

Environment, Caring for: Warwick Leaflets

In the Bahá'í Writings, which were revealed approximately 100 to 150 years ago, there is much said about the relationship of humanity with its environment. Fundamentally, Bahá'ís have an attitude of reverence for the earth and all its creatures:

“Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My name, the Maker, the Creator... Nature is God’s Will and is its expression ...”

“It is not only their fellow human beings that the beloved of God must treat with mercy and compassion, rather must they show forth the utmost loving-kindness to every living creature.”

Bahá'ís see the whole of creation as an entity:

“Reflect upon the inner realities of the universe, the secret wisdoms involved, the enigmas, the inter-relationships, the rules that govern all. For every part of the universe is connected with every other part by ties that are very powerful and admit of no imbalance...”

“... 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.”

Our Responsibility

Humanity needs to play its part in this structure:

“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.”

We need to be aware of our dependency on nature:

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

We need to take responsibility for our environment:

“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.”

Mankind has a faculty which plants and animals do not have, the power to discover the secrets of nature. We therefore have the responsibility to use this power only in a positive way, to ensure that balance is maintained in the world. As Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, warned more than a hundred years ago:

“Strange and astonishing things exist in the earth but they are hidden from the minds and the understanding of men. These things are capable of changing the whole atmosphere of the earth and their contamination would prove lethal.”

Bahá'u'lláh also warned of the effects of over-development:

“The civilisation, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men... If carried to excess, civilisation will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation. Meditate on this, O people.”

How prophetic these words have proved to be.

Preserving the Ecosystem

The Bahá'í writings state that agriculture is the world's most important industry – an obvious fact which often tends to be overlooked.

The methods of agriculture, however, need to be such that an ecological balance is maintained. For example, research has shown that rearing animals for food uses more resources than growing vegetable crops. According to the Bahá'í Writings:

“The food of the future will be fruit and grains. The time will come when meat will no longer be eaten...our natural food is that which grows out of the ground.”

The diversity of life forms needs to be preserved, not just to maintain an ecological balance but for our immediate benefit too. A variety of plants are required to maintain a healthy diet, and also for medicinal purposes:

“It is possible to cure by foods, aliments and fruits; but as today the science of medicine is imperfect, this fact is not yet fully grasped. When the science of medicine reaches perfection, treatment will be given by foods, aliments, fragrant fruits and vegetables.”

World Co-operation

For humanity to survive, the human habitat, like that of any other species, must be sustainable. The maintenance of a suitable environment for all living things is a global problem. Problems like global warming know no boundaries and need to be tackled at a global level. There needs to be a form of world government to implement worldwide solutions. It must be able to manage the resources of the earth for the good of all:

“The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.”

Local Initiative

Although Bahá'ís believe that the world should be organised as if it were one country, they recognise that excessive centralisation is a danger to be avoided. Each piece of the planet's surface is held in trust by the local inhabitants as well as by mankind as a whole. In the Bahá'í administrative system, much power rests with the local bodies.

As well as teachings on directly environmental questions, the Bahá'í Faith also has many teachings dealing with the life of the individual and the running of human affairs. Bahá'ís believe that the material aspects of life need to be guided by spiritual principles in order to achieve a sustainable and happy life. For example, Bahá'í development projects address both material and spiritual needs and they also originate at the grassroots rather than being imposed from above.

Balance and Harmony

“... until material achievements, physical accomplishments and human virtues are reinforced by spiritual perfections, luminous qualities and characteristics of mercy, no fruit or result shall issue therefrom, nor will the happiness of the world of humanity, which is the ultimate aim, be attained.”

“We need a change of heart, a reframing of all our conceptions and a new orientation of our activities. The inward life of man as well as his outward environment have to be reshaped if human salvation is to be secured.”

Bahá'is are hopeful for the future:

“The Lord of all mankind hath fashioned this human realm to be a Garden of Eden, an earthly paradise. If, as it must, it findeth the way to harmony and peace, to love and mutual trust, it will become a true abode of bliss, a place of manifold blessings and unending delights. Therein shall be revealed the excellence of humankind...”