

**“Families as Agents of Change:
Collectively Advancing Efforts to Build a Just and Sustainable Society”
Selected Bahá'í Writings and Passages**

THE NATURAL WORLD and OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH IT (DAY 1)

Nature as a Reflection of the Divine

1. Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity there are signs for men of discernment. Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise. (Bahá'u'lláh, from 'Tablet of Wisdom', published in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (revised edition), page 142)
2. I am well aware, O my Lord, that I have been so carried away by the clear tokens of Thy loving-kindness, and so completely inebriated with the wine of Thine utterance, that **whatever I behold I readily discover that it maketh Thee known unto me**, and it remindeth me of Thy signs, and of Thy tokens, and of Thy testimonies. By Thy glory! Every time I lift up mine eyes unto **Thy heaven**, I call to mind Thy highness and Thy loftiness, and Thine incomparable glory and greatness; and every time I turn my gaze to **Thine earth**, I am made to recognize the evidences of Thy power and the tokens of Thy bounty. And when I behold **the sea**, I find that it speaketh to me of Thy majesty, and of the potency of Thy might, and of Thy sovereignty and Thy grandeur. And at whatever time I contemplate **the mountains**, I am led to discover the ensigns of Thy victory and the standards of Thine Omnipotence.

I swear by Thy might, O Thou in Whose grasp are the reins of all mankind, and the destinies of the nations! I am so inflamed by my love for Thee, and so inebriated with the wine of Thy oneness, that I can hear from the **whisper of the winds** the sound of Thy glorification and praise, and can recognize in the **murmur of the waters** the voice that proclaimeth Thy virtues and Thine attributes, and can apprehend from **the rustling of the leaves** the mysteries that have been irrevocably ordained by Thee in Thy realm.

Glorified art Thou, O God of all names and Creator of the heavens! I render Thee thanks that Thou hast made known unto Thy servants this Day whereon the river that is life indeed hath flowed forth from the fingers of Thy bounty, and the springtime of Thy revelation and Thy presence hath appeared through Thy manifestation unto all who are in Thy heaven and all who are on Thy earth. (Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987, section CLXXVI, page 272)

Humility

3. 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. There can be no doubt that whoever is cognizant of this truth is cleansed and sanctified from all pride, arrogance, and vainglory.... (Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (revised edition). Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979, page 44)
4. “The deepening environmental crisis, driven by a system that condones the pillage of natural resources to satisfy an insatiable thirst for more, suggests how entirely inadequate is the present conception of humanity’s relationship with nature.” (The Universal House of Justice, letter to the Bahá'ís of Iran, March 2013)

Reciprocity/Interconnectedness

5. 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. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a previously untranslated Tablet, in Baha'i International Community, Conservation and Sustainable Development in the Bahá'í Faith, 1995)
6. Were one to observe with an eye that discovereth the realities of all things, it would become clear that the greatest relationship that bindeth the world of being together lieth in the range of created things themselves, and that cooperation, mutual aid and reciprocity are essential characteristics in the unified body of the world of being, inasmuch as all created things are closely related together and each is influenced by the other or deriveth benefit therefrom, either directly or indirectly. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a previously untranslated Tablet, in Baha'i International Community, Conservation and Sustainable Development in the Bahá'í Faith, 1995)
7. Regard ye the world as a man's body, which is afflicted with diverse ailments, and the recovery of which dependeth upon the harmonizing of all its component elements. (Bahá'u'lláh, Súriy-i-Haykal)
8. 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. (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, dated 17 February 17, 1933; in *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. I, p. 84)

Gratitude/ mindfulness

9. All that has been created is for man who is at the apex of creation and who must be thankful for the divine bestowals, so that through his gratitude he may learn to understand life as a divine benefit. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Divine Philosophy*, p. 134)

Oneness of mankind

10. Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for the reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind. (Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, 1985, p. 13-14)

Diversity, Beauty of

11. Consider the world of created beings, how varied and diverse they are in species, yet with one sole origin. All the differences that appear are those of outward form and colour. This diversity of type is apparent throughout the whole of nature.... Let us look... at the beauty in diversity, the beauty of harmony, and learn a lesson from the vegetable creation. If you behold a garden in which all the plants were the same as to form, colour and perfume, it would not seem beautiful to you at all, but, rather, monotonous and dull. The garden which is pleasing to the eye and which makes the heart glad, is the garden in which are growing side by side flowers of every hue, form and perfume, and the joyous contrast of colour is what makes for charm and beauty. So is it with trees. An orchard full of fruit trees is a delight; so is a plantation planted with many species of shrubs. It is just the diversity and variety that constitutes its charm; each flower, each tree, each fruit, beside being beautiful in itself, brings out by contrast the qualities of the others, and shows to advantage the special loveliness of each and all. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 51-53)

Nature and purpose of human life

12. Bahá'ís believe that the crucial need facing humanity is to find a unifying vision of the nature and purpose of human life. An understanding of humanity's relationship to the natural environment is an

integral part of this vision.

(Bahá'í International Community's *Seven Year Plan of Action on Climate Change*, 2009)

Environmental Sustainability

13. The elements and lower organisms are synchronized in the great plan of life. Shall man, infinitely above them in degree, be antagonistic and a destroyer of that perfection?
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, talk at Leland Stanford Junior University, Palo Alto, California, 8 October 1912. Promulgation of Universal Peace. Wilmette, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982. p. 350)
14. Bahá'í Scriptures describe nature as a reflection of the sacred. They teach that nature should be valued and respected, but not worshipped; rather, it should serve humanity's efforts to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. However, in light of the interdependence of all parts of nature, and the importance of evolution and diversity "to the beauty, efficiency and perfection of the whole," every effort should be made to preserve as much as possible the earth's bio-diversity and natural order.

As trustees, or stewards, of the planet's vast resources and biological diversity, humanity must learn to make use of the earth's natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable, in a manner that ensures sustainability and equity into the distant reaches of time. This attitude of stewardship will require full consideration of the potential environmental consequences of all development activities. It will compel humanity to temper its actions with moderation and humility, realizing that the true value of nature cannot be expressed in economic terms. It will also require a deep understanding of the natural world and its role in humanity's collective development - both material and spiritual. Therefore, sustainable environmental management must come to be seen not as a discretionary commitment mankind can weigh against other competing interests, but rather as a fundamental responsibility that must be shouldered - a pre-requisite for spiritual development as well as the individual's physical survival. (Bahá'í International Community, *Valuing Spirituality in Development: Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development*. A concept paper written for the World Faiths and Development Dialogue, Lambeth Palace, London, 18-19 February 1998)

15. ...assisting in endeavors to conserve the environment in ways which blend with the rhythm of life of our community must assume more importance in Bahá'í activities. (Letter from the Universal House of Justice, April 21, 1989, to the Bahá'ís of the World; in *Conservation of the Earth's Resources*; in *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. I, p. 86)

Values, Role of

16. 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. - Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, from a letter dated May 27, 1932, to an individual believer; in *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1, p. 85
17. Issues of food, nutrition, health and shelter are central to the challenge of providing an adequate standard of living for all members of the human family. These issues cannot, however, be tackled solely as technical or economic problems. Eliminating hunger and malnutrition; establishing food security; providing adequate shelter; and achieving health for all will require a shift in values, a commitment to equity, and a corresponding reorientation of policies, goals and programs. - Baha'i International Community, Feb. 18, 1998, *Valuing Spirituality in Development*

CLIMATE CHANGE (DAY 2)

Justice & Equity

18. 'O Son of Spirit! The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbour. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behoveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes. (Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 36)
19. At the group level, a concern for justice is the indispensable compass in collective decision making, because it is the only means by which unity of thought and action can be achieved. Far from encouraging the punitive spirit that has often masqueraded under its name in past ages, justice is the practical expression of awareness that, in the achievement of human progress, the interests of the individual and those of society are inextricably linked. (The Prosperity of Humankind, Bahá'í International Community, Office of Public Information, Haifa, 1995)
20. ...in the face of the destructive impacts of climate change – exacerbated by the extremes of wealth and poverty – a need for new approaches centred on the principles of justice and equity is apparent.... The challenge before the world community, then, is not only a technical one but a moral one, which calls for the transformation of thoughts and behaviours so as to allow our economic and social structures to extend the benefits of development to all people. (Bahá'í International Community, Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the challenge of climate change, 2008)
21. A fundamental component of resolving the climate change challenge will be the cultivation of values, attitudes and skills that give rise to just and sustainable patterns of human interaction with the environment. (Bahá'í International Community, Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the challenge of climate change, 2008)

Women and Climate Change

22. On the community rests the challenge of providing the setting in which decision-making can occur peacefully and individual capabilities can be channeled through collective action. One of the most pervasive social challenges besetting communities around the world is the marginalization of girls and women – a condition further exacerbated by the impacts of climate change. Around the world, women are largely responsible for securing food, water and energy for cooking and heating. Scarcity of resources arising from climate change intensifies the woman's burden and leaves less time to earn an income, attend school or care for the family. Moreover, natural disasters exact a heavier toll on women given their lack of access to information and resources, and, in some cases, their inability to swim, drive or even leave the house alone. It would be a mistake, however, to cast women as the victims or simply as under-resourced members of society; they represent perhaps the greatest source of untapped potential in the global effort to overcome the challenges of climate change. Their responsibilities in families, in communities, as farmers and as stewards of natural resources make them uniquely positioned to develop strategies for adapting to changing environmental conditions. Women's distinct knowledge and needs complement those of men, and must be duly considered in all arenas of community decision-making. It is in relationship and consultation with one another that the most effective strategies for mitigation and adaptation can be devised. (Bahá'í International Community, Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the challenge of climate change, 2008)

Climate Change, Religion and Science

23. Given their tremendous capacity to mobilize public opinion and their extensive reach in the most remote communities around the world, religious communities and their leaders bear an inescapable and weighty role in the climate change arena. By many measures, increasing numbers of religious communities are consistently lending their voice and resources to efforts to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change – they are educating their constituencies, providing a scriptural basis for ethical action and leading or participating in efforts at the national and international levels. This role,

however, must now unfold in the context of an emerging conversation – a rapprochement – between the discourses of science and religion. The time has come for the entrenched dichotomy between these two systems of knowledge to be earnestly re-examined. Both are needed to mobilize and direct human energies to the resolution of the problem at hand: methods of science facilitate a more objective and systematic approach to problem solving while religion concerns itself with those moral inclinations that motivate action for the common good. In an age yearning for justice and equality, religious doctrines will need to be carefully examined. Those that encourage social exclusion, passivity or inequality between the sexes will fail to engage the peoples of the world while qualities of justice, compassion, trustworthiness, humility and generosity – common to all religious traditions – will be even more urgently needed to forge the patterns of progressive community life. (Bahá'í International Community, *Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the challenge of climate change*, 2008)

24. ...the problem of climate change has powerfully demonstrated the need for integrated and systemic approaches. (Bahá'í International Community, *Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the challenge of climate change*, 2008)

Oneness of Mankind

25. Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for the reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind. (Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, 1985, p. 13-14)
26. ...the principle of the oneness of humankind must become the ruling principle of international life. This principle does not seek to undermine national autonomy or suppress cultural or intellectual diversity. Rather, it makes it possible to view the climate change challenge through a new lens – one that perceives humanity as a unified whole, not unlike the cells of the human body, infinitely differentiated in form and function yet united in a common purpose which exceeds that of its component parts. This principle constitutes more than a call for cooperation; it seeks to remould anachronistic and unjust patterns of human interaction in a manner that reflects the relationships that bind us as members of one human race. The earnest consideration of the place of this principle in international relations should not be seen as an abstract exercise; it is precisely this level of analysis that must be undertaken and this level of commitment secured in order to forge a coherent ethic for the resolution of the climate change crisis. In order to progress beyond a world community driven by a largely economic and utilitarian calculus, to one of shared responsibility for the prosperity of all nations, such a principle must take root in the conscience of the individual. In this way, we come to recognize the broader human agenda – which subsumes those of climate change, poverty eradication, gender equality, development, and the like – and seeks to use both human and natural resources in a way that facilitates the progress and well-being of all people. (Bahá'í International Community, *Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the challenge of climate change*, 2008)
27. While it is acknowledged that any effective climate change policy needs to be rooted in a global perspective, even this enlargement of the sphere of responsibility has not sufficiently moved governments to act. This perspective must now evolve to reflect the essential connectedness and common fate of humanity that for too long has struggled against a worldview that emphasized sovereignty, ascendancy and competition. Efforts to reconceptualize sovereignty, from an absolute right to a responsibility, signal that a shift in consciousness towards greater degrees of global solidarity is already underway. To be sure, the solution to climate change exceeds the capacities and resources of any one nation and requires the full cooperation of all nations, each according to their means.

Much has been said about the need for cooperation to solve a climate challenge that no nation or community can solve alone. The principle of the oneness of humankind... seeks to move beyond utilitarian notions of cooperation to anchor the aspirations of individuals, communities and nations to those of the progress of humanity. In practical terms, it affirms that individual and national interests are best served in tandem with the progress of the whole. As children, women, men, religious and scientific communities as well as governments and international institutions converge on this reality, we will do more than achieve a collective response to the climate change crisis. We will usher in a new paradigm by means of which we can understand our

purpose and responsibilities in an interconnected world; a new standard by which to evaluate human progress; and a mode of governance faithful to the ties that bind us as members of one human race. (Bahá'í International Community, *Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the challenge of climate change*, 2008)

28. Our fellow human beings everywhere are insensibly subjected at one and the same time to the conflicting emotions incited by the continuous operation of simultaneous processes of "rise and of fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos".[1] These Shoghi Effendi identified as aspects of the Major Plan and Minor Plan of God, the two known ways in which His purpose for humankind is going forward. The Major Plan is associated with turbulence and calamity and proceeds with an apparent, random disorderliness, but is, in fact, inexorably driving humanity towards unity and maturity. Its agency for the most part is the people who are ignorant of its course and even antagonistic towards its aim. As Shoghi Effendi has pointed out, God's Major Plan uses "both the mighty and the lowly as pawns in His world-shaping game, for the fulfilment of His immediate purpose and the eventual establishment of His Kingdom on earth." [2] The acceleration of the processes it generates is lending impetus to developments which, with all the initial pain and heartache attributable to them, we Bahá'ís see as signs of the emergence of the Lesser Peace. (Universal House of Justice, Ridvan message, 1998)

FOOD, DIET & AGRICULTURE (DAY 3)

Diet/Health

29. The food of the future will be fruit and grains. The time will come when meat is no longer eaten. Medical science is yet only in its infancy, but it has shown that our natural diet is that which grows out of the ground. The people will gradually develop up to the condition of taking only this natural food. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 296)
30. ... It is certain that in this wonderful new age the development of medical science will lead to the doctors' healing their patients with foods. ...At whatever time highly-skilled physicians shall have developed the healing of illnesses by means of foods, and shall make provision for simple foods, and shall prohibit humankind from living as slaves to their lustful appetites, it is certain that the incidence of chronic and diversified illnesses will abate, and the general health of all mankind will be much improved. This is destined to come about. In the same way, in the character, the conduct and the manners of men, universal modifications will be made. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 153)
31. When mankind is more fully developed, the eating of meat will gradually cease. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 171)
32. It is, therefore, evident that 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, and by various waters, hot and cold in temperature. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 258)
33. Regarding the eating of animal flesh and abstinence therefrom, ...he [man] is not in need of meat, nor is he obliged to eat it. Even without eating meat he would live with the utmost vigour and energy. For example, the community of the Brahmins in India do not eat meat; notwithstanding this they are not inferior to other nations in strength, power, vigour, outward senses or intellectual virtues. Truly, the killing of animals and the eating of their meat is somewhat contrary to pity and compassion, and if one can content oneself with cereals, fruit, oil and nuts, such as pistachios, almonds and so on, it would undoubtedly be better and more pleasing. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, in a letter written to an individual believer; in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 294)
34. But eating meat is not forbidden or unlawful, nay, the point is this, that it is possible for man to live without eating meat and be strong. Meat is nourishing and containeth the elements of herbs, seeds and fruits; therefore sometimes it is essential for the sick and for the rehabilitation of health. There is

no objection in the Law of God to the eating of meat if it is required. So if thy constitution is rather weak and thou findest meat useful, thou mayest eat it. (From a tablet of Abdu'l-Baha to an individual believer, Lights of Guidance, p. 295)

35. You should always bear in mind Bahá'u'lláh's counsel that we should take the utmost care of our health, surely not because it is an end in itself, but as a necessary means of serving His Cause. – (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer July 17, 1937; in Lights of Guidance, p. 291)
36. In regard to the question as to whether people ought to kill animals for food or not, there is no explicit statement in the Bahá'í Sacred Scriptures (as far as I know) in favor or against it. It is certain, however, that if man can live on a purely vegetarian diet and thus avoid killing animals, it would be much preferable. This is, however, a very controversial question and the Bahá'ís are free to express their views on it. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, July 9, 1931; quoted in Lights of Guidance, p. 296)
37. Your concern for the prevention of cruelty to animals and for restraint in exploiting them unduly for food and other purposes is indeed praiseworthy; however, the House of Justice is not aware of any absolute prohibition in any Holy Book against the use of animals for food and clothing. As the laws brought by Bahá'u'lláh become known and operative throughout the world, we believe that humanity will find the proper balance in adjusting itself to nature and to the world of animals.

As in so many other areas, the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh in this regard follow the golden mean: kindness toward animals is definitely upheld, vegetarianism is encouraged, hunting is regulated, but certain latitude is left to individual conscience and in practical regard to the diversity of circumstances under which human beings live. For example, the indigenous peoples of the Arctic would be hard-pressed to subsist without recourse to animal products. (Letter from the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, June 29, 1995)

Importance of Agriculture

38. In relation to the economic and social development of the nations, the Universal House of Justice underlines the importance of 'agriculture and the preservation of the ecological balance of the world.' (The Universal House of Justice, Department of the Secretariat, from a letter dated March 31, 1985, to the Association for Bahá'í Studies; in The Compilation of Compilations, vol. 1, p. 81)
39. Bahá'u'lláh states that "Special regard must be paid to agriculture." He characterizes it as an activity which is "conducive to the advancement of mankind and to the reconstruction of the world". 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts that "the fundamental basis of the community is agriculture, tillage of the soil." In relation to the economic and social development of the nations, the Universal House of Justice underlines the importance of "agriculture and the preservation of the ecological balance of the world." (Conservation of the Earth's Resources, in The Compilation of Compilations, vol. I, p. 81)

Kindness to Animals

40. Burden not an animal with more than it can bear. We, truly, have prohibited such treatment through a most binding interdiction in the Book. Be ye the embodiments of justice and fairness amidst all creation. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, p. 87)
41. Briefly, 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. For in all physical respects, and where the animal spirit is concerned, the selfsame feelings are shared by animal and man. Man hath not grasped this truth, however, and he believeth that physical sensations are confined to human beings, wherefore is he unjust to the animals, and cruel.

And yet in truth, what difference is there when it cometh to physical sensations? The feelings are one and the same, whether ye inflict pain on man or on beast. There is no difference here whatever. And indeed ye do worse to harm an animal, for man hath a language, he can lodge a complaint, he can

cry out and moan; if injured he can have recourse to the authorities and these will protect him from his aggressor. But the hapless beast is mute, able neither to express its hurt nor take its case to the authorities. If a man inflict a thousand ills upon a beast, it can neither ward him off with speech nor hale him into court. Therefore is it essential that ye show forth the utmost consideration to the animal, and that ye be even kinder to him than to your fellow man.

...But to blessed animals the utmost kindness must be shown, the more the better. Tenderness and loving-kindness are basic principles of God's heavenly Kingdom. Ye should most carefully bear this matter in mind. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 158)

CONSUMPTION AND MATERIALISM (DAY 4)

Our Relationship with Material Wealth

42. Man's merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches. (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 128)
43. What is it of which ye can rightly boast? Is it on your food and your drink that ye pride yourselves, on the riches ye lay up in your treasuries, on the diversity and the cost of the ornaments with which ye deck yourselves? If true glory were to consist in the possession of such perishable things, then the earth on which ye walk must needs vaunt itself over you, because it supplieth you, and bestoweth upon you, these very things, by the decree of the Almighty. In its bowels are contained, according to what God hath ordained, all that ye possess. From it, as a sign of His mercy, ye derive your riches. Behold then your state, the thing in which ye glory! Would that ye could perceive it! (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 252)
44. The civilization, 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, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation.... The day is approaching when its flame will devour the cities... (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CLXIV, p. 342-343, and Bahá'í World Faith, p. 138-139)
45. The happiness and greatness, the rank and station, the pleasure and peace, of an individual have never consisted in his personal wealth, but rather in his excellent character, his high resolve, the breadth of his learning, and his ability to solve difficult problems. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 23)
46. And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is voluntary sharing of one's property with others among mankind. This voluntary sharing is greater than equality, and consists in this, that man should not prefer himself to others, but rather should sacrifice his life and property for others. But this should not be introduced by coercion so that it becomes a law and man is compelled to follow it. Nay, rather, man should voluntarily and of his own choice sacrifice his property and life for others, and spend willingly for the poor.... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 227, p. 302)
47. Consumer culture, today's inheritor by default of materialism's gospel of human betterment, is unembarrassed by the ephemeral nature of the goals that inspire it. For the small minority of people who can afford them, the benefits it offers are immediate, and the rationale unapologetic. Emboldened by the breakdown of traditional morality, the advance of the new creed is essentially no more than the triumph of animal impulse, as instinctive and blind as appetite, released at long last from the restraints of supernatural sanctions.... Tendencies once universally castigated as moral failings mutate into necessities of social progress. Selfishness becomes a prized commercial resource; falsehood reinvents itself as public information.... Under appropriate euphemisms, greed, lust, indolence, pride - even violence - acquire not merely broad acceptance but social and economic value. (Universal House of Justice, One Common Faith, 2005, p. 10)
48. A challenge of similar nature faces economic thinking as a result of the environmental crisis. The fallacies in theories based on the belief that there is no limit to nature's capacity to fulfil any demand

made on it by human beings have now been coldly exposed. A culture which attaches absolute value to expansion, to acquisition, and to the satisfaction of people's wants is being compelled to recognise that such goals are not, by themselves, realistic guides to policy. Inadequate, too, are approaches to economic issues whose decision-making tools cannot deal with the fact that most of the major challenges are global rather than particular in scope. (*The Prosperity of Humankind*, Bahá'í International Community, Office of Public Information, Haifa, 1995)

Moderation/Simplicity/ Frugality

49. Economy is the foundation of human prosperity. The spendthrift is always in trouble. Prodigality on the part of any person is an unpardonable sin. We must never live on others like a parasitic plant. Every person must have a profession, whether it be literary or manual, and must live a clean, manly, honest life, an example of purity to be imitated by others. It is more kingly to be satisfied with a crust of stale bread than to enjoy a sumptuous dinner of many courses, the money for which comes out of the pockets of others. The mind of a contented person is always peaceful and his heart at rest. He is like a monarch ruling over the whole world. How happily such a man helps himself to his frugal meals! How joyfully he takes his walks, how peacefully he sleeps! - 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, p. 102
50. One day 'Abdu'l-Bahá wanted to go from Akka to Haifa. He went to take an inexpensive seat in a regular coach. The driver was surprised and must have asked himself why 'Abdu'l-Bahá was so frugal as to ride in this cheap coach. "Surely, Your Excellency would prefer to travel in a private carriage," he exclaimed. "No," replied the Master, and He traveled in the crowded coach all the way to Haifa. As He stepped down from the coach in Haifa a distressed fisherwoman came to Him and asked for His help. All day she had caught nothing and now had to return to her hungry family. 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave her a good sum of money, turned to the driver and said, "Why should I ride in luxury while so many are starving?" - Story from *Ruhi Book 3: Teaching Children's Classes*, Grade 1; pp. 43-44
51. A Persian friend arrived who had passed through 'Ishqabad. He presented a cotton handkerchief to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who untied it, and saw therein a piece of dry black bread, and a shrivelled apple. The friend explained: "A poor Bahá'í workman came to me: 'I hear thou goest into the presence of our Beloved. Nothing have I to send, but this my dinner. I pray thee offer it to Him with my loving devotion.'" 'Abdu'l-Bahá spread the poor handkerchief before Him, leaving His own luncheon untasted. He ate of the workman's dinner, broke pieces off the bread, and handed them to the assembled guests, saying: "Eat with me of this gift of humble love." - Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, p. 161

Contentment

52. [The true seeker] should be content with little, and be freed from all inordinate desire.... He should succour the dispossessed, and never withhold his favour from the destitute. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, p. 193-194)

Disparity between rich and poor

53. We see amongst us men who are overburdened with riches on the one hand, and on the other those unfortunate ones who starve with nothing; those who possess several stately palaces, and those who have not where to lay their head. Some we find with numerous courses of costly and dainty food; whilst others can scarce find sufficient crusts to keep them alive. Whilst some are clothed in velvets, furs and fine linen, others have insufficient, poor and thin garments with which to protect them from the cold. This condition of affairs is wrong, and must be remedied. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 151)

AGENTS OF CHANGE / TAKING IT HOME (DAY 5)

Social Action and Spiritual Values

54. Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CVI, p. 213)
55. It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written in reality and action. - Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 165
56. Material civilization is like a lamp-glass. Divine civilization is the lamp itself and the glass without the light is dark. Material civilization is like the body. No matter how infinitely graceful, elegant and beautiful it may be, it is dead. Divine civilization is like the spirit, and the body gets its life from the spirit, otherwise it becomes a corpse. It has thus been made evident that the world of mankind is in need of the breaths of the Holy Spirit. Without the spirit the world of mankind is lifeless, and without this light the world of mankind is in utter darkness. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, p.289)
57. And the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world's multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself, should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellow men? No, by the one true God, there is no greater bliss, no more complete delight... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 2)
58. All social action seeks to apply the teachings and principles of the Faith to improve some aspect of the social or economic life of a population, however modestly. (The Universal House of Justice *Ridván Message 2010*)
59. Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is vast. It calls for profound change not only at the level of the individual but also in the structure of society. "Is not the object of every Revelation", He Himself proclaims, "to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions?" The work advancing in every corner of the globe today represents the latest stage of the ongoing Bahá'í endeavour to create the nucleus of the glorious civilization enshrined in His teachings, the building of which is an enterprise of infinite complexity and scale, one that will demand centuries of exertion by humanity to bring to fruition. There are no shortcuts, no formulas. Only as effort is made to draw on insights from His Revelation, to tap into the accumulating knowledge of the human race, to apply His teachings intelligently to the life of humanity, and to consult on the questions that arise will the necessary learning occur and capacity be developed. (The Universal House of Justice, *Ridvan Message 2010*)
60. Bahá'í activity in the field of social and economic development seeks to promote the wellbeing of people of all walks of life, whatever their beliefs or background. It represents the efforts of the Bahá'í community to effect constructive social change, as it learns to apply the teachings of the Faith, together with knowledge accumulated in different fields of human endeavour, to social reality. Its purpose is neither to proclaim the Cause nor to serve as a vehicle for conversion. (Office of Social and Economic Development, *Social Action*, November 2012)
61. An exploration of the nature of social action, undertaken from a Bahá'í perspective, must necessarily place it in the broad context of the advancement of civilization. That a global civilization which is both materially and spiritually prosperous represents the next stage of a millennia-long process of social evolution provides a conception of history that endows every instance of social action with a particular purpose: to foster true prosperity, with its spiritual and material dimensions, among the diverse inhabitants of the planet. (Office of Social and Economic Development, *Social Action*, November 2012)

Spiritual Principles, importance of

62. There are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. Any well-intentioned group can in a general sense devise practical solutions to

its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is immanent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures. Leaders of governments and all in authority would be well served in their efforts to solve problems if they would first seek to identify the principles involved and then be guided by them. (Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, 1985. p.13)

63. Through [Bahá'u'lláh's] revelation, the principles required for the collective coming of age of the human race have been invested with the one power capable of penetrating to the roots of human motivation and of altering behaviour. (Bahá'í International Community, *One Common Faith*, p. 39-40)
64. Issues of food, nutrition, health and shelter are central to the challenge of providing an adequate standard of living for all members of the human family. These issues cannot, however, be tackled solely as technical or economic problems. Eliminating hunger and malnutrition; establishing food security; providing adequate shelter; and achieving health for all will require a shift in values, a commitment to equity, and a corresponding reorientation of policies, goals and programs. (Baha'i International Community, Feb. 18, 1998, *Valuing Spirituality in Development*)

Trustworthiness

65. One day of days We repaired unto Our Green Island. Upon Our arrival, We beheld its streams flowing, and its trees luxuriant, and the sunlight playing in their midst. Turning Our face to the right, We beheld what the pen is powerless to describe; nor can it set forth that which the eye of the Lord of Mankind witnessed in that most sanctified, that most sublime, that blest, and most exalted Spot. Turning, then, to the left We gazed on one of the Beauties of the Most Sublime Paradise, standing on a pillar of light, and calling aloud saying: 'O inmates of earth and heaven! Behold ye My beauty, and My radiance, and My revelation, and My effulgence. By God, the True One! I am Trustworthiness and the revelation thereof, and the beauty thereof. I will recompense whosoever will cleave unto Me, and recognize My rank and station, and hold fast unto My hem. I am the most great ornament of the people of Baha, and the vesture of glory unto all who are in the kingdom of creation. I am the supreme instrument for the prosperity of the world, and the horizon of assurance unto all beings.' Thus have We sent down for thee that which will draw men nigh unto the Lord of creation. (*Tablets of Baha'u'llah Revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 122)
66. Trustworthiness is the greatest portal leading unto the tranquility and security of the people. In truth the stability of every affair hath depended and doth depend upon it. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 37)
67. Since the body of humankind is one and indivisible, each member of the race is born into the world as a trust of the whole. (*The Prosperity of Humankind*, Bahá'í International Community, Office of Public Information, Haifa, 1995)

Oneness and unity

68. Laying the groundwork for global civilization calls for the creation of laws and institutions that are universal in both character and authority. The effort can begin only when the concept of the oneness of humanity has been wholeheartedly embraced by those in whose hands the responsibility for decision making rests, and when the related principles are propagated through both educational systems and the media of mass communication. Once this threshold is crossed, a process will have been set in motion through which the peoples of the world can be drawn into the task of formulating common goals and committing themselves to their attainment. (*The Prosperity of Humankind*, Bahá'í International Community, Office of Public Information, Haifa, 1995)

Cultural Transformation - The Framework for Action

69. The commitment to preserve the autonomy and diversity of Bahá'í communities does not take away from the unity of the worldwide Bahá'í community. In fact, Bahá'ís all over the world are engaged in a

coherent framework of action that promotes the spiritual development of the individual and channels the collective energies of its members towards service to humanity. Thousands upon thousands of Bahá'ís, embracing the diversity of the entire human family, are engaged in certain core activities. These activities promote the systematic study of the Bahá'í Writings in small groups in order to build capacity for service. They respond to the inmost longing of every heart to commune with its Maker by carrying out acts of collective worship in diverse settings, uniting with others in prayer, awakening spiritual susceptibilities, and shaping a pattern of life distinguished for its devotional character. They provide for the needs of the children of the world and offer them lessons that develop their spiritual faculties and lay the foundations of a noble and upright character. They also assist junior youth to navigate through a crucial stage of their lives and to become empowered to direct their energies toward the advancement of civilization. As Bahá'ís and their friends gain experience with these initiatives, an increasing number are able to express their faith through a rising tide of endeavours that address the needs of humanity in both their spiritual and material dimensions.

(Bahá'í International Community's *Seven Year Plan of Action on Climate Change*, 2009)

70. Cultural transformation involves deliberate changes in individual choices and in institutional structures and norms. For over a decade, the worldwide Baha'í community has been endeavoring systematically to effect a transformation among individuals and communities around the world—to inspire and build the capacity for service. The framework for action guiding these activities has been rooted in a dynamic of learning—characterized by action, reflection, and consultation. In thousands of communities, Baha'ís have set into motion neighborhood-level processes that seek to empower individuals of all ages to recognize and develop their spiritual capacities and to channel their collective energies towards the betterment of their communities. Aware of the aspirations of the children of the world and their need for spiritual education, they have started children's classes that focus on laying the foundations of a noble and upright character. For youth aged 11-14, they have created a learning environment which helps them to form their moral identity at this critical time in their life and to develop skills which empower them to channel their constructive and creative energies toward the betterment of their communities. All are invited to take part in small groups of participatory learning around core concepts and themes which encourage individuals to become agents of change in their communities within a dynamic of learning and an orientation towards service. (Bahá'í International Community, *Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism*, 2010)
71. Bahá'ís believe that progress in the development field depends on and is driven by stirrings at the grass roots of society rather than from an imposition of externally developed plans and programmes. This plan, then seeks to increase local communities' and individuals' awareness of the needs and possibilities and of their capacity to respond. Different communities will likely devise different approaches and solutions in response to similar needs. It is for each community to determine its goals and priorities in keeping with its capacity and resources. Given the diversity of communities around the world, the plan encourages innovation and a variety of approaches to the environment appropriate to the rhythm of life in the community. (Bahá'í International Community's *Seven Year Plan of Action on Climate Change*, 2009)
72. Curriculum materials are continually refined in light of new knowledge and insights. The cultural shifts taking place are evident in the greater capacity to carry out collective action, to see oneself as an agent of change in the community, as a humble learner, as an active participant in the generation, diffusion and application of knowledge. The continuous cycle of learning through action, reflection and consultation has raised awareness of the needs and resources across communities as well as strengthened the mechanisms for collective action and deliberation. Bahá'í International Community, *Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism*, 2010)