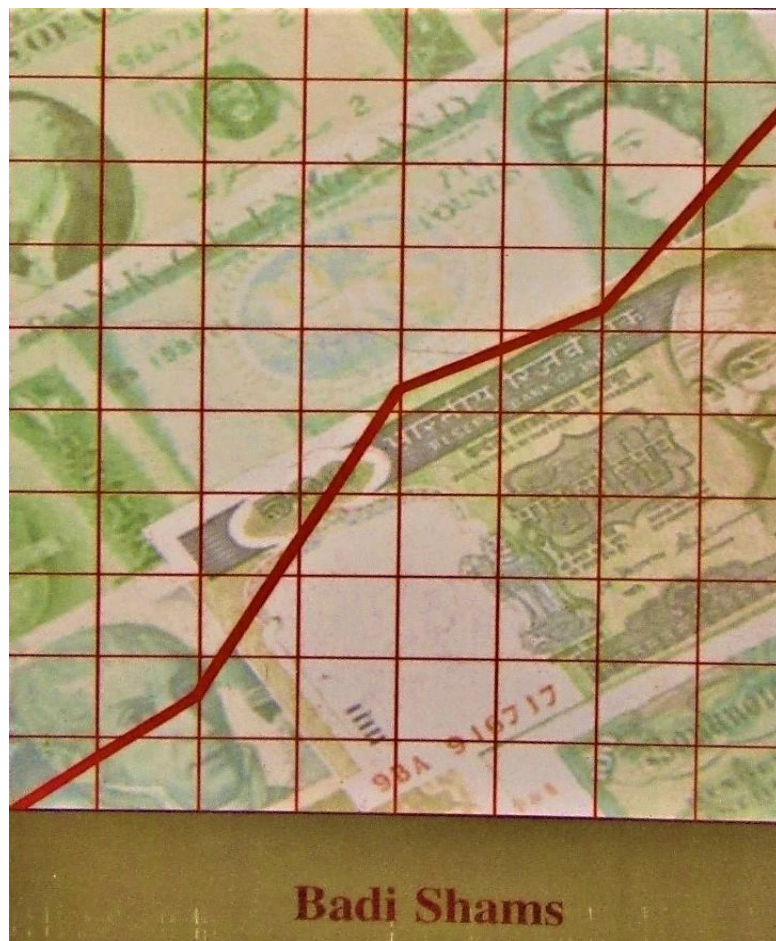


Practical Economic Suggestions For Everyday Use



The present economic system is sick and is dying. It cannot meet the needs of humanity. The gap between rich and poor is getting wider and wider, which has increased the suffering of the masses. The solutions that can heal it have been ignored. It is time to re-examine the fundamental assumptions that this system was built on and replace them with humane, moral and spiritual ones. We need to build an economic system fit to help humanity to achieve its goal of an ever-advancing civilization, a world where there is no room for economic injustice, and people have all the necessities of life so they can live peaceful and fulfilling lives. A shift in thinking is needed. Based on the Baha'i Teachings, this material aims to provide some insight and suggestions for taking steps to lay the foundation for a better economic future. We have the solutions and the technology to build a new system; all we need is the resolve and the will. Everyone has an inherent power to contribute. The time for action is upon us. This is our eleventh hour.

We live in a very confusing time, particularly after the economic market crash of 2008, which almost destroyed the whole economic system and forced governments to take desperate measures to save the system and avoid universal chaos. That was caused by unchecked greed, which led to a destructiveness that only a lack of morality can create.

Economic problems started from its inception when Adam Smith, the father of modern economics, wrote "The Wealth of Nations." His book became like the holy book for the economist. He described economics as a science of creating wealth and excluded morality and spirituality in his theories. He made self-interest the engine of the system. According to him, everybody is trying to maximize his or her satisfaction. That philosophy became the breeding ground for greed, the cause of so many economic problems in the world. Other economists followed his ideas and built their theories on his assumptions. What they failed to consider and didn't care to find out was that Adam Smith was the first to acknowledge the importance of morality in his book "The

Theory of Moral Sentiments,” which was written in 1759, seven years before “The Wealth of Nations.” He had recognized the inherent danger of wealth, even as he provided ideas for generating it:

“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, p.3.

The Baha’i concept of economics is fundamentally different and is based on spiritual and moral principles. Abdul’-Baha explains it clearly:

“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, The Baha’i World, Volume 1V, p. 448

Shoghi Effendi shed more light on this:

“... By the statement ‘the economic solution is divine in nature’ is meant that religion alone can, in the last resort, bring in man’s nature such a fundamental change as to enable him to adjust the economic relationships of society. It is only in this way that man can control the economic forces that threaten to disrupt the foundations of his existence, and thus assert his mastery over the forces of nature.” -Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 551. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 26 December 1935)

My understanding is that the aim of the Baha’is is the spiritualization of the economic system by injecting moral and spiritual values into it. Economics is made for humanity and has to reflect in it all human aspirations, including ethical, moral and spiritual.

It is important to remember that the Baha'i Economic System will occur when the transformation of man and society has been accomplished, and with it man's awareness of his spiritual station and his destiny. He will have subordinated his animal nature and will, therefore, behave less selfishly. At this time, it is almost impossible to imagine a society that has spiritually grown to that extent. But by introducing more of the spiritual qualities in our lives, we are laying the foundation for such a society and such an economic system. Some of our goals may seem idealistic, but that is precisely what we are, idealists. We are dreaming of a better world and are ready to make sure that Bahá'u'lláh's World Commonwealth is going to be established. No great achievement can take place without a goal or dream. Without them, the ever-advancing civilization would not have progressed from the Stone Age to where we are now.

Since we do not have the Bahá'i economic system in place yet, we may think that we cannot do anything to bring it about, and we must wait for its arrival. But that is not true. There is so much we can do as individuals and in our communities that is economical, and we can do it without realizing that we are participating in economic activity. Our participation will set the example for the rest of the world and, at the same time, prepare the ground for the time when the World Commonwealth will come into being.

The Universal House of Justice reminds us that time has come to pay greater attention to our economic side of our lives and take steps to improve the economic prosperity of the world.

“Although Baha'u'llah does not set out in His Revelation a detailed economic system, a constant theme throughout the entire corpus of His teachings is the reorganization of human society. Consideration of this theme inevitably gives rise to questions of economics. Of course, the future order conceived by Baha'u'llah is far beyond anything that can be imagined by the present generation. Nevertheless, its

eventual emergence will depend on strenuous effort by His followers to put His teachings into effect today. With this in mind, we hope that the comments below will stimulate thoughtful, ongoing reflection by the friends. The aim is to learn about how to participate in the material affairs of society in a way that is consistent with the divine precepts and how, in practical terms, collective prosperity can be advanced through justice and generosity, collaboration and mutual assistance.”
-The Universal House of Justice, March 1, 2017

Unfortunately, money is a yardstick that we use to measure poverty, wealth, failure and success. I wish that as we grow and expand our spiritual horizons, we will adopt a spiritual yardstick to measure our lives. Money cannot and should not be the only means of measuring our life's achievements.

Today, more than your heart and intellect, you need the power of your imagination because you are going to picture yourself in the future. Once you do that and grasp the beauty of peace, love and harmony and see how the sufferings and misery have been removed and man no longer has to fight to survive in his economic life, you will bring yourself back to the present and, hopefully, you will start making small changes in your economic activities that will lead to the fundamental changes in order to lay the foundation of a new and wonderful economic behavior based on spirituality and not greed.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá often talked about very complex subjects. Still, He made them simple and easy to understand, and my belief is that economics doesn't have to be daunting or confusing, especially when it comes to action. These suggestions are intended to be clear and simple to encourage you to participate in economic activities with increased awareness. They are meant for everyone, whether or not you are knowledgeable about economics. Hopefully, you may find them useful, and they will empower you to act to bring about a fundamental change in your character and your everyday economic actions. It also helps you realize what an incredible power we have

as individuals to transform society in every way, including economic ways.

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. There is a movement already in place called “voluntary simplicity” that 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 price estimate is 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 good 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 by doing our job well, we have demonstrated an act of worship. 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 cooperate 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.** Our society has no end to greed, 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**, 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 consumption 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

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 this “policeman” in us 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. What a sad situation it would be 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’i 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 the quality of spiritual and human life. **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, which in turn decreases 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 with regard to 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 their 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, when one is sick and should not be considered a paid day off, even if 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. He or she is 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; 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** for promotion at work, getting a contract, or applying for a job. Our goal is to grow spiritually, but these practices do not help us 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 in reality, it is a form of lying. 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 a tough thing 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** sections of our society in any way you can. It is our spiritual duty and privilege.
- **Give your Huqúqu'lláh** (the Right of God), knowing well that this giving is a privilege and is 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 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.”

-Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p.288

- **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 improve our 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.
- **Give generously to those working for minimum wage or earning very little.** We can find ways to pay more to all those working for a minimum wage, be it in the form of a generous tip or more than the asking price to street sellers who earn a little from their sales. How can we otherwise reduce the gap between the rich and the poor if we do not make small contributions?
- **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?”

-Bahá'u'lláh, 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. Materialism can destroy our spiritual well-being without constant reminders of our spiritual destiny. 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** common to all religions and the foundation for any system's success. At present, acquiring the virtues seems idealistic, but we must remember that acquiring these virtues will be commonplace as we move closer to an ever-advancing civilization. They may not look like 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 the decisions we make. Some say we make our heaven and hell here on earth due to our choices. 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 so that we can 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 that are needed for the improvement of 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 can be the catalysts of positive change. We do not want to be political or militant, but we cannot forget that our job is to provide vision and direction to wayward humanity. It is like having the healing medicine and not giving it to the sick.