Scientific and Spiritual Dimensions of Climate Change

Unit 6
Spiritual Principles for a Sustainable World

> *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.*[1]
>
> Universal House of Justice

Some people are convinced that all you need to do to change the world is to change the human heart. Other people say that we need fundamental structural change in society and that the urgency of the climate crisis demands immediate changes in laws and regulations, from the international level down to the local level. Of course, we need both, a change of heart and fundamental structural change in society.

Sometimes we encounter a similar dichotomy between emphasizing either long-term or short-term actions.

The Bahá'í International Community addresses this in its statement *One Planet, One Habitation: A Bahá'í Perspective on Recasting Humanity's Relationship with the Natural World*:

> *Pressing environmental realities demand of humanity an increasingly mature integration of principle and action, … Productive steps should be taken as quickly as possible within current systems, limitations notwithstanding, even as foundations that reflect new paradigms better able to meet contemporary needs are put into place.*[2]

Progress with environmental action requires both a long-term and a short-term view. Practical actions to reduce carbon emissions are urgent and cannot wait. At the same time, spiritual and social transformation of individuals and society are essential to generate the collective will to implement such strong climate actions and to create new patterns of community life and new institutions that aspire to live in harmony with nature.

Bahá'u'lláh explained to us that God's Revelation can help humankind make progress in both areas:

> *God's purpose in sending His Prophets unto men is twofold. The first is to liberate the children of men from the darkness of ignorance, and guide them to the light of true understanding.*
>
> *The second is to ensure the peace and tranquillity of mankind, and provide all the means by which they can be established."*[3]
>
> *… is not the object of every Revelation 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?*[4]

So, there are these two clear goals in the Bahá'í Revelation – to enable each soul on Earth to attain their human and spiritual potential and to work for the peace and unity of

humankind - to contribute to an ever-advancing spiritual civilization.

This concept is often called the twofold purpose:

1. the spiritual development of the individual
2. the social development of society

These two dimensions are intricately interconnected with each other. It is impossible to make progress with one without progress in the other.

The two readings in this Unit 7 are about the spiritual and ethical principles that can guide both individuals and society in effectively addressing the problem of climate change.

Section 1: Stewardship of the Earth

All religions and many traditions teach that the Earth is God's creation and that it is our responsibility to protect it.

From an Indigenous Perspective:

Indigenous people see plants and animals as fellow creatures, as relatives. Land is more than a material object that can be exploited, bought or sold.

“In the culture of the Maori people of New Zealand, humans are deeply connected with nature; the two are equal and interdependent, even kin. The idea is reflected in the Maori word ‘kaitiakitanga’, which means guarding and protecting the environment in order to respect the ancestors and secure the future.

“The Maoris’ intimate relationship with their lands and the natural world is shared by many other indigenous peoples around the world, and highlights why these often marginalized groups are gaining recognition as vital stewards of our environment and its fast-depleting resources.”[5]

Judaism:

> *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.*[6]

Christianity:

> *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*[7]
>
> *And God created humankind in God's image... having dominion over the earth*.[8] Some theologians and religious leaders say the word 'dominion' should not be understood as a license to dominate and exploit nature, but rather as an obligation of stewardship of the Earth.
>
> *And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.*[9]
>
> Another translation says: *The Lord God took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it.*

Islam:

> *If any Muslim plants any plant and a human being or an animal eats of it, he will be rewarded as if he had given that much in charity.*[10]

Sikhism:

> *Air is the guru, water is the father, and Earth is the mother of all.*[11]

Buddhism:

> *Water flows over these hands. May I use them skillfully to preserve our precious planet.*[12]

Bahá'í Faith:

> *Know thou that every created thing is a sign of the revelation of God.*[13]

When we see plants and animals, even rocks and mountains with glaciers as signs of the revelation of God, we can see the beauty and love of God reflected in them.

Religion also warns us what can happen when we transgress against its teachings:

> *The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant.*[14]
>
> Isaiah 24:4-5

> *... ye walk on My earth complacent and self-satisfied, heedless that My earth is weary of you and everything within it shunneth you.*[15]

> *This is the Day whereon the earth shall tell out her tidings. The workers of iniquity are her burdens, could ye but perceive it.*[16]
>
> Bahá'u'lláh

The Bahá'í International Community elaborated on that concept:

> *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.*[17]

Section 2: Various Aspects of Justice

Climate change is often perceived as just an environmental problem. As we will discuss in this section, it is very much a human problem, a social issue.

Religion calls on us to uphold justice. In the treatise *The Prosperity of Humankind* we find a helpful explanation about the nature of justice.

> *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.*[18]

Justice is part and sometimes even central in the teachings of all religions.

> *What does the Lord require of you? To do justice and love kindness and walk humbly with your God.*[19]
>
> The Bible

> *O ye who believe! Stand fast to justice, when ye bear witness before God, though it be against yourselves, or your parents, or your kindred, whether the party be rich or poor...*[20]
>
> The Qur'án

> *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.*[21]

> *The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men.*[22]
>
> Bahá'u'lláh

> (In the above and similar quotations, the word “men” signifies human beings in general; no gender bias is intended.)

> *We ask God to endow human souls with justice so that they may be fair, and may strive to provide for the comfort of all, that each member of humanity may pass his life in the utmost comfort and welfare. Then this material world will become the very paradise of the Kingdom, this elemental earth will be in a heavenly state and all the servants of God will live in the utmost joy, happiness and gladness. We must all strive and concentrate all our thoughts in order that such happiness may accrue to the world of humanity.*[23]
>
> ʻAbdu’l-Bahá

Climate change raises many issues of fairness or justice:

1. Vulnerable Populations

Some areas in the world are much more severely affected by climate change than others. One such area is Africa: It is not only the least materially developed and most exploited, but also one of the most vulnerable continents to climate change. There is a decrease in rainfall over large regions where it is already dry. Water scarcity is worsening. Most of Africa relies on rain-fed agriculture. 70% of the population lives by

farming. The consequences are more famines, death and human suffering. In some central areas of Africa, climate change results in an increase in rainfall. This causes mosquitoes to thrive and results in the further spread of malaria.

Other vulnerable people are the millions who live on small islands and low-lying coastal lands who will be displaced by sea-level rise, and the Indigenous people in the Arctic who are losing their way of life.

All these populations emit very little greenhouse gases. The parts of the world that are rich and industrialized are responsible for the huge greenhouse gas emissions that drive climate change.[24] The poor victims of economic and institutional injustice are affected the worst, without adequate means of adapting to the changing conditions.

Small island states have lost their patience with big polluting nations as they suffer the devastating impacts of climate change.[25] Vanuatu is one of these countries, and it took a courageous initiative: Led by a group of Pacific island law students and the state of Vanuatu, a coalition of more than 100 countries requested an Advisory Opinion on Climate Change from the International Court of Justice (ICJ)."[26] Its purpose was "to gain clarity how existing International Laws can be applied to strengthen action on climate change and to protect the rights of present and future generations against the adverse effects of climate change."

Their many years of effort resulted in the July 2025 ruling of the world's top court "that States must tackle fossil fuels, and failing to prevent harm to the climate could result in them being ordered to pay reparations." This was significant progress toward climate justice and can assist similar legal efforts in countries around the world.[27]

2. Inequitable Emissions

"In one year, the average American produces the same amount of greenhouse-gas emissions as four and a half Mexicans, or eighteen Indians or 99 Bangladeshis."[28]

"... Why should anyone have the right to emit more than others? ... Democratic ethos demands equal per capita rights to global environmental resources.[29] "If the world took climate change as a moral issue, each country will have to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions to their fair share of global emissions."[30]

However, when we look at greenhouse gas emissions per country alone, we fail to recognize the contribution of global commercial exchanges where consumers often do not live where production, energy use and emissions of greenhouse gasses take place. The mining of resources and the production of goods have increasingly been taking place in developing nations. So, for example, while China's emissions have been growing rapidly, the consumption of the West is partly to blame for that increase.

3. Economic Injustice

"Those who produce greenhouse gas emissions are bringing about climate change, thereby imposing costs on the world and future generations, but they do not face directly, neither via markets nor in other ways, the full consequences of the costs of their actions."[31] Who will pay for the damages of climate change?

4. Intergenerational Injustice

Future generations will have to live on an impoverished planet, plundered of its resources, polluted with chemicals and radioactivity, on an earth with less species of plants and animals, with degraded soil, polluted and scarce water supplies and a changing climate! For the short-term economic benefits of a few, the long-term well-being of everyone is sacrificed.
"Climate change will have serious impacts within the lifetime of most of us alive today. Future generations will be even more strongly affected, yet they lack representation in present-day discussions".[32] Who is in charge of advocating for future generations?

Many young people have recognized the threat of climate change and have become a powerful voice calling for change, for example Greta Thunberg with her Fridays for Future.

All around the world, from Peru to Portugal[33], young people are taking their countries to court over climate inaction. Some of them have been successful, some have failed, and many are pending.

For example, Our Children's Trust reported a "youth plaintiff's victory in Colombia, where their Supreme Court affirmed their constitutional rights to a healthy environment, life, health, food, and water; recognized legal personhood for the Colombian Amazon forest as well as a duty of the Colombian government to protect it; and ordered the Colombia government to create and implement plans to halt deforestation, update and orient existing land management plans towards climate change mitigation and adaptation, and develop an 'intergenerational pact for the life of the Colombian Amazon' with the plaintiffs, affected communities, and scientific organizations."

In the US, Our Children's Trust has launched youth-led climate lawsuits and legal actions in all 50 states over the past decade. A promising lawsuit "Juliana v. United States" specifically challenged decisions of the President of the United States and several federal departments and agencies, because those decisions "have substantially caused the planet to warm and the oceans to rise."

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States supported this lawsuit by submitting an affidavit in January 2018 in support of the decision of federal district court Judge Anne Aiken in the Juliana v. United States case. This brief documentary video provides insight into the youth's motivation and their legal struggles.

This is how the Bahá'í International Community addresses the issue of environmental justice in its statement *One Planet, One Habitation: A Bahá'í Perspective on Recasting Humanity's Relationship with the Natural World*:

> *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.*
>
> *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.*[34]

Further down in the same statement, the Bahá'í International Community points to justice for future generations and makes concrete proposals that could contribute to intergenerational justice:

> *Within current structures, global arrangements could be made more just by establishing means to estimate and model the effects that proposed policies would have in the future. Such a forward-looking orientation, as seen, for example, in the proposed United Nations Special Envoy for Future Generations and building on the lessons learned from localities that have instituted such an approach, would help insulate decision-making from narrower interests of present actors and prioritize medium and long-term equity and stewardship.*[35]

Justice must be administered with laws. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote:

> *The Law must reign, and not the individual; thus will the world become a place of beauty and true brotherhood will be realized. Having attained solidarity, men will have found truth.*[36]

Humanity needs just environmental laws from the local to the international level. See more about the need for global environmental governance in the next unit.

Social justice implies rewarding environmentally responsible actions and discouraging harmful behavior with strong environmental laws. Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

> *The structure of world stability and order hath been reared upon, and will continue to be sustained by, the twin pillars of reward and punishment.* [37]
>
> Bahá'u'lláh

Section 3: Eradication of the Extremes of Wealth and Poverty

As already pointed out in the reading on materialism in Unit 5, the current global economic order is based on the exploitation of humans and of nature and causes social inequities as well as climate change, the loss of biodiversity and pollution.

The Universal House of Justice emphasizes the injustice of man-made ideologies and how they

> *… callously abandon starving millions to the operations of a market system that all too clearly is aggravating the plight of the majority of mankind, while enabling small sections to live in a condition of affluence scarcely dreamed of by our forebears.*[38]

Poverty is often the result of unjust exploitation and oppression. Even if progress for justice was made from time to time in history, exploitation and oppression never really disappeared, and it has taken new forms now at the age of globalization, with multinational profit driven private interests.

Poverty eradication is one the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the first of the 17 goals - an indication of its high importance. A comprehensive and coherent understanding of the SDGs indicates that the global challenge of climate change cannot be addressed without addressing poverty, injustices and inequalities.

As discussed in the section above, materially disadvantaged people are generally first and most severely affected by climate change.

At the same time, those most vulnerable to climate change are often least able to afford engineering measures such as dikes or irrigation to compensate for droughts, or rebuilding away from flood or storm prone areas, and must seek other forms of adaptation.

Even in the developed countries are poor people first at risk from the impacts of climate change, for example by rising food prices or by dislocation because of severe storms.

Poverty alleviation is a central teaching in all religions.

> *Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* [39]
>
> The Bible

> *It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces to the East and the West; but righteous is he who believeth in Allah* and the Last Day and the angels and the Scripture and the prophets; and giveth wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free; and observeth proper worship and payeth the poor-due.* [40]
>
> The Qur'án

> *O YE RICH ONES ON EARTH!*
> *The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust, and be not intent only on your own ease.* [41]
>
> The Bahá'í Faith

In the Baha'i Faith, there is an added dimension to that. Bahá'u'lláh calls not only for the eradication of poverty but also of **extreme wealth**. Eliminating the extremes of wealth is important for climate-change mitigation because the rich people of the world are the ones who are responsible for most of the carbon pollution in our atmosphere.

Here are some data about global wealth distribution:

“The richest 10% of the global population currently take home 52% of the income, the poorest half of the global population earn just 8%. And, when it comes to wealth (valuable assets and items over and above income), the gap is even wider. The poorest half of the global population owns just 2% of the global total, while the richest 10% own 76% of all wealth.”[42]

“The top 10 richest individuals have about six times more wealth than the bottom 40% of the global population. “252 men have more wealth than all 1 billion women and girls in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean combined.”[43]

Billionaires are responsible for around 8,000 times more carbon emissions compared to someone among the poorest billion people on Earth.[44]
Wealth is a major cause of global warming because of the huge consumption of the rich.

The Universal House of Justice commented on the exorbitant accumulation of wealth by a minority of the world’s population:

> *… the concentration of material wealth in the hands of a minority of the world’s population gives an indication of how fundamentally ill-conceived are relationships among the many sectors of what is now an emerging global community. The principle of the oneness of humankind implies, then, an organic change in the very structure of society.*[45]

The Bahá'í teachings contain provisions that would limit the accumulation of extreme wealth but encourage individuals to acquire wealth to spend it for their own needs and for the common good. They suggest very progressive taxes.

Another tool to limit exorbitant wealth is Huqúqu'lláh. Huqúqu'lláh translates as the Right of God. It is a spiritual law consisting of the voluntary payment of a prescribed portion of one´s income after the deduction of necessary expenses. This law helps us to reflect on our personal lifestyle: Which of our expenses are necessary and which are luxury? This spiritual exercise can also affect our future consumption which will have another positive impact on the climate. The money from Huqúqu'lláh is used for global well-being.

Poverty can also exacerbate climate change. Materially disadvantaged people are often forced to unsustainably exploit their environment, for example by cutting down forests. This contributes to climate change, and the degraded environment in turn exacerbates poverty - a vicious circle. It is necessary to address the root causes of poverty by structural economic changes and by empowering people with education and participation in decision-making so that they can advance in their sustainable development.

In the Bahá'í Writings, humankind is compared to a family:

> *Because of lack of harmonious relations some members are comfortable and some in direst misery, some members are satisfied and some are hungry, some members are clothed in most costly garments and some families are in need of food and shelter. Why? Because this family lacks the necessary reciprocity and symmetry. This household is not well arranged. This household is not living under*

a perfect law. All the laws which are legislated do not ensure happiness. They do not provide comfort. Therefore a law must be given to this family by means of which all the members of this family will enjoy equal well-being and happiness.[46]

The greatest means for [the] prevention [of poverty]is that whereby the laws of the community will be so framed and enacted that it will not be possible for a few to be millionaires and many destitute.[47]

Both the environmental crisis and the social crisis of inequality and injustice require a fundamental questioning what progress means. The Bahá'í International Community writes about “Redefining progress”:

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.

No country is an example of sustainable development. We thought development was industrialization, technological capacity, and macroeconomic growth, but these leave many dissatisfied and in difficulty, while injustices face numerous other populations around the world. No one pattern of life and vision of society can be taken as the model for all of humanity.[48]

The Bahá'í International Community calls for the “Rethinking of Economic Arrangements”:

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.[49]

Section 4: Spirituality as Opposed to Materialism

Spirituality is the antidote for materialism and consumerism. All religions teach that human beings are essentially spiritual beings. A spiritual outlook can help us shift the emphasis from consumption to well-being and a meaningful life. We cannot and do not want to go back to the kind of life people led 200 years ago. However, the science is clear: We must lower our greenhouse gas emissions very significantly, basically we need to reach net-0 emissions by mid-century. Net-0 means that, as it will not be possible to avoid carbon emissions 100%, the remaining emissions must be removed from the atmosphere through natural or technological processes. As carbon removal is limited for many reasons[50], the scope of emissions reduction poses the greatest challenge to society and to individuals. Major changes and sacrifice are unavoidable and call for a spiritual world view.

Many people are not connected to a higher purpose in life and therefore fill their inner emptiness with material things. This all-pervasive materialism results in excessive consumption. “Millions of people try to find meaning in their lives by shopping and owning. One scholar even called consumerism the first global religion.”[51]
However, several scientific studies indicate that, once basic needs are met, human beings don’t increase their life satisfaction or happiness by accumulating greater wealth. Religion confirms that point:

> *Man is, in reality, a spiritual being, and only when he lives in the spirit is he truly happy.*[52]
>
> ʻAbdu’l-Bahá

Materialism is the root cause of greed, over-consumption, injustice and the destruction of the environment.

> *Consider the peoples of the West. Witness how, in their pursuit of that which is vain and trivial, they have sacrificed, and are still sacrificing, countless lives for the sake of its establishment and promotion.*[53]
>
> *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?*[54]
>
> Bahá'u'lláh

Being slaves of our material desires and our self-interest prevents us from growing as human beings. We can rise beyond that to attain our true human station of nobility.

> *Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself.*
> *Rise then unto that for which thou wast created.*[55]
>
> Bahá'u'lláh

Abandoning a materialistic world view and its devastating manifestation in consumerism is at the heart of climate change mitigation.

> *A more accurate understanding of human nature would encompass qualities and attitudes such as trustworthiness, mutual support, commitment to truth, and a sense of responsibility, that are the building blocks of a stable social order. It would give rise to models which would avoid or ameliorate the ills of reductive*

materialism, ensuring that our pursuit of prosperity includes the many other facets of individual and collective well-being.[56]

Materialism is a root cause of climate change. That is why there is an additional resource in this unit on Materialism for those who would like to more deeply explore it.

Section 5: Moderation

Moderation is the practical implementation of spiritual development and of the abandonment of materialism.

All religions teach us to be satisfied with little and to live a simple life.

Buddhism teaches restraint and moderation in all things:

> *The one I call holy, letting go of attachment to humans, rises above attachment to gods, and is independent from all attachments.*
>
> *The one I call holy calls nothing one's own, whether it be in front, behind, or between, is poor and free from attachment.*[57]
>
> From “Sayings of the Buddha”

Islam condemns wasting natural resources:

> *Eat and drink, but waste not by excess: He loves not the excessive.*[58]
>
> The Qu'rán

> *And give thy kinsman his due and the poor and the son of the road; and waste not wastefully, for the wasteful were ever the devil's brothers; and the devil is ever ungrateful to his Lord.*[59]
>
> The Qu'rán

The Bahá'í Faith teaches:

> *Fear ye God, and take heed not to outstrip the bounds of moderation, and be numbered among the extravagant.*[60]
>
> Bahá'u'lláh

> *Content thyself with but little of this world's goods!*[61]
>
> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Being satisfied with little is not only a social and environmental imperative, but also a prerequisite for our spiritual growth and hence for the fulfillment of our potential as a human being. Baha'u'llah said:

> *O my brother, when a true seeker determineth to take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must, before all else, cleanse and purify his heart, which is the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God, from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge. …That seeker should ... be content with little, and be freed from all inordinate desire.*[62]

Religion warns us to avoid over-consumption and injustice:

> *Take from this world only to the measure of your needs, and forgo that which exceedeth them. Observe equity in all your judgments, and transgress not the bounds of justice, nor be of them that stray from its path.*[63]

Gandhi warns us in a similar way:

> *The earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed.*
>
> *God forbid that India should ever take to industrialism after the manner of the West. ... If [our nation (India)] took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts.*[64]

Unfortunately, we can see now how these words by Ghandhi are becoming true.

In many countries, people are living beyond the means of our Earth. If everyone lived like the average North American, for example, we would need 5 planets. Society and individuals made the assumption that more was better. We must learn to live within the limits of one planet. In a sustainable world, society's demand on nature is in balance with nature's capacity to meet that demand.

For example, wealth and greed are strong drivers of deforestation. 'Over-consumption' is exerting a big demand for harmful crops in rainforest areas like palm oil and soybean. In fact, our food consumption patterns can have a big influence on deforestation rates. If we could shift to a more vegetarian diet, the area needed for food production, including via livestock grazing, would be much reduced. We therefore need to consider the carbon footprint of everything we do and eat.

> Mahatma Gandhi made the point very clear with his famous statement:
>
> *Live simply so that others may simply live.*

Here it is appropriate to repeat the words of Bahá'u'lláh, Who, already in the 19th century, appealed to society to observe moderation in everything, and specifically moderation in civilization:

> *Whoso cleaveth to justice, can, under no circumstances, transgress the limits of moderation. 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.* …[65]

Scientists now also call for moderation. They say we need to reduce the amount of CO_2 we are releasing into the atmosphere. That means to stop all the waste that is going on, to use energy more efficiently, to conserve our resources, to significantly reduce our burning of fossil fuels and to quickly move away to cleaner energy sources, to eat lower on the food chain, to buy less stuff, and generally to adopt a simpler lifestyle.

This understanding of moderation and spirituality is important for the materially developed nations of the world to generate a collective will for equitable de-growth.

This doesn't mean that we should lead a life of asceticism. Even when observing moderation, it is possible to enjoy life on this beautiful Earth including its material joys. Knowing that we are not harming the Earth and other people will increase our happiness. In addition, increasing our capacity for contentment will bring us a step further in our personal spiritual development.

It takes great courage to live a simple lifestyle today when society, the media**,** and the all-pervasive commercials advocate a philosophy which says, "more and bigger is always better".

Section 6: Fostering Unity with a Non-Judgemental Attitude

It is necessary to speak up for the truth and the reality of the state of the planet and to take courageous actions as individuals and communities. At the same time, in our personal interactions, we can strive to avoid criticism or fundamentalist attitudes, and nurture sincere tolerance towards each other.

In some places, climate change has become a political issue and subject to manipulation and disinformation, leading to division and even conflict. In such situations, we should remember the guidance for Bahá'ís from the Universal House of Justice.

> *On the matter of climate change and other vital issues with profound implications for the common good, Bahá'ís have to avoid being drawn into the all too common tendencies evident in contemporary discourse to delineate sharp dichotomies, become ensnared in contests for power, and engage in intractable debate that obstructs the search for viable solutions to the world's problems. 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.*[66]
>
> Universal House of Justice

In many places in the world, it is impossible to live a life without generating greenhouse gas emissions. We all need to eat and have shelter. Our goal is to substantially reduce our personal emissions. How we do this is a personal decision. We all are in different life situations; our levels of environmental awareness vary greatly; and we have different priorities of what we think is important and of what we are able and willing to do. Encouraging each other and sharing ideas on how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions can help us all along the path of treading lighter on the Earth.

> *Show forbearance and benevolence and love to one another. Should any one among you be incapable of grasping a certain truth, or be striving to comprehend it, show forth, when conversing with him, a spirit of extreme kindliness and good-will. Help him to see and recognize the truth, without esteeming yourself to be, in the least, superior to him, or to be possessed of greater endowments.*[67]
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> *The heaven of true understanding shineth resplendent with the light of two luminaries: tolerance and righteousness.*[68]
>
> Bahá'u'lláh

In English, the word righteousness sometimes has the negative connotation of self-righteousness. Of course, that's not intended here. Righteousness means to have high ethical standards for our own personal conduct. To make progress as a community and keep unity at the same time, we must have high ethical standards for our own behavior and tolerance toward others.

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