

Balancing Economy with Ecology: Rethinking the Way We Spend Money

ERFAN DALIRI



Money simply transfers energy from one place or person to another—so we can reasonably say that money flows towards our values.

In our personal lives and as nations, we direct our money towards that which we value most. So part of the solution to our world's economic problems lies in a shift in society's core values. To address the concentration of wealth and the abundance of global poverty, then, we should look at where we direct the majority of our economic energy.

More importantly, money—originally meant to be a means—has become an end in itself, and this behavioral trait has pulled the wool over our eyes and not allowed us to recognize the inherent flaws in our global economic system. In our attempts to gain our own portion of this wealth, we have inadvertently aided in its further concentration.

Money originally existed to facilitate commerce. Even when we used salt, shells and cacao beans to keep track of transactions, the point was the same. Like blood in the human body carrying oxygen, like the cycle of water in the environment and electricity in a circuit, these things all facilitate life only when they flow, and have little to no inherent value if they remain still or become stuck.

If an organ or limb of our body decided it wanted to store a bunch more blood just in case there was a shortage one day, or if the clouds decided they needed to remain as clouds in case the oceans stop evaporating one day, there would be cause for concern. In the body, we might call this a clot or a tumor, and if this lack of blood flow were to continue, certain other limbs would experience dystrophy through lack of resources. We've witnessed this exact phenomenon in our global society—the accumulation of wealth for the sake of accumulation, power and control, which causes hardship, struggle and lack of access in other portions of society.

It seems the system we designed to facilitate life in an economic sense was designed in an age when our social evolution and spiritual and moral understandings had not yet grasped the full

extent of the interconnectedness and oneness of the human race, much less as a single organic entity. Clearly, symbiosis was not factored into our economic design. The Baha'i teachings call on each of us to recognize that symbiosis and oneness and apply it to all humanity:

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 Baha'i teaching ... 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. ... Strive, therefore, to create love in the hearts in order that they may become glowing and radiant. When that love is shining, it will permeate other hearts even as this electric light illumines its surroundings. When the love of God is established, everything else will be realized. This is the true foundation of all economics. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 238.

... it is apparent that whenever the ties between nations become strengthened and the exchange of commodities accelerated, and any economic principle is established in one country, it will ultimately affect the other countries and universal benefits will result. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Tablet to the Hague*, p. 6.

With our developing understandings of interconnectedness and unity, the inherent injustice of the mechanism of our global economy is becoming more apparent. Banks lending money without the money actually existing, the privatization and control of the means of production, profiteering from the sale of basic human needs such as water, healthcare, food and electricity, as well as the removal of the earth's resources for the financial gain of an increasingly smaller proportion of society, are all functions of a system designed to concentrate wealth and power in the hands of a few rather than facilitating flow through the hands of many.

Thoughtfully considering the analogies in the Baha'i writings offers a new insight into these questions. What if we are to understand concepts of justice, generosity, compassion, selflessness, symbiosis and sustainability by reflecting on human beings as part of the earth's ecology rather than masters of it? What if phrases from the Baha'i writings such as "drops of one ocean and leaves of one tree" were more than just analogies, and actually refer to the nature of our true reality in a very literal sense?

Perhaps if we see money as the lifeblood of society we might recognize how the reconciliation of the ideas of economy and ecology will house the homeless, feed the destitute and bring a sense of self-worth and joy to the materially privileged. What if by studying more closely the workings of nature, we are able to design and mimic more effective systems, technologies and economies? Perhaps if we broaden the idea of the self to encapsulate the whole world, we will find solutions and pathways to economic justice and prosperity.

By investigating the fields of permaculture design and biomimetics, we will begin to see how the most just, the most equitable system of economy actually exists in the world of nature; the perfect design of God. Right before our very eyes, waiting to be witnessed, is not only a

sustainable and equitable system, but a life-giving and perfectly regenerative design of how energy should flow in order to sustain life in a balanced and just society.

As this single entity, the human family, begins to work in harmony and balance with itself, when individualism means less to us in the face of the collective good, then will the human race and our social structures resemble more closely the perfect handiwork so evident in the world of nature. Then will each individual member of the whole be able to fulfil their purpose in this life, see their basic needs met and ultimately offer their own unique service to humanity.