees, and the trees bear their golden fruit

*(Universal House of Justice, From a letter dated 28 May 1975 to all National Spiritual Assemblies)*

563 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.

*(From a letter dated 27 July 1976 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)*

564 At the present time in most countries, compulsory education and state school systems are widespread and meet the general need for material education, so the resources of the Faith in that field have to be concentrated on the spiritual and moral education of our children and providing primary and tutorial schools in mass-teaching areas where illiteracy is still the rule ...

The proper education of children is of vital importance to the progress of mankind, and the heart and essential foundation of all education is spiritual and moral training ...

*(Universal House of Justice, Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Bahá'í Education: A Compilation (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1978), p. 1)*

565 At the heart of all activities, the spiritual, intellectual and community life of the believers must be developed and fostered, requiring: the prosecution with increased vigour of the development of Local Spiritual Assemblies so that they may exercise their beneficial influence and guidance on the life of Bahá'í communities; the nurturing of a deeper standing of Bahá'í family life; the Bahá'í education of children, including the holding of regular Bahá'í classes and, where necessary, the establishment of tutorial schools for the provision of elementary education; the encouragement of Bahá'í youth in study and service; and the encouragement of Bahá'í women to exercise to the full their privileges and responsibilities in the work of the community ...

*(Universal House of Justice, Letter to the Bahá'ís of the World, Naw-Rúz 1979) p. 5)*

566 Suggestions for projects for development are welcome from whatever source they spring but ideally they should emanate from the local communities and receive support of the Local and National Assemblies; it should not be necessary to send people to countries to solicit projects. However, if a community has the desire to plan a special project, it is free to call upon people with experience to assist in the planning, design and implementation of the scheme.

*(Universal House of Justice, to the International Teaching Centre, 1 November 1983)*

567 The message of the House of Justice dated 20 October 1983 has clearly set out the concepts, defined the objectives and outlined the guiding principles for the selection and implementation of Bahá'í development projects, programmes or activities. The vast majority of Bahá'í projects will be primarily generated at the grass roots, and, initially as required, will receive help from Bahá'í sources, in terms of finances and manpower. The projects will, as you have surmised, be non-profit making, concerned mainly with activities closely related to education, health and hygiene, agriculture and simple community development activities. It is hoped that all these types of projects will reflect the strength of the spiritual principles enshrined in the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

It is important that our undertakings be modest in their scope at the present time. Then, as we gain in confidence and experience and as our resources increase, our work will encompass expanded objectives, and the friends will explore new areas of social and economic activity.

*(From a letter dated 22 December 1983 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)*

568 The suggestions (concerning possible development projects) are now referred to you so that you may initiate consultation at the grass roots level of the local Bahá'í communities, involving Local Spiritual Assemblies of that area. In addition to projecting Counsellor ...'s broad ideas, you should seek the suggestions of the believers regarding local needs and initiatives. Your Assembly is also asked to consider the practicability of such projects and conduct a survey of the localities, indicating which of these would be able to the projects. Among the criteria of capacity would be the following:

1. Strength of the community and its ability to benefit from projects spiritually as well as materially, including the beneficial effects of collective action upon the community and its participants.
2. Willingness of the local believers to participate, collaborate and support the projects.
3. Degree and dimension of the local contributions to the projects in terms of manpower (labour), materials and resources.
4. Presence of able people to manage the human resources and direct the energies of the friends, including strong liaison between volunteers (international and national) and local believers.

*(From a letter dated 9 November 1983 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)*

569 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 must 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 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.

*(From a letter dated 8 May 1984, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)*

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