

# Economics and Spirituality from a Baha'i perspective



## Economics and Spirituality

**Badi Shams**



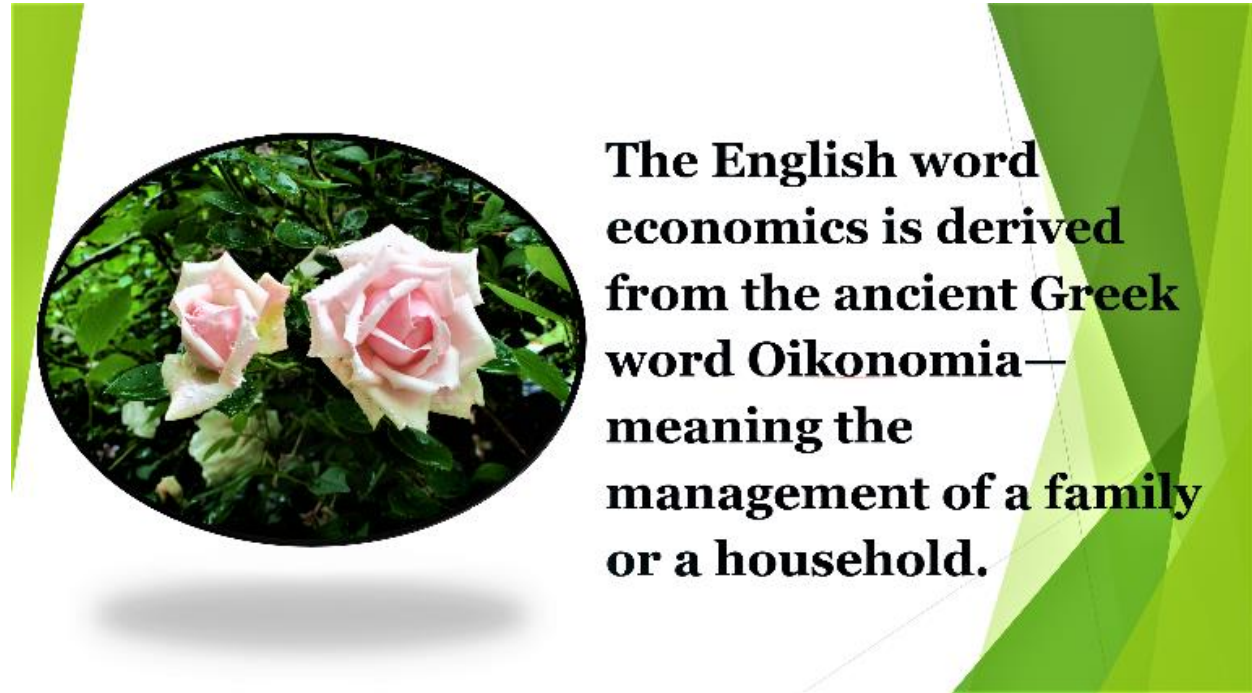
I welcome you to spend your time discussing a traditionally dull, scary, and intimidating topic to some. My joke about it is that if you want to spoil a party, just tell them that you're interested in economics and watch people run away fast. So what we are going to do is trying to discuss the role of morality in economics. Traditional economics and its theories are all there in the books. There are very few references to the moral or spiritual side of economics, so I started my website and put all the related materials in one place.

Economics is difficult to understand and very technical, so I will try to simplify it and not use economic terms. It will be an informal sharing of my heart and the ideas that I have learned from the Baha'i Writings. I will also try to make it a little bit lively by sharing pictures of the flowers from my garden along with the quotations. Hopefully, that makes it a little more interesting

I am convinced that a better world cannot be built without a humane economy which is so important for the lives of people and the poor that we all need to be concerned. Economics is supposed to serve humanity, and unfortunately, I feel that humanity is serving economics and humanity is being sacrificed to make the economic system work, which is wrong.

## Definition

We are going on a journey about understanding economics. What it is. Where did it start, and where is it going? What are its problems and crises, and what could be its solutions? So, to begin with, I guess we have to find its definition. Some of the definitions are long and full of terms such as consumption, production, equilibrium, scarce resources. By the time you finish reading the definition, you're more confused. Hence, I chose a very simple one, and it conveys a message to me:



I love the meaning and root of the word “economics” and its purpose because it says its origin and what it is supposed to be. It is supposed to help you manage your household; this household could be an individual, a family, a town, a country, or an international, so this definition clearly explains it.

## Brief History

When I wanted to find out the history of economics to see when it started, I went so far back that I ended up in heaven. You know this story of Adam and Eve and the serpent. There was no economic transaction in heaven because everything was provided and free, but certain rules must be followed. One of the rules was not to eat from the forbidden tree. But the serpent somehow managed to convince Eve to eat the apple. The serpent failed to mention its side effects.

I think that was the first false advertisement that happened even before the start of human history, and the consequences, of course, were grave, and Adam and Eve were kicked out of heaven, leading to where we are now.

This story underlines the important point that one has to be very careful about advertisement because the way they present it is - your wants are your needs.

The basic needs are shelter and food but the way they present it, yours wants to become your needs. Adam and Eve did not need the apple, but the way it was presented to them was that they really needed it, and it was essential for their survival.

Not much has changed since then, because even today, you look at the advertisement, they present things in such a way that you feel like yes, I need them. You need to go from point A to B, you can do that by walking, or you can do it by bus or bicycle, but the commercial tells you that you need the latest model of car to do that and that is the only way to travel.

That goes for almost everything. These kinds of advertising have grave consequences, as you may recall what happened with the tobacco industry. Not mentioning the side effects of cigarettes or roundup or other products led to massive harm to the millions of users and were the cause of great human tragedies in the society. They were the result of false advertisements. One has to be careful about them and read between the lines.

Anyway, now that we've covered the part of haven we can come back to earth. The first transaction that happened that we can say was economic occurred in the Stone Age. As you know, we were hunters and gatherers in the Stone Age, we would go hunting for food, and sometimes we were the food for some other animals. When we succeeded in hunting a specific animal, we became good at it. The hunter probably got tired of eating the same kill every day, and when he saw the other hunter had a different kill, he somehow explained to the other hunter that I give you my kill, and you give me yours.

That was the first transaction, and that was the start of the **Barter Economy**. Later on, many items were used as a means of exchange, such as bones, feathers and then came metal coins and currency.

From that point, humanity learned agriculture and domestication of the animals and started settling down and making communities. Soon they realized that not everybody could make their own tools and things such as shoes, so the division of labour began.

This process went on for a long time, and economic life consisted of a landlord who owned the land and the farmers who worked on the land for them. There was no industry only the war industry because in those days like now, countries had the habit of attacking each other, and they needed soldiers. The farmers were used as soldiers and also were taxed to finance the wars.

Nothing much was changed with this agriculture economics. Life was hard but simple. This simple economic system continued until the Industrial Revolution.

# Industrial Revolution

When someone in England in the 18th century automated his factory, that was the start of the industrial revolution. Soon after, the steam engine was invented, and mass production was launched. Everything changed. Now they needed roads and railways to bring the raw materials for the factories and transport the final goods. With the increase in production and sales due to mass production, the banking system was expanded to facilitate the finances for all these economic activities. Even institutions had to be changed.

People started thinking about how to manage all these economic activities and development. A need for an economic system was felt.

Adam Smith was a gentleman from Scotland who observed the market and came up with economic theories. In those days science had made significant discoveries and inventions and was amazingly popular, so naturally, he formulated his system as a science.

It is important to note that economists have had this envy of physics and wanted to follow physics and present economics as a science and as good as physics.

Charles Darwin, later on, played his role by introducing the survival of the fittest, which found its way into economic activities and legitimized competition instead of cooperation.

Adam Smith, who has been called the father of economics, observed the market activities and made some assumptions, and based on those assumptions, he created a system to make wealth. He introduced them in his book *“The Wealth of the Nations.”* His basic assumptions were that everybody wants to make money and maximize their profit, and self-interest is their motivator. That market can correct itself, and government should not interfere with economic activities.

Adam Smith also made his system a science of creating wealth. To make it a science, he omitted human values such as honesty, generosity, love etc., since those values did not have a quantitative value. To him, economics was the science of making money. Sadly, Adam Smith was a very moral person. Many years before his book *“The Wealth of the Nations,”* he had written a book called *“The Theory of Moral Sentiments,”* He warned against acquiring wealth.

**“This disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and powerful, and to despise or, at least, neglect persons of poor and mean conditions, though necessary both to establish and to maintain the distinction of ranks and the order of society, is, at the same time, the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments.”**

– Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*

Nobody paid attention to that, and economists followed his other book, based their assumptions on Adam Smith’s theories, and refined them. He clearly mentioned there is an inherent danger in possession of wealth that can lead to moral decay.

The Industrial Revolution changed everything, the governments, institutions, transportation, banking and all aspects of the life of the society. Resources and raw materials for the industries became very important since mass production depended on these resources. Many of the colonization of different nations had economic reasons behind their political claims. In a nutshell, the whole world was totally changed.

To create the big picture of the changes, I like to share how **Alvin Toffler**, a great mind of our time, explained it. In his book “**The Third Wave**,” he simplified for me what happened with economics and where it is going. He was another visionary who perceived the lack of humanity in our economic system. He looked at economics from a very different angle.

Toffler explained that society needs people who care for the elderly and know how to be compassionate and honest. Society needs people who work in hospitals. Society needs all kinds of skills that are not just cognitive; they’re emotional and affectional. You can’t run society on data and computers alone.

Toffler described human economic activities and the history of economics in three waves:

- a) The first wave or Agricultural wave
- b) The second wave or Industrial wave
- c) The third wave

- **First Wave** refers to society after the agricultural revolution and after hunter-gatherers. “First Wave societies drew their energy from ‘living batteries’ – human and animal muscle-power – or from sun, wind, and water. Forests were cut for cooking and heating. Waterwheels, some of them using tidal power, turned millstones. Windmills creaked in the fields. Animals pulled the plow. As late as the French Revolution, it has been estimated, Europe drew energy from an estimated 14 million horses and 24 million oxen. All First Wave societies thus exploited renewable energy sources. Nature could eventually replenish the forests they cut, the wind that filled their sails, the rivers that turned their paddle wheels. Even animals and people were replaceable “energy slaves.”

*-The Third Wave*

- **The second wave** refers to a society in the Industrial Revolution (the late 1600’s to the mid-1900s). The main features of the Second Wave are the factory-type of the education system, the corporation and the nuclear family. Toffler writes: “The Second Wave Society is industrial and based on mass production, mass distribution, mass consumption, mass education, mass media, mass recreation, mass entertainment, and weapons of mass destruction. You combine those things with standardization, centralization, concentration, and synchronization, and you wind up with a style of organization we call bureaucracy.”

*-Wikipedia article on Alvin Toffler*

“All Second Wave societies . . . began to draw their energy from coal, gas, and oil – from irreplaceable fossil fuels. This revolutionary shift, coming after Newcomen invented a workable steam engine in 1712, meant that for the first time civilization was eating into nature’s capital rather than merely living off the interest it provided.” -*The Third Wave*

- **Third-wave** refers to post-industrial society. Toffler explained that since the 1950s, nations have been shifting from a Second Wave Society to a Third Wave Society, based on knowledge-based action as the primary resource. His description of a super-industrial society is similar to concepts from other theorists (e.g. Information Age, Global Village, Space Age, Technetronic Age, Electronic Age, or Scientific-Technological Revolution), which to some degree forecasted knowledge-based production, demassification, diversity, and accelerated change. “The Third Wave shows us . . . new potentials. It argues that, in the very midst of destruction and decay, we can now find striking pieces of evidence of birth and life. It shows clearly and . . . indisputably, that - with intelligence and a modicum of luck – the emergent civilization can be made more sane, sensible, and sustainable, more decent and more democratic than any we have ever known.”  
- *The Third Wave*

His idea of the third wave, in my opinion, is close to the vision of Baha’u’llah’s World Commonwealth. He believed in a very different but yet better future for mankind. In essence, he was talking about and preparing us for the coming of a New World Order. He explained the characteristics of the third wave. He told us how and why the old industrial principles and theories would not work at this time; the same way agricultural principles did not work during the industrial time. He believed that humanity had entered an era in which we needed a brand new system to fit man’s needs. So maintaining the old economic system will not solve our ever-increasing problems.

I like the metaphor of the waves. Like the waves of the ocean that change everything, these waves changed the life on earth and its people.

That is what is happening now.

The Industrial wave with its institutions is crumbling down one by one, yet the new system has not arrived, which has led to confusion for experts and ordinary people. We are in a transition time where one system dies, and the new system takes its place.

## Problems

The economic system continued its journey, and as it moved forward, the gap between the rich and the poor became wider and wider. The system survived the great depression of the 1930s and the first and second world Wars until 2008, when it almost collapsed.

Imagine that the economic system as a human body. It had a heart attack in 2008, and for a while, there was no heartbeat until governments pumped money into the system and revived it. Now you think a person who had a heart attack would come from the hospital and say, that was a close call; I should find out what caused it and avoid some things and be cautious. But alas, nothing changed, and everything went back to business as usual, and there was no lesson learned from it and we continue doing the same thing we were doing. I think it is heading for a disaster which will cause more miseries.

There are some serious problems with the economic system. I can give you examples of why the system is not working. One of them is that everybody has heard that one percent of the population has almost 95% of the world's resources. What kind of a system is this that can create such an amazing gap between people.

About 4 million people live below the poverty line. Although I'm not discarding this system and I am not saying it is evil. I am saying that despite its benefits, it has created so many crises, and we are now facing these crises. The other example I can give you to drive this matter home is:

► **“A CEO from one of the world's top five global fashion brands has to work for just four days to earn what a garment worker in Bangladesh will earn in an entire lifetime.”**



I guess I don't have to say much. Can you believe it? I've lived in many places China, India, Iran, Canada and Latin America and I have seen and experienced poverty first hand. I was a refugee for years, so believe me, I know a little about poverty. It is so unfair to me knowing that people in some places are working all their lives for basically nothing.

I do not care as much about money, but I see it from a spiritual point of view. If one's life from beginning to end has a purpose, one of them is to become a better human being or to meditate or pray or do something positive.



The tragedy is that millions of people struggle to go to church to say a prayer; because they have to find the next meal. If we say that humanity has been created in the image of God, this image doesn't sit well with me. People are struggling to find food, and how many thousands of them die of starvation every day. I remember years ago, when I was in Calcutta, I would see the garbage truck come early in the morning, and I thought that was so good that they started cleaning the garbage early. I later realized that they were picking up the bodies of those who had died of starvation in the street.

I feel that we are responsible for what is happening with the poor. Our silence or lack of action means somebody will be suffering somewhere. We need to change the system so that hopefully, it will change the life of the poor.

The way I see it, the tragedy is that human life that has so much potential to achieve is wasted on scrambling for a piece of bread. Spiritual goals and spiritual aspirations have been sacrificed for the sake of finding the financial resources to survive.

You may ask, why is it? Hopefully, the below quotation can throw some light on it:

Although the body politic is one family ...  
some members are clothed in most costly garments  
and some members are in need of food and shelter.

► **Why? Because this family lacks the necessary reciprocity and symmetry. This household is not well arranged. ...All the laws which are legislated do not ensure happiness. They do not provide comfort. Therefore a law must be given to this family by means of which all the members of this family will enjoy equal well-being and happiness. -‘Abdu’l-Bahá**



As you can see, I chose the definition of economics in the beginning because it was simple. It would also help me explain that the economic system is to help us manage our household, and this household is not well arranged.



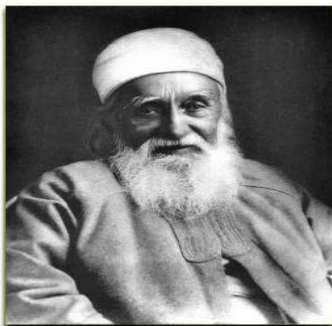
## Causes of Problems

There are so many problems with the economic system, and we can see it easily. I believe that these problems in the system can be resolved and solved if there is a will. Now you may say- why do these problems keep happening? In my view, we got it wrong from the beginning. In my opinion, when Adam Smith made his assumption, he made a fundamental error,

To say that self-interest is the driving force or the system's engine, he let greed grow free in the system to grow as much as possible, so the economic system became a breeding ground for greed.

In reality, we know from the spiritual point of view a system without values such as honesty, kindness and generosity cannot stop the greed for money. Profit at any cost becomes the norm, even if it means letting millions of people live below the poverty line.

Money became the yardstick to measure our life's achievement. If you have made 2 million, you are successful. If I had only \$100 in my bank account when I died, I had failed to achieve because, according to the yardstick of money, I failed, but this is where the changes have to come fundamentally. Hopefully, the following quotation may help us to get some idea of how fundamental this change has to be:



► **“The secrets of the whole economic question are Divine in nature, and are concerned with the world of the heart and spirit.”**

► **Abdu'l-Bahá**



Adam Smith had good intentions because he wanted to help people manage the economic side of their lives. But sentiments such as morality, kindness, and generosity were not included in his system. Those values that made us human were sacrificed to make the economic system a science to work efficiently. By keeping those values out, the system was based on the shaky ground of selfishness and greed. The foundation for a system that I advocate would have both material and spiritual elements.

Gross National Product (GNP) has been used to measure progress and development. In recent years this has been challenged, and it has been suggested to replace it with Gross National Happiness (GNH). The king of Bhutan was the first person to introduce this concept. He said, Why do we measure our achievement with some materialistic yardstick of (GNP), and why don't we start measuring it with Gross National Happiness (GNH) and see if people are happy and measure the progress that way. Certain elements were introduced for measuring the progress, factors such as faith, religion and meditation. According to this system, people's happiness was a better criterion for measurement than money or Gross National Product to see if that country, society, or economy is progressing.

I think this is the trend that eventually and hopefully will continue to gain prominence. The need for consideration of material and spiritual progress is highlighted in the following quotation, and we must have that in mind:



- ▶ **“Material civilization has reached an advanced plane, but now there is need of spiritual civilization.**
- ▶ **Material civilization** alone will not satisfy;
- ▶ **it cannot meet** the conditions and requirements of the present age;
- ▶ **its benefits are limited to the world of matter.**

▶ **Abdu'l-Baha**

This is another critical departure from economic thinking. The realization that civilizations are of two kinds. It has been explained that these two are like two wings of a bird. I believe our civilization can progress when we manage to balance these two together. Without respecting both, we can not progress with one wing, whether it is too much of the material or too much of religion, because if religion doesn't support science, it becomes superstition. We need both of them. We need science; we need the material civilization to make all these inventions. We also need the spiritual civilization to guide us to make the right decision, take care of the poor, and think about all those things that make us human and progress materially and spiritually.

## Solutions

What we need is **Humanomics**. We need a system with humanity and virtues that are respected by all religions. They are universal and apply to everyone. Virtues such as:

**Truthfulness**

**Trustworthiness**

**Service**

**Purposefulness**

“The vast majority of the virtues that humans strive to acquire share the name of the emotion or feeling that they generate.” — Justice Saint Rain

Compassion	Gentleness	Loyalty
Confidence	Grace	Modesty
Contentment	Gratitude	Nobility
Courage	Happiness	Optimism
Creative	Hope	Patience
Determination	Honesty	Peace
Empathy	Humility	Radiance
Enthusiasm	Initiative	Resilience
Faith	Integrity	Respect
Forgiveness	Joy	Reverence
Friendship	Kindness	Serenity
Generosity	Love	Wonder

*The Secret of Emotions pg. 55-56*

Some people may feel that they are powerless to make any change in the system. They express the feeling of hopelessness and say, “We do not have the power to make any change.” I am afraid I have to disagree with that sentiment. I really am so hopeful about the future. I think we have a big role to play, especially those who believe in those virtues mentioned above.

Whether you are part of organized religion or believe in humanity or morality, these values are familiar to anyone.

For us as Baha’is, our duty and course of action have been pointed out:

**“Every choice a Baha’i makes—as employee or employer, producer or consumer, borrower or lender, benefactor or beneficiary—leaves a trace, and the moral duty to lead a coherent life demands that one’s economic decisions be in accordance with lofty ideals, that the purity of one’s aims be matched by the purity of one’s actions to fulfil those aims.”** - *The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017*

My suggestion is to find a way to introduce these values to our economic activities. We have to inject these virtues into our economic system to reawaken its humanity and revive it from its

deathbed. I am not saying that this applies only to economics; I am also saying to do the same for educational and political systems.

Kindness, compassion, peace, all those values, once introduced individually and slowly through our actions injected into the system, will start a revolution and change the system entirely. I chose truthfulness as the foundation for the new system. If everybody tried to be truthful and tell the truth, we could overnight change everything overnight.

If everyone told the truth, the systems would change, and life would be easier to live.

To start this process, some may need a few practical suggestions to get them started. In my last book, “Economics of the Future Begins Today,” I devoted one chapter to this purpose and called it “Practical Economic Suggestion for Everyday Use.”

We don’t need to start a revolution. We don’t want to make big claims; we can just try practically every day when we go into society to make certain decisions based on morality, and those actions hopefully will change the system. We may fail in achieving anything, but we have the satisfaction that we at least tried, which is very important.

## Practical Economic Suggestions for Everyday Use

This list of suggestions may seem overwhelming, and you may not be able to practice all those that apply to your situation. But you have to remember that it is not about the results; it is about sincere and wholehearted efforts. It is a pure intention that counts.

- **Focus on the essential questions of life.** After answering the questions “**Who am, I?**” and “**What is the purpose of my life?**” the equally important question of “**How much is enough?**” should be answered. One of the biggest problems everyone faces is that we do not get a chance to understand who we are and what constitutes the purpose of our lives. Also, we are so busy that we do not ask how much money is enough. How much do we need to live a fruitful life? Practice contentment. Life distracts us from asking ourselves some fundamental questions. Answering these questions can guide us to go through tests and difficulties in life.
- **Live a simple life, a life like Abdu’l-Bahá.** Living a simple life brings peace of mind and removes some of the distractions of our life journey. Many studies indicate that simplicity reduces stress in life and creates a sense of freedom from the burden of material possessions. A movement already in place called “voluntary simplicity” encourages people to live a simple life. There are some benefits to living a simple life. It is a decision made by many who had too much to handle.
- **Change your mindset.** You need to believe that you are essentially a spiritual being and have a spiritual purpose in your life. You need to realize your spiritual destiny. Once this is realized, then acting accordingly is much more effective and easy. This mindset will help you to have a healthy approach to your material life. Every change begins first in your mind.

- **Pay a fair price.** If you feel that the price is too low, pay more than the asking price. The Báb practiced this when He worked as a merchant. One of the most beautiful things related to economic activities is the commitment of fair-minded people to disregard existing prices and pay more because they believe their estimate of the price to be fair.
- **Share the profits with employees.** Abdu'l-Bahá taught us how important it is for the workers to have a share of the profits. Besides profit-sharing, there are many ways to help. Get medical coverage for employees. Support the emotional and physical well-being of employees. Taking care of workers is a privilege and an opportunity to be of service to people. Looking for such opportunities is a wonderful act.
- **Pay fair wages,** not based on what society dictates. We do not need to follow the minimum wage guidelines. The Baha'i Writings provide the guidelines to ensure that we pay what is fair. Society's wage guidelines should not prevent us from paying more if we think that is fair.
- **Be honest in your dealings.** Present it with all the facts explained. In our society, we tend to misrepresent a product or share only enough information to present it in the best possible light. Truthfulness is the foundation of all virtues. When selling your car, house or other possessions, clearly describe the real condition. Mentioning the negative points about a car or a house is not wrong. I have done it, and it did help me to get a reasonable price.
- **Provide the best quality of service** or the best product possible and do so in a spirit of service. We are privileged to have the assurance that we have demonstrated an act of worship by doing our job well. Make customer satisfaction a goal. There is more to our jobs than just earning money. How satisfying it is to know that the customer is happy and we have played a part in it. Being proud of our work is a blessing millions do not have. They make money but are not happy and satisfied inside.
- **Look for opportunities to extend** to co-workers and co-operate in the workplace. Most workplaces are very isolating, and individuals work by themselves. Reaching out and extending help and treating each other fairly creates a better spirit and working environment. Extend support to others, even your competitors. Be a cause of unity by seeing them as you would see your employees or colleagues and doing as much as you can to help them.
- **Be content with a reasonable margin of profit.** There is no end to greed in our society, so being satisfied with earning a certain profit will create a sense of contentment and provide an example to others. This is an extension of how much is enough question. There is nothing wrong with being satisfied and content with a set amount of profit.
- **Update yourself with the latest information** and study in your field to provide a better service, be the leader in your profession, and be punctual in business and other meetings. Being on time at work increases the efficiency of the system and demonstrates respect for others. If time is money, then one should not waste it.

- Remember that your **actions are the best manifestation of your beliefs**, and be conscious of them. The cliché is true that actions speak louder than words. We should be an example for others since we are the ones to lead society towards an ever-advancing civilization.
- If you are lending money, ask for a **reasonable interest rate** and not the maximum rate. We are told that the rate of interest has to be fair and reasonable. Baha'u'llah has advised us to do so. Banks should not be the only ones setting interest rates.
- **Resist the consumer mentality** which exists in our society. As the standard of living rises, consumerism increases and consuming becomes a bad habit with severe consequences. Fighting this tendency is very important for our economic life and our spiritual development. Consumerism has become a disease that is spreading fast, and its forces are paralyzing the progress of our souls.
- **Be knowledgeable about advertising.** Advertisements conceal the information we need to buy a product, and they make false claims, using psychological methods to make a sale. Advertising covers all areas of our economic life. One has to be very savvy to navigate through all the false claims of advertising. Selling has become very sophisticated, and one has to be very smart about it and read between the lines.
- **Spiritually justify your expenditure.** With so much poverty in the world today, we have to answer to our conscience for any unnecessary spending. We have been advised to be frugal in our spending. It would be beneficial if we could create in us this “policeman” to check our spending.
- **Avoid wastage** in the workplace and suggest ways to cut down on waste. We can all help in some way to avoid the loss of resources.
- **Protect the environment** in your business and personal life. We owe it to future generations to protect the environment. It would be sad if humanity grows spiritually in the future, but the damage is done, and our environment is destroyed.
- **Increase your economic and business knowledge.** The more we know about how economics works, the better we will be able to forecast the future.
- **Volunteer for service** whenever possible with the spirit of service, following Abdu'l-Bahá's example, Who served mankind all of His life.
- **Give to the Bahá'í Fund and also support worthy charitable organizations.** Every act of giving is a small step towards reducing the gap between rich and poor.
- **Have or adopt a financial goal in life.** As we have teaching plans in the faith and other goals and plans in our life, it is vital to have an individual financial plan. Goals encourage discipline. This is very important. It is almost impossible to have a comfortable financial life without planning.
- **Avoid debt** as much as possible since too many financial burdens damage spiritual and human life quality. **Investigate the rate of interest** on mortgages, loans and credit to reduce cost. Volumes



can be written about this subject. Debts are one of the most destructive factors that should be avoided.

- **Create a habit of saving.** Life is full of uncertainty and change, and having some money for a rainy day creates peace of mind. Saving should be part of our financial goals. It is a beautiful habit to have. It is not easy to save with the pressure of our consumer mentality today, but it is crucial.
- **Spread the word about honest and fair businesses and professionals.** It is like giving them free advertising. They need all the help they can get. It has a very enabling power helping honest people and businesses.
- **Don't buy the latest models** if the old ones are in working order and provide the same service. Having the most recent of everything creates an unnecessary economic burden for an individual, decreasing the quality of life. Be practical about material possessions. But it is hard not to want to purchase the latest model of car when everyone is doing the same.
- **Avoid keeping up with the Joneses.** That is the worst kind of spending. It is also a sign of spiritual and emotional immaturity. And we see it happen every day. It is regrettable that people want the approval of others while their spiritual destiny is in jeopardy.
- **Support the concept of one world currency.** If we have fewer currencies to exchange, life becomes much more comfortable, and this is a good step in the right direction towards world unity. And anything that can promote world unity is extremely important.
- **Don't follow society's shortcuts concerning taxation.** There are claims made which can perhaps be legally justified but are morally wrong.
- **Make honest insurance claims.** False insurance claims have become a source of income for some who claim damages to their bodies or properties. This misuse hurts every honest person because the cost of insurance will increase due to the increase in dishonest claims. There are some incidences that though legally, one can make a claim, but morally it does not go with the spirit of honesty
- **Make fair expense claims** at work. It has become common to claim the maximum amount even if it is not used, but we have the duty, to be honest about them.

**Do not abuse sick leave.** Some people use their sick leave even though they are not ill. They think that if they do not use it, they will lose it. But in reality, though sick leave is a right but has to be used in the right spirit, which when one is sick and should not be considered as a paid day off, even one is not sick.

- **Return to the store when you realize you have been undercharged** or received too much change for your purchase. This is practicing the virtue of honesty. Watch the face of the cashier when you do this. They are probably wondering, "Who are these people?" The answer is that we are the people from the future, where honesty is the norm.

- **Resist society's corrupt practices of bribery** and cheating. In some places in the world, giving bribes is a way of life, and that is a test and an opportunity to fight this harmful practice. It is very hard in places like India and China, where I have lived. Refusing to participate in these practices is very difficult.
- **Regard service first and profit second.** This seems idealistic in society, but for Bahá'is, it is considered a way of life. And in the long run, it is the best advertisement one can buy for free.
- **Participate in social and economic projects.** We can help to change the world for the better by getting involved in these projects. And they are a valuable way of learning and contributing. We need to gain experience in social activities so that we can contribute more in the future.
- **Do not support the idea of the end justifying the means** when it comes to promotion at work or getting a contract, or applying for a job. Our goal is to grow spiritually, and these practices do not help us to improve. That is the worst kind of numbing our conscience.
- **Be honest in a job interview.** Society has adopted the practice of magnifying positive and minimizing or omitting negative, but it is a form of lying in reality. It will feel strange to the interviewer and us, but we have to start being honest.
- **Be truthful in filling out forms or tenders.** Exaggerating has become a way of life, but it is not a Bahá'í way of life. It is tough to do when competing, but we can have the satisfaction that Baha'u'llah is happy with us.
- **Do not sacrifice your values to get a promotion** or contract even though there is nothing wrong with being ambitious and wanting to progress through the ranks. Some would do anything to get a promotion, but we cannot follow that practice.
- **Use good quality material in production.** Do not use harmful ingredients in production. Be educated about the ingredients, so no harm comes as a result.
- **Protect the poor and underprivileged** section of our society in any way you can. It is our spiritual duty and privilege.
- **Give your Huqúqu'lláh** (the Right of God), knowing that this giving is a privilege and not a tax. Give with a sense of sharing rather than a sense of loss. This is your opportunity to practice generosity. Giving is the best practical step for bridging the gap between the rich and poor.
- **Create a consciousness that your welfare,** well-being and happiness depend on the welfare, prosperity and happiness of every poor, needy and underprivileged person in the world; that the real meaning of the oneness of humankind will come into being when we see others as members of our family. This should be easy for us since we have heard and said it many times that:

**“Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship.”**

- **Money is a tool and not the goal of your life.** The biggest mistake that most people make is that they forget that we have not been created to make money. That should not be our life's goal. Money should be seen as an effective tool to serve humanity and to improve the spiritual and economic life of ourselves and others. This is the key that can make a person happy or sad at the end of our physical life. Since we cannot take it with us, then why not spend it for the good of humankind.
- **Spend an equal amount of energy in becoming detached from material possessions** as you spend getting them, recognizing that they are a test and remembering what Baha'u'llah said:

**“Thou dost wish for gold, and I desire thy freedom from it. Thou thinkest thyself rich in its possession, and I recognize thy wealth in thy sanctity therefrom. By My life! This is My Knowledge, and that is thy fancy; how can My way accord with thine?”**

*-The Hidden Words, Arabic no.56*

It is like spiritual detoxification. There is nothing inherently wrong with being rich as long as we are fully aware of its benefits and dangers. Baha'u'llah has allowed us to have all the luxuries we desire, as long as we are detached from them.

- **Remind yourself of your spiritual destination** while pursuing financial goals since materialism can slowly take over your spiritual life. Without constant reminders of our spiritual destiny, materialism can destroy our spiritual well-being. We have to have the “big picture” in our view all the time so that we are not lost.
- **Live the Bahá'í Life.** In a sense, it is a simple statement to live the Bahá'í life, but it requires an understanding of ourselves and our purpose in life. **It is easier said than done.**
- **Be considerate to those who rent from you.** Be sensitive to their situation. If they are in trouble, be flexible with their rent payments. Let them miss a payment or part of a payment. Besides the spiritual satisfaction that you feel, you also gain a tenant who cares for you and your property and will use it as if it's theirs. It even makes economic sense since you will probably lessen the cost of repairs.
- **Develop virtues** that are common to all religions and are the foundation for any system's success. At present, acquiring the virtues seems idealistic, but we have to remember that as we move closer to an ever-advancing civilization, acquiring these virtues will be commonplace. They may not look as if they have anything to do with economics, but they help us gain spiritual and human qualities, which help us create a better society. Here is the list of virtues identified by The Virtues Project:

**Assertiveness, Caring, Cleanliness, Compassion, Confidence, Consideration, Courage, Courtesy Creativity, Detachment, Determination, Enthusiasm, Excellence, Faithfulness, Flexibility, Forgiveness, Friendliness, Generosity, gentleness, Helpfulness, Honesty, Honor,**

**Humility, Idealism, Joyfulness, Justice, Kindness, Love, Loyalty, Mercy, Moderation, Modesty, Obedience, Orderliness, Patience, Peacefulness, Prayerfulness, Purposefulness, Reliability, Respect, Responsibility, Reverence, Self-discipline, Service, Steadfastness, Tact, Thankfulness, Tolerance, Trust, Trustworthiness, Truthfulness, Unity**

- **Deal with your insistent self or ego;** otherwise, it can undo any success or progress if it is not recognized as a serious threat to our good efforts. History is full of examples of how egos created destruction throughout the ages. As human beings, our life in this world and our progress in the next world depend on our decisions. Some say we make our heaven and hell here on earth as a result of the choices we make. It is sad if we do not make the right decision and give our higher nature the upper hand. Because we are bombarded by advertisements and consumerism, nurturing our higher nature is very difficult, and that is why we need to tune ourselves spiritually to make the right choice so that we get the rewards and benefits of that choice. We know that reading the Writings has been encouraged in our faith, and when we read the Holy Writings and meditate on them, our souls are uplifted, and that affects our decision-making. Our souls are tuned by reading the Writings and bringing ourselves to account each day. It is like a spiritual balance sheet to perceive the good and the bad in our ways. **This is such an important factor in our lives, and we need to take the opportunity to deal with it adequately.**
- Recognize and nurture the **four aspects of your being:**
  - a) **Spiritual**
  - b) **Physical**
  - c) **Emotional**
  - d) **Intellectual**

Most people ignore one aspect for the sake of others, but we need all aspects to have balance in our lives. This sounds like one of those self-help mantras, but awareness of all aspects of our being is essential to realistic **self-knowledge, which is the first step towards knowing God.**

- **Be more vocal in a loving way** about what we think about the changes needed to improve the economic life of individuals and the society in which we live; in short, without being militant or aggressive, express our ideas and vision. We all have a say in all matters, and we can be the catalysts of positive change. We do not want to be political or militant, but we cannot forget that our job is providing vision and direction to wayward humanity. It is like having the healing medicine and not giving it to the sick.