

How the Rich Are Accepting the Baha'i Call to Help the Poor

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We've all noticed the contrast between the constructive and destructive forces at play in our lives. They affect all aspects of life, including the world's great disparities of poverty and wealth, for good and bad.

Sadly, our media outlets generally cover negative news and even sensationalize it, which means the news of so many remarkable, uplifting events and positive philanthropic works do not get the coverage they need or deserve.

One of these positive developments, which has been largely ignored or met with a suspicious mindset, is the emerging trend in which an increasing number of rich people voluntarily give their wealth to the needy. The statistics show that a growing number of billionaires, millionaires, and yes, even regular folks are actively donating more money to charitable causes.

In our world today, the wealthier people and nations have begun to be more concerned with playing their role in solving some of the problems of the poor and needy.

This news has not filtered down to most people, however. Many still believe that the wealthy do not care for the poor at all, and that their donations have selfish motives, such as tax deductions. That's certainly true of some wealthy individuals, but today more money is flowing to charities and relief organizations than ever before – and much of it comes from the massive donations wealthy individuals and corporations make.

We can view this trend as the first clumsy step of a child learning to walk, since the rich are in the uncharted territory of giving rather than taking. Like a child trying to walk who repeatedly falls, mistakes are part of learning; however, this early attempt is moving in the right direction, no matter how imperfect it might look now.

For example: when it was reported that Bill Gates had given \$6 billion to charities, the news went generally unnoticed. Few saw his act as positive and worthy of praise. This indifference occurred despite ample proof that some of the wealthy do care deeply for their fellow human brothers and sisters. They should be recognized for this and praised and encouraged. As responsible citizens, we must give credit where credit is due.

The Baha'i writings speak very clearly about the moral obligation of those who possess great wealth, and the heavenly rewards awaiting those rich people who follow Baha'u'llah's injunctions and help the poor through charitable acts. In several of his tablets, including these two (below), Baha'u'llah praised the wealthy who voluntarily give to the poor:

Charity is pleasing and praiseworthy in the sight of God and is regarded as a prince among goodly deeds. ... Blessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself. Verily, such a

man is reckoned, by virtue of the Will of God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise, with the people of Baha who dwell in the Crimson Ark.

They who are possessed of riches, however, must have the utmost regard for the poor, for great is the honor destined by God for those poor who are steadfast in patience. By My life! There is no honor, except what God may please to bestow, that can compare to this honor. Great is the blessedness awaiting the poor that endure patiently and conceal their sufferings, and well is it with the rich who bestow their riches on the needy and prefer them before themselves.

So not every wealthy person is selfish and heartless. The Baha'i teachings assure us that a new race of people who exemplify the best human values will gradually evolve – and that the wealthy will start changing their attitudes toward wealth, finding the most satisfaction when they spend their wealth on their fellow human beings rather than hoarding it or spending it on only themselves.

Statistics on Philanthropy

As an example from just one country, Americans and U.S.-based organizations gave about \$484.85 billion to national charities in 2021. That number increased 4 per cent from the previous year's estimated \$466.23 billion, according to Giving USA, as the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy reported. Some of the wealthiest Americans gave as much as \$15 billion during the year, which represented 5 per cent of all giving by individuals.

A few of the highlights from Giving USA's annual report include:

- Roughly \$326.87 billion in donations by individuals
- An estimated \$90.88 billion by foundations and other organizations
- More than \$46 billion through bequests, which are made through trusts and wills
- More than \$28 billion in corporate donations

The Giving Pledge

The Giving Pledge, started in 2010 in an effort by Bill Gates, Melinda French Gates, and Warren Buffett, aims to get billionaires to donate more than half of their wealth to charity. That Pledge has set a new standard of generosity among the ultra-wealthy – to date, 230 individual billionaires from 28 countries have signed the pledge.

Today, more than ever in history, negativity has darkened people's minds. In the face of that force, our moral duty is to remind ourselves and others about the daily positive actions around us, and magnify them to offset the negative forces. The rich, too, need our support and encouragement. Who can judge and say that the rich have no heart? As many wealthy individuals have proven recently, it is possible to become attracted to God's mercy by following Abdu'l-Baha's advice:

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.