

Scientific and Spiritual Dimensions of Climate Change

Summary version of Units 1 and 2

Section 1: Nature and Creation

When God created the first human beings, God led them around all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said: "See my works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are! Think of this, and do not corrupt or destroy My world."¹

Judaism

Say: 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."²

Baha'i Faith

In the infinite web of life everything is connected with everything else. We humans are dependent upon the integrity of the web of life.

The sun is the source of all life and of all energy. It provides the temperature necessary for the existence of life. Plants absorb carbon dioxide and emit oxygen with the help of sunlight. That's called photosynthesis. During photosynthesis, plants transform atmospheric carbon into organic compounds, especially glucose (sugars). That glucose is used in various forms by every creature on the planet for energy and growth. Photosynthesis is the foundation for all plant life and therefore of all animal life as well.

The energy of the sun also drives the climate and the weather, as differences in air and water temperatures create wind and ocean currents.

Natural gas, coal and oil are all fossil fuels. They were created a long time ago by the breakdown of plants and animals. This process took billions of years. So fossils fuels are an accumulation of the sun's energy or you could call it stored solar energy from ancient times.

Section 2: Interconnectedness in Nature

'Abdu'l-Baha explains that everything in nature is interconnected, like in a human body, which consists of many different cells, organs, and limbs:

Reflect upon the inner realities of the universe, the secret wisdoms involved, the enigmas, 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. In the physical realm of creation, all things are eaters and eaten: the plant drinketh in the mineral, the animal doth crop and swallow down the plant, man doth feed upon the animal, and the mineral devoureth the body of man. Physical bodies are transferred past one barrier after another, from one life to another, and all things are subject to transformation and change, save only the essence of existence itself -- since it is constant and immutable, and upon it is founded the life of every species and kind, of every contingent reality throughout the whole of creation.³

Section 3: Science and Religion

Science

The faculty of intellectual investigation into the secrets of creation... 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...⁴

Abdu'l-Baha

What is science? It is a method of investigation that must be conducted objectively without any bias. Its results must be measurable and its experiments reproducible by other scientists. Scientific research is continuously progressing. Science cannot give us guidance in how we should use specific scientific discoveries and technologies or whether we should use them at all.

Religion

Religion has always had a profound influence on people and cultures. It has been a strong force for social progress, "motivating individuals to develop spiritual qualities, and empowering them to sacrifice for their fellow human-beings and to contribute to the betterment of their communities." ⁵

...Religion is a radiant light and an impregnable stronghold for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world.

...Should the lamp of religion be obscured, chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness and justice, of tranquillity and peace cease to shine... ⁶

Baha'u'llah

Science and Religion

Science and religion are tools to investigate reality from two different angles. Each discipline asks a fundamentally different question.

- Science asks: **how** does the universe work?
- Religion asks: **why** is there a universe and what is its purpose, and what is our purpose of existence as human beings?

The Baha'i teachings say that we need to rely on 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.⁷

‘Abdu'l-Baha

Now, as the Earth is affected by climate change and other environmental problems we need science to learn more about the causes, effects, and solutions to these problems.

So, what's the role of religion? While scientists can tell us what needs to be done, they are usually not able to motivate society to implement these solutions. That's where we need religion. Religion provides us with the spiritual understanding of our responsibility towards the Earth and towards other human beings including future generations. In other words, religion provides an ethical or moral framework. And it motivates us to act!

Questions for discussion:

1. What is photosynthesis?
2. What are fossil fuels and where do they come from?
3. What is the source of all energy on earth?
4. What is the ultimate source of all energy, both spiritual and physical?

REFERENCES

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- ¹ Midrash Kohelet Rabbah, 1 on Ecclesiastes 7:13, quoted by Rabbi Lawrence Troster,
 - ² Baha'u'llah (Tablets from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 140-142 (Lawh-i-Hikmat)
 - ³ ‘Abdu'l-Baha (Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 156)
 - ⁴ ‘Abdu'l-Baha (Promulgation of Universal Peace (2nd edition). Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1982, p. 31)
 - ⁵ Baha'i International Community, 1994 Aug 24, Role of Religion in Social Development
 - ⁶ Baha'u'llah (Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 125)
 - ⁷ ‘Abdu'l-Baha (Paris Talks*, Page: 143)