



Guiding Questions and Compilation of Bahá'í texts

COMPILED BY INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM

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(The Baha'i texts below are compiled under the specific GES questions. There is some overlap of topics and many texts are also applicable to other questions.)

1. Why do we so often deny or ignore what science and traditional knowledge say about the climate crisis and share or tolerate misinformation, even knowing lives are at risk?

a. Importance of science, Independent Investigation of Truth

Scientific inquiry into the question of human contributions to global warming has gradually unfolded over a century of investigation and, more recently, with intense scrutiny. While there will naturally be differences of view among individual scientists, there does exist at present a striking degree of agreement among experts in relevant fields about the cause and impact of climate change. Sound scientific results, obtained through the employment of sound scientific methods, produce knowledge that can be acted upon; ultimately, the outcomes of action must stand the test of further scientific inquiry and the objective facts of the physical world. In the spectrum of issues under discussion — which includes the extent of human contribution, projections of the possible future consequences, and alternatives for response — some aspects are, of course, less supported than others by scientific findings and hence subject to additional critical analysis.

A phenomenon as complex as climate change cannot be reduced to simple propositions or simplistic policy prescriptions. Even when there is agreement on some underlying facts, there may be a diversity of views about what to do in response to those facts, and the problem is compounded when uncertainty exists or when basic facts are contested for partisan reasons. But while there may indeed be a localized and highly charged political component to the public discussion, more remarkable is the fact that at a time when nations have difficulty reaching agreement on many important issues, the governments of nearly every country on earth have reached political consensus on a joint framework, in the Paris accord, to respond to climate change in a manner that is anticipated to evolve over time as experience accumulates.... The agreement represents a starting point for constructive thought and action that can be refined or revised on the basis of experience and new findings over time.

(Universal House of Justice, letter of 29 November 2017)

Science is the first emanation from God toward man. All created beings embody the potentiality of material perfection, but the power of intellectual investigation and scientific acquisition is a higher virtue specialized to man alone. Other beings and organisms are deprived of this potentiality and attainment. God has created or deposited this love of reality in man. The development and progress of a nation is according to the measure and degree of that nation's scientific attainments. Through this means, its greatness is continually increased and day by day the welfare and prosperity of its people are assured.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 67)

God has conferred upon and added to man a distinctive power—the faculty of intellectual investigation into the secrets of creation -- the greatest virtue of which is scientific enlightenment. This endowment is the most praiseworthy power of man, for through its employment and exercise the betterment of the human race is accomplished, the development of the virtues of mankind is made possible...

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 30)

The principle of the harmony of science and religion means...that everything in this creation, all aspects of human life and knowledge, should be studied in the light of [religious] revelation as well as in that of purely rational investigation [i.e., science].

(The Universal House of Justice, Messages 1963 to 1986, p. 388)

...Man must independently investigate reality, for the disagreements and dissensions which afflict and affect humanity primarily proceed from imitations of ancestral beliefs...

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 314)

b. Disunity and partisan politics

Humanity would be best and most effectively served by setting aside partisan disputation, pursuing united action that is informed by the best available scientific evidence and grounded in spiritual principles, and thoughtfully revising action in the light of experience. The incessant focus on generating and magnifying points of difference rather than building upon points of agreement leads to exaggeration that fuels anger and confusion, thereby diminishing the will and capacity to act on matters of vital concern.

(Universal House of Justice, letter of 29 November 2017)

c. Breakdown of trust and manipulation by vested interests

One of the signs of the breakdown of society in all parts of the world is the erosion of trust and collaboration between the individual and the institutions of governance. In many nations the electoral process has become discredited because of endemic corruption. Contributing to the widening distrust of so vital a process are the influence on the outcome from vested interests having access to lavish funds, the restrictions on freedom of choice inherent in the party system, and the distortion in public perception of the candidates by the bias expressed in the media. Apathy, alienation, and disillusionment are a consequence, too, as is a growing sense of despair of the unlikelihood that the most capable citizens will emerge to deal with the manifold problems of a defective social order. Evident everywhere is a yearning for institutions which will dispense justice, dispel oppression, and foster an enduring unity between the disparate elements of society.

Universal House of Justice, 25 March 2007 – To the Bahá'ís of the World

The failings of so many organizations and institutions of society have understandably led to a decline in public trust, but this has been systematically exploited by vested interests seeking to undermine the credibility of all sources of knowledge. Certain shared ethical principles, which seemed to be in the ascendant at the start of this century, are eroded, threatening the

prevailing consensus about right and wrong that, in various arenas, had succeeded in holding humanity's basest tendencies in check. And the will to engage in international collective action, which twenty years ago represented a powerful strain of thinking among world leaders, has been cowed, assailed by resurgent forces of racism, nationalism, and factionalism.

(Universal House of Justice, 18 January 2019 – To the Bahá'ís of the World)

d. Materialism (which causes the fear that climate action could harm the economy)

...the crass materialism, which lays excessive and ever-increasing emphasis on material well-being, forgetful of those things of the spirit on which alone a sure and stable foundation can be laid for human society. It is this same cancerous materialism, born originally in Europe, carried to excess in the North American continent, contaminating the Asiatic peoples and nations, spreading its ominous tentacles to the borders of Africa, and now invading its very heart, which Bahá'u'lláh in unequivocal and emphatic language denounced in His Writings, comparing it to a devouring flame and regarding it as the chief factor in precipitating the dire ordeals and world-shaking crises that must necessarily involve the burning of cities and the spread of terror and consternation in the hearts of men....

(Shoghi Effendi, Citadel of Faith, written in 1954 www.bahai.org/r/000331358)

Today the world is assailed by an array of destructive forces. Materialism, rooted in the West, has now spread to every corner of the planet, breeding, in the name of a strong global economy and human welfare, a culture of consumerism. It skilfully and ingeniously promotes a habit of consumption that seeks to satisfy the basest and most selfish desires, while encouraging the expenditure of wealth so as to prolong and exacerbate social conflict. How vain and foolish a worldview!

(Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010)

... true prosperity, the fruit of a dynamic coherence between the material and spiritual requirements of life, will recede further and further out of reach as long as consumerism continues to act as opium to the human soul....

(Letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Baha'is in Iran, March 2, 2013)

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)

2. Why do we continue with production and consumption models that harm the most vulnerable and are not aligned with the 1.5°C Mission?

The attainment of any object is conditioned upon knowledge, volition and action. Unless these three conditions are forthcoming, there is no execution or accomplishment.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 217–218)

a. *Knowledge*

Lack of understanding of the Earth’s limits

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)

Take from this world only to the measure of your needs, and forego that which exceedeth them. Observe equity in all your judgements, and transgress not the bounds of justice, nor be of them that stray from its path.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Súriy-i-Mulúk* §19, in *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 193.)

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*, 1995)

Lack of understanding of the true purpose of human existence

Man is, in reality, a spiritual being, and only when he lives in the spirit is he truly happy.

(‘Abdu’l-Baha: *Paris Talks*, page 72)

Why, then, exhibit such greed in amassing the treasures of the earth, when your days are numbered and your chance is well-nigh lost? Will ye not, then, O heedless ones, shake off your slumber?

(*Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 127)

The forces of materialism promote a quite contrary line of thinking: that happiness comes from constant acquisition, that the more one has the better, that worry for the environment is for another day. These seductive messages fuel an increasingly entrenched sense of personal entitlement, which uses the language of justice and rights to disguise selfinterest. Indifference

to the hardship experienced by others becomes commonplace while entertainment and distracting amusements are voraciously consumed. The enervating influence of materialism seeps into every culture...

(Universal House of Justice, Economic Well-being, 1 March 2017)

Lack of understanding about true human progress

As is well known, the dominant model of development depends on a society of vigorous consumers of material goods. In such a model, endlessly rising levels of consumption are cast as indicators of progress and prosperity. This preoccupation with the production and accumulation of material objects and comforts (as sources of meaning, happiness and social acceptance) has consolidated itself in the structures of power and information to the exclusion of competing voices and paradigms. The unfettered cultivation of needs and wants has led to a system fully dependent on excessive consumption for a privileged few, while reinforcing exclusion, poverty and inequality, for the majority. Each successive global crisis—be it climate, energy, food, water, disease, financial collapse—has revealed new dimensions of the exploitation and oppression inherent in the current patterns of consumption and production....

(BIC, Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism, 2010)

To fix humanity's relationship with the natural world, we need to redefine ideas of progress, civilization, and development. What are the qualities by which a person, nation, or corporation are judged successful? For what are they commended and appreciated?

So long as our values prioritize possessions over relationships or acquisition over responsibility, and we expect infinite growth on a finite planet, a sustainable world will remain out of reach. Such values affect the human spirit, leading to excess, exploitation, and depletion, with extremes of wealth and poverty. Progress must be understood in new terms.

(BIC, One Planet, One Habitation: A Baha'i Perspective on Recasting Humanity's Relationship with the Natural World, #17, 18, 19 https://www.iefworld.org/2022bic_OPOH)

If long-cherished ideals and time-honoured institutions, if certain social assumptions and religious formulae have ceased to promote the welfare of the generality of mankind, if they no longer minister to the needs of a continually evolving humanity, let them be swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines. Why should these, in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human institution? For legal standards, political and economic theories are solely designed to safeguard the interests of humanity as a whole, and not humanity to be crucified for the preservation of the integrity of any particular law or doctrine.

(Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 42)

Lack of understanding of humanity's interconnectedness and oneness

The global challenges now facing humanity are a severe test of its willingness to put aside short-term self-interest and come to terms with this stark spiritual and moral reality: there is but one, interconnected human family and it shares one precious homeland.

(Universal House of Justice, 4 January 2022 - To the Bahá'ís of the World, #2)

The welfare of any segment of humanity is inextricably bound up with the welfare of the whole. Humanity's collective life suffers when any one group thinks of its own well-being in isolation from that of its neighbours' or pursues economic gain without regard for how the natural environment, which provides sustenance for all, is affected. A stubborn obstruction, then, stands in the way of meaningful social progress: time and again, avarice and self-interest prevail at the expense of the common good. Unconscionable quantities of wealth are being amassed, and the instability this creates is made worse by how income and opportunity are spread so unevenly both between nations and within nations. But it need not be so. However much such conditions are the outcome of history, they do not have to define the future, and even if current approaches to economic life satisfied humanity's stage of adolescence, they are certainly inadequate for its dawning age of maturity. There is no justification for continuing to perpetuate structures, rules, and systems that manifestly fail to serve the interests of all peoples....

There is an inherent moral dimension to the generation, distribution, and utilization of wealth and resources. The stresses emerging out of the long-term process of transition from a divided world to a united one are being felt within international relations as much as in the deepening fractures that affect societies large and small. With prevailing modes of thought found to be badly wanting, the world is in desperate need of a shared ethic, a sure framework for addressing the crises that gather like storm clouds. The vision of Baha'u'llah challenges many of the assumptions that are allowed to shape contemporary discourse—for instance, that self-interest, far from needing to be restrained, drives prosperity, and that progress depends upon its expression through relentless competition. To view the worth of an individual chiefly in terms of how much one can accumulate and how many goods one can consume relative to others is wholly alien to Baha'i thought. But neither are the teachings in sympathy with sweeping dismissals of wealth as inherently distasteful or immoral, and asceticism is prohibited. Wealth must serve humanity. Its use must accord with spiritual principles; systems must be created in their light. And, in Baha'u'llah's memorable words, "No light can compare with the light of justice. The establishment of order in the world and the tranquillity of the nations depend upon it."

(Universal House of Justice, To the Baha'ís of the World, 1 March 2017)

b. Volition – Love, Justice, Altruism and Solidarity

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.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 17 February 1933)

Let your vision be world embracing rather than confined to your own self.

(Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah XLIII)

True peace and tranquillity will only be realized when every soul will have become the well-wisher of all mankind.

(Baha'u'llah, The Tabernacle of Unity)

Humanity's crying need... calls... for a fundamental change of consciousness... that the time has come when each human being on earth must learn to accept responsibility for the welfare of the entire human family.

(The Universal House of Justice, 24 May 2001 Letter, #6)

c. Action

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.

(Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the challenge of climate change Initial Considerations of the BIC, December 2008)

The global nature of climate change calls for the widest possible cooperation by all countries and their participation in an effective and appropriate international response, in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities and their social and economic conditions.

(United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), preamble, quoted in UN Chronicle No. 2, 2007)

3. What can we do to ensure that rich countries, major producers, and consumers of fossil fuels accelerate their transitions and contribute financing for these measures in the most vulnerable countries?

i. Nurture Global Solidarity

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)

ii. Prioritise well-being of people and planet, Moderation

Modern economic arrangements have resulted in both the degradation of ecosystems and the impoverishment of many local communities and individual lives. Inequalities are rising and the harm inherent in the perpetual creation and gratification of wants has been demonstrated beyond objection. Putting the world on more ecologically sustainable foundations requires a recasting of the global economic order. People and the planet need to be valued as explicitly today as profit and economic gain have been in the past.

As current imbalances are driven in large part by numerous forms of excess, the principle of moderation will need to find much fuller expression in global arrangements. Concepts of contentment, sufficiency, and simplicity, which find little place in growth-driven paradigms, will have to be reclaimed and expanded. Patterns of life that have come to be associated with

extreme wealth—devotion to convenience and luxury, for example, or high levels of consumption and waste—will need to be set aside. Basic notions of progress, development, and prosperity will need to be recast in far more holistic terms.

(BIC, One Planet, One Habitation: A Baha'i Perspective on Recasting Humanity's Relationship with the Natural World, Rethinking Economic Arrangements, https://www.iefworld.org/2022bic_OPOH)

iii. Global Collaboration

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.

(Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the challenge of climate change Initial Considerations of the BIC, December 2008)

The global nature of climate change calls for the widest possible cooperation by all countries and their participation in an effective and appropriate international response, in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities and their social and economic conditions.

(United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), preamble, quoted in UN Chronicle No. 2, 2007)

iv. Fight Corruption with Nurturing Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the greatest portal leading unto the tranquillity and security of the people. In truth the stability of every affair hath depended and doth depend upon it. All the domains of power, of grandeur and of wealth are illumined by its light.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 37)

4. What traditions, histories, or practices (cultural, spiritual) from your community teach us to live in greater harmony with nature?

a. Nature – God's Creation

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.

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 140-142 (Lawh-i-Hikmat))

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, Wilmette, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988, p. 44)

Bahá'u'lláh loved the beauty and verdure of the country. One day He passed the remark: 'I have not gazed on verdure for nine years. The country is the world of the soul, the city is the world of bodies.'

('Abdu'l-Bahá, in J. E. Esslemont, Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era. Chpt. 3, p. 35)

Reflect upon the inner realities of the universe, the secret wisdoms involved,...the inter-relationships, the rules that govern all. For every part of the universe is connected with every other part by ties that are very powerful and admit of no imbalance, nor any slackening whatever.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 156)

The natural world, in all its wonder and majesty, offers profound insight into the essence of interdependence. From the biosphere as a whole to the smallest microorganism, it demonstrates how dependent any one life-form is on numerous others—and how imbalances in one system reverberate across an interconnected whole.

(Bahá'í International Community, One Planet, One Habitation, §1)

Every people, in its own way, celebrates the ever-abundant beauty and grandeur of nature. The traditions of every culture pay homage to that priceless heritage that sustains not only the physical needs of bodies but also the transcendent qualities of the spirit. The task of building a sustainable and flourishing world holds the promise of providing a point of unity not only in shared endeavor, but in joyful celebration as well.

(Bahá'í International Community, One Planet, One Habitation, §6)

If humanity's relationship with the natural world is to be refashioned, notions of progress, civilization, and development will need to be redefined.... What are the qualities by which a person, nation, or corporation are judged successful? For what are they commended and appreciated?

So long as such questions are answered according to values that prioritize possessions over relationships or acquisition over responsibility, a sustainable world will remain out of reach. Such values, by their very nature and effect on the human spirit, beckon incessantly to excess, exploitation, and depletion. They also give rise to gross extremes of alienating wealth and debilitating poverty. Only to the degree that these are set aside can the profound contradictions they give rise to — not least the expectation of infinite growth on a finite planet — be resolved. And only as progress is understood in new terms can the fundamental drivers of present environmental crises be accurately identified and lasting change be made.

(Bahá'í International Community, *One Planet, One Habitation*, §17-18)

b. Justice and Fairness to both People and Nature

One of the most pressing problems of humanity in the current century is how a growing, rapidly developing, and not yet united global population can, in a just manner, live in harmony with the planet and its finite resources. Certain biological realities present themselves when an organism negatively affects or exceeds the capacity of its ecosystem. The limited availability and inequitable distribution of resources profoundly impact social relations within and between nations in many ways, even to the point of precipitating upheaval and war. And particular arrangements of human affairs can have devastating consequences for the environment. The question of the impact of climate change, and to what extent it is man-made and its effects can be ameliorated, is today a major aspect of this larger problem. The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh directly and indirectly touches on a range of such concerns in a manner that speaks to a harmony between society and the natural world.

(Universal House of Justice, letter of 29 November 2017)

Central to any authentic conception of oneness at a planetary level are issues of justice. That widespread suffering has resulted from humanity's extractive relationship with the natural world, that a select few benefit from excessive use of the earth's resources to the detriment of many others, that immediate preferences often override the basic needs of future generations — these reveal profound injustices to people and planet.

Correcting such ills will require an honest reckoning, along with creativity, perseverance, and humility in response. The voices of those who have been disadvantaged by the current order will need to figure far more prominently into decision-making processes at all levels. Insight will need to be sought from populations sustaining more harmonious relationships with the natural world, many of whom live in areas other than urban centers. Diverse cultural understandings of humanity's relationship with the natural world, especially those of indigenous peoples, can provide needed insights into the creation of more holistic and sustainable models for present and future generations.

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Justice demands a wide range of outcomes — that the benefits of human civilization be distributed with equity, for example, or that responsibility for undertaking necessary transitions be apportioned in light of actors' historic contributions to the present climate crisis. But justice at the level of outcome is established only through the operation of justice at the level of process. At the individual level, justice calls for fair-mindedness in one's judgments and equity in one's treatment of others. At the group level, it is the practical expression of awareness that the interests of the individual and those of society are inextricably linked. It also requires a standard of truth-seeking far beyond the patterns of negotiation and compromise that tend to characterize present-day relations — a process of consultation and decision-making that is principled, candid, and fact-based.

At all levels, the capacity to manifest justice — and commitment to doing so — must be strengthened. Just and equitable relationships are indispensable foundations for any unified global movement for the common good.

(Bahá'í International Community, *One Planet, One Habitation*, §29-32)

5. Considering that we need to guarantee diversity in the collective, how can we mobilize more people, leaders, corporations, companies, and nations to support just and ethical changes in combating the climate crisis? What ideas and values could inspire us in this mission?

a. Justice and Equity

climate change is not inevitable; humanity chooses its relationships with the natural world.... The current global order has often approached the natural world as a reservoir of material resources to be exploited. The grave consequences of this paradigm have become all too apparent, and more balanced relationships among the peoples of the world and the planet are clearly needed. The question today is how new patterns of action and interaction can best be established, both individually and collectively, through personal choices, social systems, and governing institutions.

A more balanced attitude toward the environment must therefore address human conditions as consciously as it does natural ones. It must be embodied in social norms and patterns of action characterized by justice and equity. On this foundation can be built an evolving vision of our common future together. And that vision, in turn, stands as a powerful mechanism for mobilizing action around the world and coordinating numerous efforts into mutually reinforcing lines of action.

Setting humanity on a more sustainable path to the future involves transformation in attitudes and actions.... We all have agency and none of our decisions are without consequence. Establishing sustainable patterns of individual and collective life will therefore require not only new technologies, but also a new consciousness in human beings, including a new conception of ourselves and our place in the world.

From where will this consciousness arise? And where will the volition and self-discipline needed to embody it in countless cities, towns, and villages be found? Qualities such as the capacity to sacrifice for the well-being of the whole, to trust and be trustworthy, to find contentment, to give freely and generously to others derive not from mere pragmatism or political expediency. Rather they arise from the deepest sources of human inspiration and motivation. In this, faith has shown itself to be key, whether in the efficacy of sustainability efforts or the capacity of the human race.

Of particular note is the role to be played by religious faith. Religion has been a feature of human civilization since the dawn of recorded history, and has prompted countless multitudes to arise and exert themselves for the well-being of others. Religion offers an understanding of human existence and development that lifts the eye from the rocky path to the distant horizon. And when true to the spirit of its transcendent founders, religion has been one of the most powerful forces for the creation of new and beneficial patterns of individual and collective life. Religion therefore offers a vital source of commitment to new and potentially challenging patterns of daily life.... Identifying the spiritual principles at the root of ecological challenges can also be key in formulating effective action. Principles – that humanity constitutes but a

single people, for example, or that justice demands universal participation in the work of sustainable development – reflect the rich complexity of human nature. Just as importantly, they help foster the will and the aspiration needed to facilitate the implementation of pragmatic measures. Identifying the principles underlying given issues and formulating action in light of their imperatives is therefore a methodology that all can benefit from and contribute to – those in traditionally religious roles, but also leaders of government, the corporate sector, civil society, and others involved in the formulation of public policy.

Exploring new patterns of interaction among the actors of society, such as individuals and institutions, will be central to the task of building more sustainable relationships with the natural world and among various segments of the global family. The work of addressing global climate change ultimately revolves around the aim of human lives well lived, which is a goal cherished by people and cultures the world over. In it can therefore be found a powerful point of unity to support the work ahead.

(BIC, Shared Vision, Shared Volition: Choosing Our Global Future Together, Statement to the Paris Climate Change Conference, November 2015)

The climate crisis—one of the most pronounced symptoms of our ailing global order—requires genuine transformative change. Its various physical manifestations are an expression of the inaccuracy and insufficiency of our views of ourselves and the world.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change noted that setting humanity on a sustainable path would require “rapid, far-reaching, and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society.” This includes transformations to technological, industrial, agricultural, and scientific systems, which in turn require unprecedented change in values, assumptions, standards, and patterns of thought and behavior.

We must find unity, solidarity, and even opportunity in the common struggle increasingly faced in every corner of the world. We must draw on the insights of science and the universal values of the world’s great religions to inform our next steps, and to guide our current trajectory. For religion without science becomes pure superstition, and science without religion becomes the instrument of materialism. Transformation will result from the insights gleaned when both systems of knowledge are judiciously applied to the crises humanity faces—climate foremost among them.

(BIC, perspective, 20 September 2019)

b. Intergenerational Justice

As we learn how best to utilize the earth’s raw materials for the good of all, we must be conscious of our attitudes toward the source of our subsistence. Our activities must reflect the fact that the wealth and wonders of the earth are the common heritage of all people, who deserve just and equitable access to its resources. Our choices must evince an intergenerational perspective in which the well-being of future inhabitants is taken into account at all levels of decision-making. And in this turbulent period of human history, our activities must increasingly be tempered by the wisdom and judgment that come with growing maturity.

(BIC, One Planet One Habitation: A Bahá'í Perspective on Recasting Humanity's Relationship with the Natural World, 1 June, 2022, First box)

c. Stewardship

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)

d. The importance of consultation: Participation from all stakeholders, with an approach that creates a unified vision and resolve for unified action

The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol. I, p. 91)

Consultation ... is a shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol. I, p. 93)

The voices of those who have been disadvantaged by the current order will need to figure far more prominently into decision-making processes at all levels. Insight will need to be sought from populations sustaining more harmonious relationships with the natural world, many of whom live in areas other than urban centers. Diverse cultural understandings of humanity's relationship with the natural world, especially those of indigenous peoples, can provide needed insights into the creation of more holistic and sustainable models for present and future generations.

(BIC, One Planet, One Habitation: A Baha'i Perspective on Recasting Humanity's Relationship with the Natural World, #30 https://www.iefworld.org/2022bic_OPOH)

-down models of community development can no longer adequately respond to modern day needs and aspirations. The world community must move toward more participatory, knowledge-based and values-driven systems of governance in which people can assume responsibility for the processes and institutions that affect their lives. These systems need to be democratic in spirit and method, and must emerge on all levels of world society, including the global level. Consultation -- the operating expression of justice in human affairs -- should become their primary mode of decision-making.

(BIC, 1996 Jun 07, Sustainable Communities in an Integrating World)

The pathway to sustainability will be one of empowerment, collaboration and continual processes of questioning, learning and action in all regions of the world. It will be shaped by the experiences of women, men, children, the rich, the poor, the governors and the governed as each one is enabled to play their rightful role in the construction of a new society. As the sweeping tides of consumerism, unfettered consumption, extreme poverty and marginalization recede, they will reveal the human capacities for justice, reciprocity and happiness.

(BIC, Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism)

e. The Importance of using both science and religion

Religion and science are the two wings upon which man's intelligence can soar into the heights, with which the human soul can progress. It is not possible to fly with one wing alone! Should a man try to fly with the wing of religion alone, he would quickly fall into the quagmire of superstition, whilst on the other hand, with the wing of science alone he would also make no progress, but fall into the despairing slough of materialism.

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 143)

In working to build a more sustainable world, humanity has at its disposal two mutually reinforcing systems of knowledge and practice: science and religion.

Scientific inquiry has been a vital instrument in seeking to understand physical reality and in forging innovative solutions based on a search for truth and a commitment to learning. When combined with values such as freedom from prejudice and bias it has enabled humanity to separate fact from conjecture. Scientific capabilities—of observing, measuring, rigorously testing ideas—have allowed us to construct a coherent understanding of the laws and processes governing physical reality, as well as to gain insights into human conduct and the working of society. Far from being the province of researchers and academics alone, the methodologies of scientific inquiry are tools that any individual or community can employ. For its part, religion provides a framework by which high ideals can be applied to individual lives and to the life of society, for the betterment of all. The spiritual principles animating the world's enduring religions have aided individuals and entire populations to grapple with questions of meaning, purpose, and the nature of the good life and the good society. When true to these ideals, religion has provided a bulwark against ideologies of materialism that would reduce

human beings to mere resources to be exploited or consumers to be satiated. At its highest, religion has not only raised the call to virtues such as integrity, good character, high resolve, cooperation, and sacrificial endeavor, but drawn growing numbers together around such principles, unifying disparate elements, and giving rise to cohesive communities working to manifest high ideals in practice.

Taken together, science and religion provide fundamental organizing principles by which lasting progress can be made. When both the material and spiritual dimensions of humanity are kept in mind, and due attention is given to both scientific and spiritual knowledge, the tendency to reduce human progress to the consumption of goods, services, and technological packages is avoided. Both science and religion are essential to the liberation of individuals and communities from the traps of ignorance and passivity. Both are vital to the advancement of civilization.

(Baha'i International Community, One Planet One Habitation – a Baha'i Perspective on Recasting Humanity's Relationship with the Natural World https://www.iefworld.org/2022bic_OPOH)

f. Religion as the motivating force for societal change

Through its teachings and through the examples of human lives illumined by these teachings, masses of people in all ages and lands have developed the capacity to love. They have learned to discipline the animal side of their natures, to make great sacrifices for the common good, to practice forgiveness, generosity, and trust, to use wealth and other resources in ways that serve the advancement of civilization. Institutional systems have been devised to translate these moral advances into the norms of social life on a vast scale. However obscured by dogmatic accretions and diverted by sectarian conflict, the spiritual impulses set in motion by such transcendent figures as Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, and Muhammad have been the chief influence in the civilizing of human character.

These prophets have been the spiritual driving force behind the unfoldment of human civilizations. Their message, says Bahá'u'lláh, is “endowed with such potency as can instill new life into every human frame.”

(Bahá'í International Community, The Prosperity of Humankind, Haifa, 1995)

The disease which afflicts the body politic is lack of love and absence of altruism. The spiritual teachings of the religion of God can alone create this love, unity and accord in human hearts.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 171)

6. Other Principles

a. *A World-Embracing Vision*

Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 94)

True peace and tranquillity will only be realized when every soul will have become the well-wisher of all mankind.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Tabernacle of Unity, www.bahai.org/r/161451281)

Humanity's crying need ... calls ... for a fundamental change of consciousness ... that the time has come when each human being on earth must learn to accept responsibility for the welfare of the entire human family.

(The Universal House of Justice, 24 May 2001 Letter)

The global challenges now facing humanity are a severe test of its willingness to put aside short-term self-interest and come to terms with this stark spiritual and moral reality: there is but one, interconnected human family and it shares one precious homeland.

(Universal House of Justice, 4 January 2022 - To the Bahá'ís of the World)

The unification of the earth's inhabitants is neither a remote utopian vision nor, ultimately, a matter of choice. It constitutes the next, inescapable stage in the process of social evolution, a stage toward which all the experience of past and present is impelling us. Until this issue is acknowledged and addressed, none of the ills afflicting our planet will find solutions, because all the essential challenges of the age we have entered are global and universal, not particular or regional.

(Who is Writing the Future? BIC, Office of Public Information, February 1999)

... truly transforming individual and collective patterns of life will require a much deeper appreciation of the interconnectedness of the planetary biosphere. People and the environment are inter-connected aspects of one organically integrated system. At this point in history, neither can be accurately understood in isolation from the other.

Implicit in this understanding is the organic oneness of the human race itself.

(BIC, Statement to the 2015 COP21 Paris Climate Change Conference)

The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life.

(Shoghi Effendi, World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 202, written 1936)

Organizing and coordinating the affairs of humanity on a global level requires a new way of thinking, one that transcends the limits of nations. The Bahá'í teachings explain: The principle of the Oneness of Mankind... is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope.... It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a

change such as the world has not yet experienced.... It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world – a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units. It represents the consummation of human evolution – an evolution that has had its earliest beginnings in the birth of family life, its subsequent development in the achievement of tribal solidarity, leading in turn to the constitution of the city-state, and expanding later into the institution of independent and sovereign nations.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p.42)

The representatives of people on the local, national and international level must be trustworthy and “regard themselves as the representatives of all that dwell on earth.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 61)

O ye the elected representatives of the people in every land! Take ye counsel together, and let your concern be only for that which profiteth mankind and bettereth the condition thereof.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 90/93)

On an institutional level, a global entity with a strong scientific advisory capacity is needed to streamline reporting and decision-making processes, including the voices of non-state actors. It must coherently link environmental issues to social and economic priorities, for none of these can advance in isolation.

(*Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward as One*, BIC on Poverty, 14 February 2008)

b. Education

Refer to the society-building efforts of the world-wide Baha’I community with children’s classes, youth empowerment programme, adult spiritual education, and devotional gatherings, all welcoming everyone.

c. The transition in perspective

Its [humanity’s] present state, indeed even its immediate future, is dark, distressingly dark. Its distant future, however, is radiant, gloriously radiant—so radiant that no eye can visualize it.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, www.bahai.org/r/563821072)

Whether in the life of the individual or that of society, profound change occurs more often than not in response to intense suffering and to unendurable difficulties that can be overcome in no other way. Just so great a testing experience, Bahá'u'lláh warned, is needed to weld the Earth's diverse peoples into a single people.

(BIC, *Who is Writing the Future*, paragraph 35)

Justice is, in this day, bewailing its plight, and Equity groaneth beneath the yoke of oppression. The thick clouds of tyranny have darkened the face of the earth, and enveloped its peoples. Through the movement of Our Pen of glory We have, at the bidding of the omnipotent Ordainer, breathed a new life into every human frame, and instilled into every word a fresh potency. All

created things proclaim the evidences of this world-wide regeneration. This is the most great, the most joyful tidings imparted by the Pen of this wronged One to mankind. Wherefore fear ye, O My well-beloved ones?

(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, section XLIII, p.93)

Much suffering will still be required ere the contending nations, creeds, classes and races of mankind are fused in the crucible of universal affliction, and are forged by the fires of a fierce ordeal into one organic commonwealth, one vast, unified, and harmoniously functioning system. Adversities unimaginably appalling, undreamed of crises and upheavals, war, famine, and pestilence, might well combine to engrave in the soul of an unheeding generation those truths and principles which it has disdained to recognize and follow. A paralysis more painful than any it has yet experienced must creep over and further afflict the fabric of a broken society ere it can be rebuilt and regenerated.

(Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 193)

Chaos and confusion are daily increasing in the world. They will attain such intensity as to render the frame of mankind unable to bear them. Then will men be awakened and become aware that religion is the impregnable stronghold and the manifest light of the world, and its laws, exhortations and teachings the source of life on earth.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Peace, Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Bahá'í World Centre, August 1985)

[We] see in the revolutionary changes taking place in every sphere of life the interaction of two fundamental processes. One is destructive in nature, while the other is integrative; both serve to carry humanity, each in its own way, along the path leading towards its full maturity. The operation of the former is everywhere apparent—in the vicissitudes that have afflicted time-honoured institutions, in the impotence of leaders at all levels to mend the fractures appearing in the structure of society, in the dismantling of social norms that have long held in check unseemly passions, and in the despondency and indifference exhibited not only by individuals but also by entire societies that have lost any vital sense of purpose. Though devastating in their effects, the forces of disintegration tend to sweep away barriers that block humanity's progress, opening space for the process of integration to draw diverse groups together and disclosing new opportunities for cooperation and collaboration.... [The] forces associated with the process of integration... will continue to gain in strength, no matter how bleak the immediate horizons. Human affairs will be utterly reorganized, and an era of universal peace inaugurated.

(Universal House of Justice, To the Baha'is of Iran, 2 March 2013 para. 4)

The crisis that exists in the world is... serving a great purpose. It is broadening the outlook of man, teaching him to think internationally, forcing him to take into consideration the welfare of his neighbours if he wishes to improve his own condition...

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, February 3, 1932)