

PRINCIPLE-BASED APPROACH TO BUSINESS, WORK, WEALTH & LEADERSHIP

A COMPILATION FROM
THE WORLD'S SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS

Compiled by:
Bamdad Jabbari
Nousha Etemad
Sai Thallam

Draft v1: December 2003
Draft v2: June 2005
Draft v3: January 2006
Draft v4: January 2007

ebbf

info@ebbf.org | www.ebbf.org

}

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION..... 3

2. VALUE BASED APPROACH..... 4

3. ETHICAL BUSINESS PRACTICES 5

3.1 FOUNDATIONS OF BUSINESS..... 5

3.2 CRITERION FOR PURSUING BUSINESS ACTIVITIES 5

3.3 GUIDING PRINCIPLES..... 5

 3.3.1 *The Golden Rule*..... 5

 3.3.2 *Honesty, truthfulness, trustworthiness* 6

 3.3.3 *Reliance on God*..... 8

 3.3.4 *Detachment* 9

 3.3.5 *Contentment* 10

4. TRUE WEALTH..... 12

4.1 THE ESSENCE OF WEALTH 12

4.2 POVERTY 13

4.3 SPIRITUAL WEALTH 14

4.4 ATTAINING SPIRITUAL WEALTH 15

5. MATERIAL WEALTH..... 19

5.1 REDEFINING MATERIAL SUCCESS 19

5.2 ATTAINING MATERIAL WEALTH..... 20

5.3 DISTRIBUTION OF MATERIAL WEALTH 22

 5.3.1 *Abolishment of Extremes of Wealth and Poverty* 22

 5.3.2 *Voluntary Giving*..... 23

 5.3.3 *Profit Sharing*..... 24

 5.3.4 *Graduated Income Tax*..... 25

 5.3.5 *Interest* 25

6. A NEW PARADIGM OF WORK..... 27

6.1 WORK AS AN ACT OF WORSHIP 27

6.2 WORK TO BENEFIT THE SELF AND OTHERS..... 28

6.3 WORK NOT TO BE A BURDEN TO OTHERS 29

7. VALUES-BASED LEADERSHIP 30

7.1 A RESPONSIBILITY; NOT A PATH TO PRIVILEGE..... 30

7.2 SPIRITUAL QUALITIES OF LEADERSHIP (BEYOND SERVANT LEADERSHIP) 31

7.3 JUSTICE 32

7.4 MODERATION..... 33

7.5 PLANNING PROJECTS..... 34

7.6 CONFLICT RESOLUTION..... 35

7.7 THE BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER: AN EXAMPLE OF LEADERSHIP 35

8. PARTNERSHIP OF WOMEN AND MEN..... 36

9. NON-ADVERSARIAL DECISION MAKING THROUGH CONSULTATION..... 38

10. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 40

1. INTRODUCTION

Principle-based decision making is generally defined as identification of principles and values first, and then making decisions based on those. Noble principles and values support decision-making by emphasizing the correct path and by de-emphasizing wrong or inefficient paths in the eyes of the decision maker. Professionals who have successfully built up a coherent set of principles are able to make correct decisions in a more timely and efficient manner.

Human happiness, security and well-being, social cohesion, and economic justice are not mere by-products of material success. Rather, they emerge from a complex and dynamic interplay between the satisfaction of material and social needs and the spiritual fulfillment of the individual.

By linking material progress with fundamental spiritual aspirations, by appealing to those universal values which enable the individual to transcend narrow self-interest, the peoples of the world can be empowered to translate high-minded ideals and principles into constructive, sustained actions for their own well-being and the betterment of their communities.

(Bahá'í International Community, 1994 Aug 22, Toward a Development Paradigm for 21st Century)

Why another compilation of quotations? Because, as business professionals, we rarely have the opportunity to reflect on spiritual and ethical principles that guide our daily actions and decisions. Whether we work in public or private-sector companies, international development organizations, non-profit or non-governmental organizations, or are entrepreneurs we face self-interest and absence of principle in many of our daily tasks. In this compilation we seek to fill these gaps with the insights and wisdom of the world's spiritual traditions whose Teachings have caused significant advancement in the course of culture and history.

Bahá'ís believe that religious revelation is continuous and progressive and that, from the very beginning of human history, God has periodically sent divine educators to the world to guide mankind. The appearance of these divine educators -- Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster, Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad and, in our own age, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh -- has signified the founding of a new religion, and yet none of these religions is really new; they are stages in the unfoldment of the same religious truth proceeding from the same God. They teach the same, unchanging spiritual principles...

(Bahá'í International Community, 1993 Feb 18, Eliminating Religious Intolerance)

Material advancement is, therefore, best understood not as an end in itself, but rather as a vehicle for moral, spiritual, and social progress. We hope you will find these thoughts stimulating, challenging, comforting and inspiring.

In selecting quotes for this compilation we have strived to bring together insights that would help us change our current thought-patterns, replacing the former way of thinking or with a new exploration of meanings.

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.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 92)

We invite our readers to contribute to the expansion of this compilation by submitting their favorite relevant quotes.

2. VALUE BASED APPROACH

If a man does not seek children, wealth or power either for himself or for someone else, if he does not seek his own advantage by unprincipled means, he is a virtuous man, a wise man and a righteous man.

(Buddhist, Dhammapada - Sayings of the Buddha 1 (tr. J. Richards))

Even if he does not quote appropriate texts much, if he follows the principles of the Teaching by getting rid of greed, hatred and delusion, deep of insight and with a mind free from attachment, not clinging to anything in this world or the next - that man is a partner in the Holy Life.

(Buddhist, Dhammapada - Sayings of the Buddha 1 (tr. J. Richards))

When a man has faith, is endowed with virtue, and possessed of fame and wealth, wherever he lives he will be honored.

(Buddhist, Dhammapada - Sayings of the Buddha 1 (tr. J. Richards))

And O my people! give just measure and weight, nor withhold from the people the things that are their due: commit not evil in the land with intent to do mischief.

(The Qur'an (Yusuf Ali tr), Surah 11)

16:26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

(King James Bible, Matthew)

Unveiled and unconcealed, this Wronged One hath, at all times, proclaimed before the face of all the peoples of the world that which will serve as the key for unlocking the doors of sciences, of arts, of knowledge, of well-being, of prosperity and wealth.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 96)

There are practically no technical teachings on economics in the Cause, such as banking, the price system, and others. The Cause is not an economic system, nor its Founders be considered as having been technical economists. The contribution of the Faith to this subject is essentially indirect, as it consists of the application of spiritual principles to our present-day economic system. Bahá'u'lláh has given us a few basic principles which should guide future Bahá'í economists in establishing such institutions which will adjust the economic relationships of the world...

(Shoghi Effendi, Directives of the Guardian, p. 20)

The permanence and stability achieved by any association, group or nation is a result of -- and dependent upon -- the soundness and worth of the principles upon which it bases the running of its affairs and the direction of its activities. The guiding principles of the Bahá'ís are: honesty, love, charity and trustworthiness; the setting of the common good above private interest; and the practice of godliness, virtue and moderation. Ultimately, then, their preservation and happiness are assured. Whatever misfortunes they may encounter, wrought by the wiles of the schemer and ill-wisher, shall all pass away like waves, and hardship shall be succeeded by joy.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 18 December 1925 to a National Spiritual Assembly - translated from the Persian, Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 350)

3. ETHICAL BUSINESS PRACTICES

3.1 FOUNDATIONS OF BUSINESS

Every business company should be established on divine principles. Its foundations should be trustworthiness, piety and truthfulness in order to protect the rights of the people.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá: from a tablet - translated from the Persian – Compilation on Trustworthiness, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 341)

3.2 CRITERION FOR PURSUING BUSINESS ACTIVITIES

Your criterion should be to pursue your commercial activities with such fairness and equity as to be a cause of guidance to others. The friends of God should, through the instrumentality of their business, lead the people to God's path, and make them so astonished as to exclaim: "How great is their truthfulness, how high their trustworthiness, and how true is their good will!"

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá: From a Tablet - translated from the Persian, Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 341)

If any of the friends should enter into the service of the government, they should make their occupation a means of drawing nearer to the divine Threshold: they should act with probity and uprightness, rigorously shun all forms of venality and corruption, and content themselves with the salaries they are receiving, taking pride, rather, in the degree of sagacity, competence and judgment that they can bring to their work. If a person content himself with a single loaf of bread, and perform his duties with as much justice and fair-mindedness as lieth within his power, he will be the prince of mortals, and the most praiseworthy of men. Noble and distinguished will he be, despite his empty purse! Pre-eminent will he rank among the free, although his garb be old and worn! For man, praise and glory reside in virtuous and noble qualities; honor and distinction in nearness to the divine Threshold. The world's wealth is, by contrast, the stuff of illusion. Those who lust after it are the followers of evil and, ere long, they shall be plunged into confusion and despair. Which is better -- that a man should be thus, or that he should comport himself with consecration and sanctity of purpose and stand out conspicuously for his integrity, uprightness and honesty? Nay, such qualities are better than the riches of Korah, and dearer than all the treasures of existence.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 343)

3.3 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

3.3.1 THE GOLDEN RULE

Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.

(Buddhism: Udana-Varga, 5:18, 6th Century BCE)

Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.

(Christianity: Matthew 7:12, 1st Century CE)

May I do to others as I would they should do unto me.

(Classical Paganism: Plato, 4th Century BCE)

Do not unto others what you would not have them do to you.

(Confucianism: Analects, 15:23, 6th Century BCE)

Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you.

(Hinduism: Mahabharata 5:1517, 3rd Century BCE)

Lay not on any soul a load which ye would not wish to be laid upon you and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself.

(Bahá'í: Bahá'u'lláh, 19th Century CE)

No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother what he desires for himself.

(Islam: Muhammad, Sunnah, 6th Century CE)

In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self, and should therefore refrain from inflicting upon others such injury as would appear undesirable to us if inflicted upon ourselves.

(Jainism: Lord Mahvir, 24th Tirthankara, 5th Century, BCE)

What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow man.

(Judaism: Talmud, Shabbat 31a)

Do not condemn your brother until you have walked a mile in his moccasins.

(Native American: Unknown)

Don't create enmity with anyone as God is within everyone.

(Sikhism: Guro Arjan Devji 259, Guru Granth Shaib)

Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain and regard your neighbor's loss as your own loss.

(Taoism: Unkown)

Do not do unto others all that which is not well for oneself.

(Zoroastrianism: Dadistan-I-Dinik, 94:5, 5th Century BCE)

3.3.2 HONESTY, TRUTHFULNESS, TRUSTWORTHINESS

Well may people hold dear the man who is endowed with morality and insight, who is well established in righteousness, a seer of the truth, and applying himself to his own business.

(Buddhist, Dhammapada - Sayings of the Buddha 1 (tr. J. Richards))

Therefore in this religion, this is what comes first for a wise bhikkhu - guarding of the senses, contentment, and discipline in accordance with the rules of the Order. He should cultivate friends of good character, of pure behaviour and resolute.

He should be friendly in his manner, and well-behaved. As a result he will experience great joy, and put an end to suffering.

(Buddhist, Dhammapada - Sayings of the Buddha 1 (tr. J. Richards))

These are the first things to cultivate: Sense-control, contentment, observance of the Rules, association with keen friends who lead a pure life.

(Buddhist, Dhammapada - Sayings of the Buddha 3 (tr. J. Richards))

Fearlessness, singleness of soul, the will
Always to strive for wisdom; opened hand
And governed appetites; and piety,
And love of lonely study; humbleness,
Uprightness, heed to injure nought which lives,
Truthfulness, slowness unto wrath, a mind
That lightly letteth go what others prize;
And equanimity, and charity
Which spieth no man's faults; and tenderness
Towards all that suffer; a contented heart,
Fluttered by no desires; a bearing mild,
Modest, and grave, with manhood nobly mixed,
With patience, fortitude, and purity;
An unvengeful spirit, never given
To rate itself too high;- such be the signs,
O Indian Prince! of him whose feet are set
On that fair path which leads to heavenly birth!

(Hindu, Bhagavad Gita (Edwin Arnold tr))

By truthfulness a witness is purified, through truthfulness his merit grows, truth must, therefore, be spoken by witnesses of all castes (varna).

(Hindu, Laws of Manu)

When they entered the presence of David, and he was terrified of them, they said: "Fear not: We are two disputants, one of whom has wronged the other: decide now between us with truth, and treat us not with injustice, but guide us to the even Path.

"This man is my brother; he has nine and ninety ewes, and I have (but) one: Yet he says, 'Commit her to my care,' and is (moreover) harsh to me in speech."

(David) said: "He has undoubtedly wronged thee in demanding thy (single) ewe to be added to his (flock of) ewes: truly many are the Partners (in business) who wrong each other: not so do those who believe and work deeds of righteousness, and how few are they?"

(The Qur'an (Yusuf Ali tr), Surah 38)

O ye who believe! if ye engage to one another in a debt for a stated time, then write it down, and let a scribe write it down between you faithfully; nor let a scribe refuse to write as God taught him, but let him write, and let him who owes dictate; but let him fear God his Lord, and not diminish therefrom aught; but if he who owes be a fool, or weak, or cannot dictate himself, then let his agent dictate faithfully, and let them call two witnesses out from amongst their men; or if there be not two men, then a man and two women, from those whom he chooses for witnesses, so that if one of the two should err, the second of the two may remind the other; and let not the witnesses refuse when they are summoned; and let them not tire of writing it, be it small or great, with its time of payment. That is more just in the sight of God, and more upright for testimony, and brings you nearer to not doubting. Unless, indeed, it be a ready-money transaction between you, which ye arrange between yourselves, then it is no crime against you that ye do not write it down; but bring witnesses to what ye sell one to another, and let not either scribe or witness come to harm, for if ye do it will be abomination in you; but fear God, for God teaches you, and God knows all things. But if ye be upon a journey, and ye cannot find a scribe, then let a pledge be taken. But if one of you trust another, then let him who is trusted surrender his trust, and let him fear God his Lord, and conceal not testimony, for he who conceals it, verily, sinful is his heart: God knows what ye do.

God's is what is in heaven and in the earth, and if ye show what is in your souls, or hide it, God will call you to account; and He forgives whom He will, and punishes whom He will, for God is mighty over all.

(The Qur'an (E.H. Palmer tr), Sura 2 - The Heifer)

'Make thy own self pure, O righteous man! any one in the world here below can win purity for his own self, namely, when he cleanses his own self with good thoughts, words, and deeds.

(The Zend-Avesta, Avesta - Vendidad)

Beautify your tongues, O people, with truthfulness, and adorn your souls with the ornament of honesty. Beware, O people, that ye deal not treacherously with any one. Be ye the trustees of God amongst His creatures, and the emblems of His generosity amidst His people. They that follow their lusts and corrupt inclinations, have erred and dissipated their efforts. They, indeed, are of the lost. Strive, O people, that your eyes may be directed towards the mercy of God, that your hearts may be attuned to His wondrous remembrance, that your souls may rest confidently upon His grace and bounty, that your feet may tread the path of His good-pleasure. Such are the counsels which I bequeath unto you. Would that ye might follow My counsels!

(Bahá'u'lláh: Gleanings, Page: 297)

O Haydar-'Ali! Upon thee be the praise of God and His glory. Say: Honesty, virtue, wisdom and a saintly character redound to the exaltation of man, while dishonesty, imposture, ignorance and hypocrisy lead to his abasement. By My life! Man's distinction lieth not in ornaments or wealth, but rather in virtuous behaviour and true understanding. Most of the people in Persia are steeped in deception and idle fancy. How great the difference between the condition of these people and the station of such valiant souls as have passed beyond the sea of names and pitched their tents upon the shores of the ocean of detachment.

(Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Pages: 57-58)

Trustworthiness, wisdom and honesty are, of a truth, God's beauteous adornments for His creatures. These fair garments are a befitting vesture for every temple. Happy are those that comprehend, and well is it with them that acquire such virtues.

Commerce is as a heaven, whose sun is trustworthiness and whose moon is truthfulness. The most precious of all things in the estimation of Him Who is the Sovereign Truth is trustworthiness: thus hath it been recorded in the sacred Scroll of God. Entreat ye the one true God to enable all mankind to attain to this most noble and lofty station.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 335*)

Furthermore, any agency whatever, though it be the instrument of mankind's greatest good, is capable of misuse. Its proper use or abuse depends on the varying degrees of enlightenment, capacity, faith, honesty, devotion and high-mindedness of the leaders of public opinion.

(Abdu'l-Bahá: *Secret of Divine Civilization*, Page: 16)

If a man were to perform every good work, yet fail in the least scruple to be entirely trustworthy and honest, his good works would become as dry tinder and his failure as a soul-consuming fire. If, on the other hand, he should fall short in all his affairs, yet act with trustworthiness and honesty, all his defects would ultimately be righted, all injuries remedied, and all infirmities healed. Our meaning is that, in the sight of God, trustworthiness is the bedrock of His Faith and the foundation of all virtues and perfections. A man deprived of this quality is destitute of everything. What shall faith and piety avail if trustworthiness be lacking? Of what consequence can they be? What benefit or advantage can they confer? Wherefore 'Abdu'l-Bahá counselleth the friends -- nay, rather, fervently imploreth them -- so vigilantly to guard the sanctity of the Cause of God and preserve their own dignity as individuals that all nations shall come to know and honor them for their trustworthiness and integrity. They can render no greater service than this today. To act otherwise would be to take an axe to the root of the Cause of God -- we take refuge with God from this heinous transgression and pray that He will protect His loved ones from committing so flagrant a wrong.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *From a Tablet - translated from the Persian, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 339*)

You have written on the question of how the friends should proceed in their business dealings with one another. This is a question of the greatest importance and a matter that deserveth the liveliest concern. In relations of this kind, the friends of God should act with the utmost trustworthiness and integrity. To be remiss in this area would be to turn one's face away from the counsels of the Blessed Beauty and the holy precepts of God. If a man in his own home doth not treat his relations and friends with entire trustworthiness and integrity, his dealings with the outside world -- no matter how much trustworthiness and honesty he may bring to them -- will prove barren and unproductive. First one should order one's own domestic affairs, then attend to one's business with the public. One should certainly not argue that the friends need not be treated with undue care, or that it is unnecessary for them to attach too great importance to the practice of trustworthiness in their dealings with one another, but that it is in their relations with strangers that correct behaviour is essential. Talk like this is sheer fantasy and will lead to detriment and loss. Blessed be the soul that shineth with the light of trustworthiness among the people and becometh a sign of perfection amidst all men.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *From a Tablet - translated from the Persian, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 340*)

Since the orderly running of your association dependeth upon the devotion, integrity, fair-mindedness and sanctity of purpose manifested by the friends of God, they should show forth in their management of its affairs such purity, nobility and far-sighted wisdom that they will become a model for other societies, and all people may be edified and enlightened by their example. In this way the Bahá'ís will become known to all as people who are dependable and honest, virtuous and enlightened, pure and refined; who are industrious and high-principled, liberal-minded and promoters of freedom; whose concern is to serve the common good, not to advance their own interests, and whose aim is to further the welfare and prosperity of the people, not to foster their own well-being.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *From a Tablet - translated from the Persian, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 340*)

Let the Light of Truth and Honesty shine from them, so that all who behold them may know that their word in business or pleasure will be a word to trust and depend upon.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, p. 124)

3.3.3 RELIANCE ON GOD

Men whom neither merchandize nor selling divert from the remembrance of God and steadfastness in prayer and giving alms, who fear a day when hearts and eyes shall be upset; that God may recompense them for the best that they have done, and give them increase of His grace; for God provides whom He pleases without count. But those who misbelieve, their works are like the mirage in a plain, the thirsty counts it water till when he comes to it he finds nothing, but he finds that God is with him; and He will pay him his account, for God is quick to take account.

(The Qur'an (E.H. Palmer tr), Sura 24 - Light)

Whatever hath befallen you, hath been for the sake of God. This is the truth, and in this there is no doubt. You should, therefore, leave all your affairs in His Hands, place your trust in Him, and rely upon Him. He will assuredly not forsake you. In this, likewise, there is no doubt. No father will surrender his sons to devouring beasts; no shepherd will leave his flock to ravening wolves. He will most certainly do his utmost to protect his own.

If, however, for a few days, in compliance with God's all-encompassing wisdom, outward affairs should run their course contrary to one's cherished desire, this is of no consequence and should not matter. Our intent is that all the friends should fix their gaze on the Supreme Horizon, and cling to that which hath been revealed in the Tablets. They should strictly avoid sedition, and refrain from treading the path of dissension and strife. They should champion their One True God, exalted be He, through the hosts of forbearance, of submission, of an upright character, of goodly deeds, and of the choicest and most refined words.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Compilations, Fire and Light, p. 10)

Delight not yourselves in the things of the world and its vain ornaments, neither set your hopes on them. Let your reliance be on the remembrance of God, the Most Exalted, the Most Great. He will, ere long, bring to naught all the things ye possess. Let Him be your fear, and forget not His covenant with you, and be not of them that are shut out as by a veil from Him.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 127)

Place not thy reliance on thy treasures. Put thy whole confidence in the grace of God, thy Lord. Let Him be thy trust in whatever thou doest, and be of them that have submitted themselves to His Will. Let Him be thy helper and enrich thyself with His treasures, for with Him are the treasures of the heavens and of the earth. He bestoweth them upon whom He will, and from whom He will He withholdeth them. There is none other God but Him, the All-Possessing, the All-Praised. All are but paupers at the door of His mercy; all are helpless before the revelation of His sovereignty, and beseech His favors.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 49)

The virtues and attributes pertaining unto God are all evident and manifest, and have been mentioned and described in all the heavenly Books. Among them are trustworthiness, truthfulness, purity of heart while communing with God, forbearance, resignation to whatever the Almighty hath decreed, contentment with the things His Will hath provided, patience, nay, thankfulness in the midst of tribulation, and complete reliance, in all circumstances, upon Him. These rank, according to the estimate of God, among the highest and most laudable of all acts. All other acts are, and will ever remain, secondary and subordinate unto them....

(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 290)

3.3.4 DETACHMENT

When thou hast enough, remember the time of hunger: and when thou art rich, think upon poverty and need. From the morning until the evening the time is changed, and all things are soon done before the Lord.

(Deuterocanonical Apocrypha, Sirach)

Happy is it to have a friend in need
Happy is contentment with whatever betides
Happy is merit at the end of life.
Happy is it to leave all-sorrow behind.

(Buddhist, Dhammapada - Sayings of the Buddha 3 (tr. J. Richards))

Purity, constancy, control of self,
Contempt of sense-delights, self-sacrifice,
Perception of the certitude of ill
In birth, death, age, disease, suffering, and sin;
Detachment, lightly holding unto home,
Children, and wife, and all that bindeth men;
An ever-tranquil heart in fortunes good
And fortunes evil, with a will set firm
To worship Me- Me only! ceasing not;

Loving all solitudes, and shunning noise
Of foolish crowds; endeavours resolute
To reach perception of the Utmost Soul,
And grace to understand what gain it were
So to attain,- this is true Wisdom, Prince!

(Hindu, Bhagavad Gita (Edwin Arnold tr))

When gold and jade fill the hall, their possessor cannot keep them safe. When wealth and honors lead to arrogance, this brings its evil on itself. When the work is done, and one's name is becoming distinguished, to withdraw into obscurity is the way of Heaven.

(Tao, Tao Te Ching (J. Legge tr))

Earthly possessions will certainly be lost, and what hath been accumulated will be dispersed; excessive riches will be cast adrift, and the flush of fortune will wither away and fade into nothingness; immense treasures will be squandered and the wealth gathered up by the wind will eventually be blown away by the wind.

(Compilation from the Bahá'í Writings, Fire and Light, p. 28)

55. O SON OF PASSION!

Cleanse thyself from the defilement of riches and in perfect peace advance into the realm of poverty; that from the well-spring of detachment thou mayest quaff the wine of immortal life.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Persian Hidden Words)

Detachment does not consist in setting fire to one's house, or becoming bankrupt or throwing one's fortune out of the window, or even giving away all of one's possessions. Detachment consists in refraining from letting our possessions possess us. A prosperous merchant who is not absorbed in his business knows severance. A banker whose occupation does not prevent him from serving humanity is severed.

A rich man and a poor man lived in the same town. One day the poor man said to the rich man, "I want to go to the Holy Land." The rich man replied, "Very good, I will go also," and they started from the town and began their pilgrimage. But night fell and the poor man said, "Let us return to our houses to pass the night." The rich man replied, "We have started for the Holy Land and must not now return." The poor man said, "The Holy Land is a long distance to travel on foot. I have a donkey, I will go and fetch it." "What?" replied the rich man, "are you not ashamed? I leave all my possessions to go on this pilgrimage and you wish to return to get your donkey! I have abandoned with joy my whole fortune. Your whole wealth consists of a donkey and you cannot leave it!" You see that fortune is not necessarily an impediment. The rich man who is thus detached is near to reality. There are many rich people who are severed and many poor who are not.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Divine Philosophy, p. 135)

Another friend asked, "In the Tablets it is stated that we must be severed and detached. In another place it is stated that we must learn a trade or profession. Do not these two statements contradict each other?" 'Abdu'l-Bahá replied, "In the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, it is incumbent upon every soul to acquire a trade and an occupation. For example, I know how to weave or make a mat, and you know some other trade. This, in itself is an act of worship, provided that it is conducted on the basis of utmost honesty and faithfulness.

And this is the cause of prosperity. Yet, in spite of being so occupied, if the heart is not chained and tied to this world, and is not troubled by current events, neither hindered by wealth from rendering service to mankind, nor grieved because of poverty, - then this is human perfection. Otherwise in a state of poverty, to manifest generosity and in a state of weakness to claim justice - this can easily be said, but it is not a proof of man's attainments and alertness."

(From an article written by Dr. Z. Baghdadi entitled "'Abdu'l-Bahá in America", published in "Star of the West", Vol. 19, No. 7, p. 219) (Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol. I, p. 4)

3.3.5 CONTENTMENT

Health is the supreme possession. Contentment is the supreme wealth. A trustworthy friend is the supreme relation.

(Buddhist, Dhammapada - Sayings of the Buddha 1 (tr. J. Richards))

Whether a man be rich or poor, if he have a good heart toward the Lord, he shall at all times rejoice with a cheerful countenance.

(Deuterocanonical Apocrypha, Sirach)

He who desires happiness must strive after a perfectly contented disposition and control himself; for happiness has contentment for its root, the root of unhappiness is the contrary (disposition).

(Hindu, Laws of Manu)

Contentment, forgiveness, self-control, abstention from unrighteously appropriating anything, (obedience to the rules of) purification, coercion of the organs, wisdom, knowledge (of the supreme Soul), truthfulness, and abstention from anger, (form) the tenfold law.

(Hindu, Laws of Manu)

51. O SON OF MY HANDMAID!

Be not troubled in poverty nor confident in riches, for poverty is followed by riches, and riches are followed by poverty. Yet to be poor in all save God is a wondrous gift, belittle not the value thereof, for in the end it will make thee rich in God, and thus thou shalt know the meaning of the utterance, "In truth ye are the poor," and the holy words, "God is the all-possessing," shall even as the true morn break forth gloriously resplendent upon the horizon of the lover's heart, and abide secure on the throne of wealth.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Persian Hidden Words)

Once again We exhort all believers to observe justice and fairness and to show forth love and contentment.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 134)

The source of all good is trust in God, submission unto His command, and contentment with His holy will and pleasure.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 153)

The source of all glory is acceptance of whatsoever the Lord hath bestowed, and contentment with that which God hath ordained.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 155)

50. O QUINTESENCE OF PASSION!

Put away all covetousness and seek contentment; for the covetous hath ever been deprived, and the contented hath ever been loved and praised.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Persian Hidden Words)

Know also that the soul is endowed with two wings: should it soar in the atmosphere of love and contentment, then it will be related to the All-Merciful. And should it fly in the atmosphere of self and desire, then it will pertain to the Evil One; may God shield and protect us and protect you therefrom, O ye who perceive! Should the soul become ignited with the fire of the love of God, it is called benevolent and pleasing unto God, but should it be consumed with the fire of passion, it is known as the concupiscent soul. Thus have We expounded this subject for thee that thou mayest obtain a clear understanding.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 154)

4. TRUE WEALTH

4.1 THE ESSENCE OF WEALTH

Hence, the purpose of the Holy Life does not consist in acquiring alms, honor, or fame, nor in gaining morality, concentration, or the eye of knowledge. That unshakable deliverance of the heart: that, verily, is the object of the Holy Life, that is its essence, that is its goal.

((The Eightfold Path), Buddha, the Word (The Eightfold Path))

Riches and strength lift up the heart: but the fear of the Lord is above them both: there is no want in the fear of the Lord, and it needeth not to seek help. The fear of the Lord is a fruitful garden, and covereth him above all glory.

(Deuterocanonical Apocrypha, Sirach)

Say: If it be that your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your mates, or your kindred; the wealth that ye have gained; the commerce in which ye fear a decline; or the dwellings in which ye delight, are dearer to you than Allah, or His Messenger, or the striving in his cause; then wait until Allah brings about His decision: and Allah guides not the rebellious.

(The Qur'an (Yusuf Ali tr), Surah 9)

Wealth and children are an adornment of the life of this world; but enduring good works are better with thy Lord, as a recompense, and better as a hope.

(The Qur'an (E.H. Palmer tr), Sura 18 - The Cave)

Those who expend their wealth by night and day, secretly and openly, they shall have their hire with their Lord. No fear shall come on them, nor shall they grieve.

(The Qur'an (E.H. Palmer tr), Sura 2 - The Heifer)

To men of evil creed belongs the place of corruption. They that set themselves to contemn the worthy, despising righteousness, forfeiting their own body. - Where is the Righteous Lord who shall rob them of life and freedom? Thine Mazda is the Dominion, whereby thou canst give to the right-living poor man the better portion.

(The Zend-Avesta, Avesta - Yasna)

A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

(Luke 12:15)

True knowledge, therefore, is the knowledge of God, and this is none other than the recognition of His Manifestation in each Dispensation. Nor is there any wealth save in poverty in all save God and sanctity from aught else but Him -- a state that can be realized only when demonstrated towards Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation.

(The Báb, Selections from the Writings of the Báb, p. 89)

The essence of wealth is love for Me; whoso loveth Me is the possessor of all things, and he that loveth Me not is indeed of the poor and needy. This is that which the Finger of Glory and Splendor hath revealed.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 156)

All praise be to God Who hath adorned the world with an ornament, and arrayed it with a vesture, of which it can be despoiled by no earthly power, however mighty its battalions, however vast its wealth, however profound its influence. Say: the essence of all power is God's, the highest and the last End of all creation. The source of all majesty is God's, the Object of the adoration of all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth. Such forces as have their origin in this world of dust are, by their very nature, unworthy of consideration.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 340)

All else but Thee are impotent before the revelations of Thy might, are as lost in the face of the evidences of Thy wealth, are as nothing when compared with the manifestations of Thy transcendent sovereignty, and are destitute of all strength when face to face with the signs and tokens of Thy power.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, p. 82)

Every conqueror is but a serf whom Thy hand hath subjected, and the richest of the rich is as destitute before the immensity of Thy wealth. The noblest of nobles is humbled when faced with the manifestations of Thy glory, and the mightiest of potentates is a mere abject one when confronted with the compelling evidences of Thine authority.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, p. 101)

How marvelous, then, are the manifold tokens of Thy might, and how great are the diverse evidences of Thy power! The learned have, without exception, admitted their ignorance when confronted with the radiance of the Luminary of Thy knowledge; and the mighty have all confessed their impotence in the face of the billowing Ocean of Thy power; and the rich have one and all acknowledged their poverty before the effusions of the Treasuries of Thy wealth; and the worldly wise have each recognized their nothingness beside the splendors of the Light of Thy beauty; and the exalted have all witnessed unto their abasement when face to face with the effulgence of the Day-Star of Thy glory; and they who are in authority have borne witness to their own evanescence and to the evanescence of others, and discovered the eternity of Thy majesty, and of Thy sovereignty, and of Thy sublimity, and of Thy power.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, p. 281)

No man of insight will let wealth distract his gaze from his ultimate objective, and no man of understanding will allow riches to withhold him from turning unto Him Who is the All-Possessing, the Most High.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 129)

We beseech God to aid all the leaves to attain the knowledge of the Tree and deprive them not of the ocean of His generosity. In this day no regard is paid to loftiness or lowliness, to poverty or wealth, to nobility and lineage, to weakness or might. Whosoever recognizeth the incomparable Beloved is the possessor of true wealth and occupieth a divine station. Today, in the court of the True One, the queen of the world and her like are not worth a mustard seed, because although she may speak in the name of God, invoke the Lord of creation every day in the temple of her body, and spend large sums of earthly wealth for the development of her nation, she is deprived of recognition of the Sun of His Manifestation and is barred from the True One in Whose remembrance she is engaged....

(Bahá'u'lláh, Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 359)

4.2 POVERTY

And those who were settled in the abode and the faith before them, love those who fled to them; and they do not find in their breasts a need of what has been given to them; preferring them to themselves, even though there be poverty amongst them; and whoso is preserved from his own covetousness, these are the prosperous!

(The Qur'an (E.H. Palmer tr), Sura 59 - The Emigration)

In like manner, it is related that on a certain day, one of the companions of Sadiq complained of his poverty before him. Whereupon, Sadiq, that immortal beauty, made reply: "Verily thou art rich, and hast drunk the draught of wealth." That poverty-stricken soul was perplexed at the words uttered by that luminous countenance, and said: "Where are my riches, I who stand in need of a single coin?" Sadiq thereupon observed: "Dost thou not possess our love?" He replied: "Yea, I possess it, O thou scion of the Prophet of God!" And Sadiq asked him saying: "Exchangest thou this love for one thousand dinars?" He answered: "Nay, never will I exchange it, though the world and all that is therein be given me!" Then Sadiq remarked: "How can he who possesses such a treasure be called poor?"

This poverty and these riches, this abasement and glory, this dominion, power, and the like, upon which the eyes and hearts of these vain and foolish souls are set, -- all these things fade into utter nothingness in that Court! Even as He hath said: "O men! Ye are but paupers in need of God; but God is the Rich, the Self-Sufficing." By 'riches' therefore is meant independence of all else but God, and by 'poverty' the lack of things that are of God.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 131)

You must be thankful to God that you are poor, for Jesus Christ has said, "Blessed are the poor." He never said, "Blessed are the rich." He said, too, that the Kingdom is for the poor and that it is easier for a camel to enter a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter God's Kingdom. Therefore, you must be thankful to God that although in this world you are indigent, yet the treasures of God are within your reach; and although in the material realm you are poor, yet in the Kingdom of God you are precious. Jesus Himself was poor. He did not belong to the rich. He passed His time in the desert, traveling among the poor, and lived upon the herbs of the field. He had no place to lay His head, no home. He was exposed in the open to heat, cold and frost -- to inclement weather of all kinds -- yet He chose this rather than riches. If riches were considered a glory, the Prophet Moses would have chosen them; Jesus would have been a rich

man. When Jesus Christ appeared, it was the poor who first accepted Him, not the rich. Therefore, you are the disciples of Jesus Christ; you are His comrades, for He outwardly was poor, not rich. Even this earth's happiness does not depend upon wealth. You will find many of the wealthy exposed to dangers and troubled by difficulties, and in their last moments upon the bed of death there remains the regret that they must be separated from that to which their hearts are so attached. They come into this world naked, and they must go from it naked. All they possess they must leave behind and pass away solitary, alone. Often at the time of death their souls are filled with remorse; and worst of all, their hope in the mercy of God is less than ours. Praise be to God! Our hope is in the mercy of God, and there is no doubt that the divine compassion is bestowed upon the poor. Jesus Christ said so; Bahá'u'lláh said so. While Bahá'u'lláh was in Baghdad, still in possession of great wealth, He left all He had and went alone from the city, living two years among the poor. They were His comrades. He ate with them, slept with them and gloried in being one of them. He chose for one of His names the title of The Poor One and often in His Writings refers to Himself as Darvish, which in Persian means poor; and of this title He was very proud. He admonished all that we must be the servants of the poor, helpers of the poor, remember the sorrows of the poor, associate with them; for thereby we may inherit the Kingdom of heaven. God has not said that there are mansions prepared for us if we pass our time associating with the rich, but He has said there are many mansions prepared for the servants of the poor, for the poor are very dear to God. The mercies and bounties of God are with them. The rich are mostly negligent, inattentive, steeped in worldliness, depending upon their means, whereas the poor are dependent upon God, and their reliance is upon Him, not upon themselves. Therefore, the poor are nearer the threshold of God and His throne.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 32)

Do not grieve, dear brother, for being poor, for you are rich instead in faith and in spirit. This is a divine wealth for which the richest of the world will crave for in vain. True we must work hard, earn money and keep our family in happiness and prosperity, but we must always realize that our lives must be devoted to things higher and more sublime. We must remember what great souls, whose lives still inspire hundreds and thousands, were of the poorest in the world.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, May 18, 1927- Compilations, Lights of Guidance, p. 125)

4.3 SPIRITUAL WEALTH

Riches destroy a fool, but not those who are seeking the other shore. The fool destroys himself by his craving for riches, as he destroys others too.

(Buddhist, Dhammapada - Sayings of the Buddha 1 (tr. J. Richards))

(Some declare that) the chief good consists in (the acquisition of) spiritual merit and wealth, (others place it) in (the gratification of) desire and (the acquisition of) wealth, (others) in (the acquisition of) spiritual merit alone, and (others say that the acquisition of) wealth alone is the chief good here (below); but the (correct) decision is that it consists of the aggregate of (those) three.

(Hindu, Laws of Manu)

But families that are rich in the knowledge of the Veda, though possessing little wealth, are numbered among the great, and acquire great fame.

(Hindu, Laws of Manu)

Neither the praise of the peoples of the world, nor the things that the kindreds of the earth possess are worthy of mention before the remembrance of His Name.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 74)

A dewdrop out of the ocean of Thy mercy is able to adorn all things with the ornament of sanctity, and a sprinkling of the waters of Thy bounty can cause the entire creation to attain unto true wealth.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, p. 245)

Whatsoever occurreth in the world of being is light for His loved ones and fire for the people of sedition and strife. Even if all the losses of the world were to be sustained by one of the friends of God, he would still profit thereby, whereas true loss would be borne by such as are wayward, ignorant and contemptuous. Although the author of the following saying had intended it otherwise, yet We find it pertinent to the operation of God's immutable Will:

"Even or odd, thou shalt win the wager." The friends of God shall win and profit under all conditions, and shall attain true wealth. In fire they remain cold, and from water they emerge dry. Their affairs are at variance with the affairs of men. Gain is their lot, whatever the deal. To this testifyeth every wise one with a discerning eye, and every fair-minded one with a hearing ear.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol. I, p. 153)

By My life! Neither the pomp of the mighty, nor the wealth of the rich, nor even the ascendancy of the ungodly will endure. All will perish, at a word from Him. He, verily, is the All-Powerful, the All-Compelling, the Almighty. What advantage is there in the earthly things which men possess? That which shall profit them, they have utterly neglected. Erelong, they will awake from their slumber, and find themselves unable to obtain that which hath escaped them in the days of their Lord, the Almighty, the All-Praised. Did they but know it, they would renounce their all, that their names may be mentioned before His throne. They, verily, are accounted among the dead.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 138)

It may be that a man who has every material benefit, and who lives surrounded by all the greatest comfort modern civilization can give him, is denied the all important gift of the Holy Spirit.

It is indeed a good and praiseworthy thing to progress materially, but in so doing, let us not neglect the more important spiritual progress, and close our eyes to the Divine light shining in our midst.

Only by improving spiritually as well as materially can we make any real progress, and become perfect beings. It was in order to bring this spiritual life and light into the world that all the great Teachers have appeared. They came so that the Sun of Truth might be manifested, and shine in the hearts of men, and that through its wondrous power men might attain unto Everlasting Light.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 62)

Yea, some of the intellectually cultured people in those countries exert themselves to reach the loftiest summits of prosperity in worldly affairs and most of them are desiring wealth and are making an effort to attain it somehow. But they are unmindful of the treasury of the Kingdom, the spiritual affluence and the wealth of mind; therefore, thou findest them subject to the rage of lusts and under the influence of egotistic and selfish desires, sinking into intemperance and engaged in drinking the cup of lust. Were they to become mindful of their heedlessness and awakened from the sleep of ignorance, they would become intoxicated by the cup of the love of God and exhilarated by the good cheer of the wine of the knowledge of God.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v3, p. 648)

Material civilization alone is not sufficient and will not prove productive. The physical happiness of material conditions was allotted to the animal. Consider how the animal has attained the fullest degree of physical felicity. A bird perches upon the loftiest branch and builds there its nest with consummate beauty and skill. All the grains and seeds of the meadows are its wealth and food; all the fresh water of mountain springs and rivers of the plain are for its enjoyment. Truly, this is the acme of material happiness, to which even a human creature cannot attain. This is the honor of the animal kingdom. But the honor of the human kingdom is the attainment of spiritual happiness in the human world, the acquisition of the knowledge and love of God. The honor allotted to man is the acquisition of the supreme virtues of the human world. This is his real happiness and felicity. But if material happiness and spiritual felicity be conjoined, it will be "delight upon delight," as the Arabs say.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 165)

Development should not become confused with the creation of an unsustainable consumer society. True prosperity encompasses spiritual as well as material well-being. Food, drink, shelter and a degree of material comfort are essential, but human beings cannot and never will find fulfillment in these necessities. Nor is contentment to be found in the somewhat more intangible material attainments such as social recognition or political power. Ultimately, not even intellectual achievement satisfies our deepest needs.

It is in the hunger for something more, something beyond ourselves, that the reality of the human spirit can be properly understood. Although the spiritual side of our nature is obscured by the day-to-day struggle for material attainment, our need for the transcendent cannot long be disregarded. Thus a sustainable development paradigm must address both the spiritual aspirations of human beings and their material needs and desires.

(Bahá'í International Community, 1995 Oct, Turning Point For All Nations)

4.4 ATTAINING SPIRITUAL WEALTH

12:10 Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another;

12:11 Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;

12:12 Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;

12:13 Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.

12:14 Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

12:15 Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

12:16 Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

12:17 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

12:18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

(King James Bible, Romans)

In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider.

(Ecclesiastes ch. VII, v 14)

Those who rehearse the Book of Allah, establish regular Prayer and spend (in Charity) out of what We have provided for them, secretly and openly, hope for a Commerce that will never fail:

For He will pay them their meed, nay, He will give them (even) more out of His Bounty; for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Ready to appreciate (service).

(The Qur'an (Yusuf Ali tr), Surah 35)

Righteousness is not that ye turn your faces towards the east or the west, but righteousness is, one who believes in God, and the last day, and the angels, and the Book, and the prophets, and who gives wealth for His love to kindred, and orphans, and the poor, and the son of the road, beggars, and those in captivity; and who is steadfast in prayer, and gives alms; and those who are sure of their covenant when they make a covenant; and the patient in poverty, and distress, and in time of violence; these are they who are true, and these are those who fear.

(The Qur'an (E.H. Palmer tr), Sura 2 - The Heifer)

11. O SON OF DUST!

Blind thine eyes, that thou mayest behold My beauty; stop thine ears, that thou mayest hearken unto the sweet melody of My voice; empty thyself of all learning, that thou mayest partake of My knowledge; and sanctify thyself from riches, that thou mayest obtain a lasting share from the ocean of My eternal wealth. Blind thine eyes, that is, to all save My beauty; stop thine ears to all save My word; empty thyself of all learning save the knowledge of Me; that with a clear vision, a pure heart and an attentive ear thou mayest enter the court of My holiness.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Persian Hidden Words)

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. It behoveth everyone who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 19)

Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer to the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. Be an ornament to the countenance of truth, a crown to the brow of fidelity, a pillar of the temple of righteousness, a breath of life to the body of mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary above the horizon of virtue, a dew to the soil of the human heart, an ark on the ocean of knowledge, a sun in the heaven of bounty, a gem on the diadem of wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy generation, a fruit upon the tree of humility. We pray God to protect thee from the heat of jealousy and the cold of hatred. He verily is nigh, ready to answer.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 93)

O Zayn! Upon thee be My glory and My loving-kindness. Nothing that existeth in the world of being hath ever been or ever will be worthy of mention. However, if a person be graciously favoured to offer a penny-worth -- nay even less -- in the path of God, this would in His sight be preferable and superior to all the treasures of the earth. It is for this

reason that the one true God -- exalted be His glory -- hath in all His heavenly Scriptures praised those who observe His precepts and bestow their wealth for His sake. Beseech ye God that He may enable everyone to discharge the obligation of Huquq, inasmuch as the progress and promotion of the Cause of God depend on material means. If His faithful servants could realize how meritorious are benevolent deeds in these days, they would all arise to do that which is meet and seemly. In His hand is the source of authority and He ordaineth as He willeth. He is the Supreme Ruler, the Bountiful, the Equitable, the Revealer, the All-Wise.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Compilations, Huququ'lláh)

Great God! In this glorious Dispensation the treasures laid up by kings and queens are not worthy of mention, nor will they be acceptable in the presence of God. However, a grain of mustard offered by His loved ones will be extolled in the exalted court of His holiness and invested with the ornament of His acceptance. Immeasurably exalted is His bounty, immeasurably glorified is His majesty. And yet, when an offering was adorned with the glory of His acceptance and reported by Jinab-i-Amin, twice that amount was ordered to be paid out to the poor and the needy. Unto this beareth witness every fair-minded man of insight, and those that are truthful and trustworthy.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Compilations, Huququ'lláh)

Thus Jesus, Son of Mary, whilst seated one day and speaking in the strain of the Holy Spirit, uttered words such as these: "O people! My food is the grass of the field, wherewith I satisfy my hunger. My bed is the dust, my lamp in the night the light of the moon, and my steed my own feet. Behold, who on earth is richer than I?" By the righteousness of God! Thousands of treasures circle round this poverty, and a myriad kingdoms of glory yearn for such abasement! Shouldst thou attain to a drop of the ocean of the inner meaning of these words, thou wouldst surely forsake the world and all that is therein, and, as the Phoenix wouldst consume thyself in the flames of the undying Fire.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 130)

O My servants! Were ye to discover the hidden, the shoreless oceans of My incorruptible wealth, ye would, of a certainty, esteem as nothing the world, nay, the entire creation. Let the flame of search burn with such fierceness within your hearts as to enable you to attain your supreme and most exalted goal -- the station at which ye can draw nigh unto, and be united with, your Best-Beloved....

(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 323)

... the happiness and greatness, the rank and station, the pleasure and peace, of an individual have never consisted in his personal wealth, but rather in his excellent character, his high resolve, the breadth of his learning, and his ability to solve difficult problems. How well has it been said: "On my back is a garment which, were it sold for a penny, that penny would be worth far more; yet within the garment is a soul which, if you weighed it against all the souls in the world, would prove greater and nobler."

(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 23)

You must manifest complete love and affection toward all mankind. Do not exalt yourselves above others, but consider all as your equals, recognizing them as the servants of one God. Know that God is compassionate toward all; therefore, love all from the depths of your hearts, prefer all religionists before yourselves, be filled with love for every race, and be kind toward the people of all nationalities. Never speak disparagingly of others, but praise without distinction. Pollute not your tongues by speaking evil of another. Recognize your enemies as friends, and consider those who wish you evil as the wishers of good. You must not see evil as evil and then compromise with your opinion, for to treat in a smooth, kindly way one whom you consider evil or an enemy is hypocrisy, and this is not worthy or allowable. You must consider your enemies as your friends, look upon your evil-wishers as your well-wishers and treat them accordingly. Act in such a way that your heart may be free from hatred. Let not your heart be offended with anyone. If some one commits an error and wrong toward you, you must instantly forgive him. Do not complain of others. Refrain from reprimanding them, and if you wish to give admonition or advice, let it be offered in such a way that it will not burden the bearer. Turn all your thoughts toward bringing joy to hearts. Beware! Beware! lest ye offend any heart. Assist the world of humanity as much as possible. Be the source of consolation to every sad one, assist every weak one, be helpful to every indigent one, care for every sick one, be the cause of glorification to every lowly one, and shelter those who are overshadowed by fear.

In brief, let each one of you be as a lamp shining forth with the light of the virtues of the world of humanity. Be trustworthy, sincere, affectionate and replete with chastity. Be illumined, be spiritual, be divine, be glorious, be quickened of God, be a Bahá'í.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 453)

Therefore, consider how base a nature it reveals in man that, notwithstanding the favors showered upon him by God, he should lower himself into the animal sphere, be wholly occupied with material needs, attached to this mortal realm, imagining that the greatest happiness is to attain wealth in this world. How purposeless! How debased is such a nature! God has created man in order that he may be a dove of the Kingdom, a heavenly candle, a recipient of eternal life. God has created man in order that he may be resuscitated through the breaths of the Holy Spirit and become the light of the world. How debased the soul which can find enjoyment in this darkness, occupied with itself, the captive of self and passion, wallowing in the mire of the material world! How degraded is such a nature! What an ignorance this is! What a blindness! How glorious the station of man who has partaken of the heavenly food and built the temple of his everlasting residence in the world of heaven!

(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 185)

Briefly; the Blessed Perfection bore all these ordeals and calamities in order that our hearts might become enkindled and radiant, our spirits be glorified, our faults become virtues, our ignorance transformed into knowledge; in order that we might attain the real fruits of humanity and acquire heavenly graces; although pilgrims upon earth we should travel the road of the heavenly kingdom; although needy and poor we might receive the treasures of life eternal. For this has He borne these difficulties and sorrows.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith - Abdu'l-Bahá Section, p. 224)

5. MATERIAL WEALTH

5.1 REDEFINING MATERIAL SUCCESS

56. O SON OF MAN!

Thou dost wish for gold and I desire thy freedom from it. Thou thinkest thyself rich in its possession, and I recognize thy wealth in thy sanctity therefrom. By My life! This is My knowledge, and that is thy fancy; how can My way accord with thine?

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Arabic Hidden Words)

53. O YE THAT PRIDE YOURSELVES ON MORTAL RICHES!

Know ye in truth that wealth is a mighty barrier between the seeker and his desire, the lover and his beloved. The rich, but for a few, shall in no wise attain the court of His presence nor enter the city of content and resignation. Well is it then with him, who, being rich, is not hindered by his riches from the eternal kingdom, nor deprived by them of imperishable dominion. By the Most Great Name! The splendor of such a wealthy man shall illuminate the dwellers of heaven even as the sun enlightens the people of the earth!

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Persian Hidden Words)

This is a brilliant century. Eyes are now open to the beauty of the oneness of humanity, of love and of brotherhood. The darkness of suppression will disappear and the light of unity will shine. We cannot bring love and unity to pass merely by talking of it. Knowledge is not enough. Wealth, science, education are good, we know: but we must also work and study to bring to maturity the fruit of knowledge.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p. 54)

Life in this mortal world will quickly come to an end, and this earthly glory, wealth, comfort and happiness will soon vanish and be no more. Summon ye the people to God and call the souls to the manners and conduct of the Supreme Concourse. To the orphans be ye kind fathers, and to the unfortunate a refuge and shelter. To the poor be a treasure of wealth, and to the sick a remedy and healing. Be a helper of every oppressed one, the protector of every destitute one, be ye ever mindful to serve any soul of mankind. Attach no importance to self-seeking, rejection, arrogance, oppression and enmity. Heed them not. Deal in the contrary way. Be kind in truth, not only in appearance and outwardly. Every soul of the friends of God must concentrate his mind on this, that he may manifest the mercy of God and the bounty of the Forgiving One. He must do good to every soul whom he encounters, and render benefit to him, becoming the cause of improving the morals and correcting the thoughts so that the light of guidance may shine forth and the bounty of His Holiness the Merciful One may encompass. Love is light in whatsoever house it may shine and enmity is darkness in whatsoever abode it dwell.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith - Abdu'l-Bahá Section, p. 216)

Every imperfect soul is self-centred and thinketh only of his own good. But as his thoughts expand a little he will begin to think of the welfare and comfort of his family. If his ideas still more widen, his concern will be the felicity of his fellow citizens; and if still they widen, he will be thinking of the glory of his land and of his race. But when ideas and views reach the utmost degree of expansion and attain the stage of perfection, then will he be interested in the exaltation of humankind. He will then be the well-wisher of all men and the seeker of the weal and prosperity of all lands. This is indicative of perfection.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 69)

O ye friends, exert ye an effort! Every expenditure is in need of an income. This day, in the world of humanity, men are all the time expending, for war is nothing but the consumption of men and of wealth. At least engage ye in a deed of profit to the world of humanity that ye may partially compensate for that loss. Perchance, through the divine confirmations, ye may be assisted in promulgating amity and concord among men, in substituting love for enmity, in causing universal peace to result from universal war and in converting loss and rancour into profit and love. This wish will be realized through the power of the Kingdom.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 281)

I desire distinction for you. The Bahá'ís must be distinguished from others of humanity. But this distinction must not depend upon wealth -- that they should become more affluent than other people. I do not desire for you financial distinction. It is not an ordinary distinction I desire; not scientific, commercial, industrial distinction. For you I desire spiritual distinction -- that is, you must become eminent and distinguished in morals. In the love of God you must

become distinguished from all else. You must become distinguished for loving humanity, for unity and accord, for love and justice. In brief, you must become distinguished in all the virtues of the human world -- for faithfulness and sincerity, for justice and fidelity, for firmness and steadfastness, for philanthropic deeds and service to the human world, for love toward every human being, for unity and accord with all people, for removing prejudices and promoting international peace. Finally, you must become distinguished for heavenly illumination and for acquiring the bestowals of God. I desire this distinction for you. This must be the point of distinction among you.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 190)

5.2 ATTAINING MATERIAL WEALTH

Let a person avoid wrong actions, as a merchant, who has few companions and carries much wealth, avoids a dangerous road; as a person who loves life avoids poison.

(Buddhist, Dhammapada - Sayings of the Buddha 2 (tr. J. Richards))

5:18 Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion.

5:19 Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God.

(King James Bible, Ecclesiastes)

Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase.

(King James Bible, Proverbs)

Prosperity and adversity, life and death, poverty and riches, come of the Lord.

(Deuterocanonical Apocrypha, Sirach)

Verily, those who believe and act aright,-verily, we will not waste the hire of him who does good works.

(The Qur'an (E.H. Palmer tr), Sura 18 - The Cave)

But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God, for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore unto thy fathers, as it is this day.

(Torah (Law), Devarim (Deuteronomy))

GLORIFIED art Thou, O Lord my God! Thou art in truth the King of kings. Thou dost confer sovereignty upon whomsoever Thou willest and dost seize it from whomsoever Thou willest. Thou dost exalt whomsoever Thou willest and dost abase whomsoever Thou willest. Thou dost render victorious whomsoever Thou willest and dost bring humiliation upon whomsoever Thou willest. Thou dost bestow wealth upon whomsoever Thou willest and dost reduce to poverty whomsoever Thou willest. Thou dost cause whomsoever Thou willest to prevail over whomsoever Thou willest. Within Thy grasp Thou dost hold the empire of all created things and through the potency of Thy sovereign behest Thou dost call into being whomsoever Thou willest. Verily Thou art the Omniscient, the Omnipotent, the Lord of power.

(The Báb, Selections from the Writings of the Báb, p. 213)

The first Taraz and the first effulgence which hath dawned from the horizon of the Mother Book is that man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty. Having attained the stage of fulfilment and reached his maturity, man standeth in need of wealth, and such wealth as he acquireth through crafts or professions is commendable and praiseworthy in the estimation of men of wisdom, and especially in the eyes of servants who dedicate themselves to the education of the world and to the edification of its peoples. They are, in truth, cup-bearers of the life-giving water of knowledge and guides unto the ideal way. They direct the peoples of the world to the straight path and acquaint them with that which is conducive to human upliftment and exaltation. The straight path is the one which guideth man to the dayspring of perception and to the dawning-place of true understanding and leadeth him to that which will redound to glory, honor and greatness.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 34)

The fourth Taraz concerneth trustworthiness. Verily it is the door of security for all that dwell on earth and a token of glory on the part of the All-Merciful. He who partaketh thereof hath indeed partaken of the treasures of wealth and prosperity. 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)

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. Whatever hath been said hath come from God. Unto this, He, verily, hath borne, and beareth now, witness, and He, in truth, is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 44)

Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual's own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes. Above all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement, for such a benefactor would supply the needs and insure the comfort and well-being of a great multitude. Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy. If, however, a few have inordinate riches while the rest are impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability to its possessor. If, on the other hand, it is expended for the promotion of knowledge, the founding of elementary and other schools, the encouragement of art and industry, the training of orphans and the poor -- in brief, if it is dedicated to the welfare of society -- its possessor will stand out before God and man as the most excellent of all who live on earth and will be accounted as one of the people of paradise.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 24)

The third requirement of perfection is to arise with complete sincerity and purity of purpose to educate the masses: to exert the utmost effort to instruct them in the various branches of learning and useful sciences, to encourage the development of modern progress, to widen the scope of commerce, industry and the arts, to further such measures as will increase the people's wealth. For the mass of the population is uninformed as to these vital agencies which would constitute an immediate remedy for society's chronic ills.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 39)

It is clear from what has already been said that man's glory and greatness do not consist in his being avid for blood and sharp of claw, in tearing down cities and spreading havoc, in butchering armed forces and civilians. What would mean a bright future for him would be his reputation for justice, his kindness to the entire population whether high or low, his building up countries and cities, villages and districts, his making life easy, peaceful and happy for his fellow beings, his laying down fundamental principles for progress, his raising the standards and increasing the wealth of the entire population.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 67)

Spiritual conditions are not dependent upon the possession of worldly treasures or the absence of them. When one is physically destitute, spiritual thoughts are more likely. Poverty is a stimulus toward God. Each one of you must have great consideration for the poor and render them assistance. Organize in an effort to help them and prevent increase of poverty. The greatest means for prevention 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. One of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings is the adjustment of means of livelihood in human society. Under this adjustment there can be no extremes in human conditions as regards wealth and sustenance. For the community needs financier, farmer, merchant and laborer just as an army must be composed of commander, officers and privates. All cannot be commanders; all cannot be officers or privates. Each in his station in the social fabric must be competent -- each in his function according to ability but with justness of opportunity for all.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 216)

Again, there are sagacious leaders among the people and influential personalities throughout the country, who constitute the pillars of state. Their rank and station and success depend on their being the well-wishers of the people and in their seeking out such means as will improve the nation and will increase the wealth and comfort of the citizens.

5.3 DISTRIBUTION OF MATERIAL WEALTH

5.3.1 ABOLISHMENT OF EXTREMES OF WEALTH AND POVERTY

Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.

(*King James Bible, 1 Corinthians*)

Then rules and laws should be established to regulate the excessive fortunes of certain private individuals, and limit the misery of millions of the poor masses; thus a certain moderation would be obtained. However, absolute equality is just as impossible, for absolute equality in fortunes, honors, commerce, agriculture, industry, would end in a want of comfort, in discouragement, in disorganization of the means of existence, and in universal disappointment: the order of the community would be quite destroyed. Thus, there is a great wisdom in the fact that equality is not imposed by law: it is, therefore, preferable for moderation to do its work. The main point is, by means of laws and regulations to hinder the constitution of the excessive fortunes of certain individuals, and to protect the essential needs of the masses.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *Baha'i World Faith - Abdu'l-Bahá Section*, p. 281)

Social inequality is the inevitable outcome of the natural inequality of man. Human beings are different in ability and should, therefore, be different in their social and economic standing. Extremes of wealth and poverty should, however, be abolished...

The Master has definitely stated that wages should be unequal, simply because that men are unequal in their ability and hence should receive wages that would correspond to their varying capacities and resources.

(*Shoghi Effendi, Directives from the Guardian*, p. 20)

... Of course conditions in the East differ where the Countries are rarely industrial and mostly agricultural we should have to apply different laws from the West and that is why the principles of the Movement strike at the root which is common to them both. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has developed in various of His talks, which the Bahá'í economic system would be based. A system that prevents among others the gradual control of wealth in the hands of a few and the resulting state of both extremes, wealth and poverty.

(*From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, October 28, 1927: Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings on the Subject of Agriculture and Related Subjects, a compilation of the Universal House of Justice. - Compilations, Lights of Guidance*, p. 548)

The inordinate disparity between rich and poor, a source of acute suffering, keeps the world in a state of instability, virtually on the brink of war. Few societies have dealt effectively with this situation. The solution calls for the combined application of spiritual, moral and practical approaches. A fresh look at the problem is required, entailing consultation with experts from a wide spectrum of disciplines, devoid of economic and ideological polemics, and involving the people directly affected in the decisions that must urgently be made. It is an issue that is bound up not only with the necessity for eliminating extremes of wealth and poverty but also with those spiritual verities the understanding of which can produce a new universal attitude. Fostering such an attitude is itself a major part of the solution."

(*The Universal House of Justice: The Promise of World Peace*, pp. 10-11, Haifa, 1985 - *Compilations, Lights of Guidance*, p. 551)

Different contributions to the common economic welfare deserve and should receive different measures of reward and recognition, but the extremes of wealth and poverty which afflict most nations on earth, regardless of the socio-economic philosophies they profess, must be abolished.

(*Bahá'í International Community, 1992 May 29, Statement on Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 17)

Since the body of humankind is one and indivisible, each member of the race is born into the world as a trust of the whole. This trusteeship constitutes the moral foundation of most of the other rights -- principally economic and social -- which the instruments of the United Nations are attempting similarly to define. The security of the family and the home, the ownership of property, and the right to privacy are all implied in such a trusteeship. The obligations on the part of the community extend to the provision of employment, mental and physical health care, social security, fair wages, rest and recreation, and a host of other reasonable expectations on the part of the individual members of society.

(Bahá'í International Community, 1995 Mar 03, The Prosperity of Humankind)

5.3.2 VOLUNTARY GIVING

If by giving up a small pleasure, one sees a great pleasure, the wise will let go of the small pleasure and look to the great one

(Buddhist, Dhammapada - Sayings of the Buddha 2 (tr. J. Richards))

Be faithful to thy neighbour in his poverty, that thou mayest rejoice in his prosperity: abide steadfast unto him in the time of his trouble, that thou mayest be heir with him in his heritage: for a mean estate is not always to be contemned: nor the rich that is foolish to be had in admiration.

(Deuterocanonical Apocrypha, Sirach)

Let him, without tiring, always offer sacrifices and perform works of charity with faith; for offerings and charitable works made with faith and with lawfully-earned money, (procure) endless rewards.

(Hindu, Laws of Manu)

Be steadfast in prayer, give the alms, and bow down with those who bow.

(The Qur'an (E.H. Palmer tr), Sura 2 - The Heifer)

Expend in alms in God's way and be not cast by your own hands into perdition; but do good, for God loves those who do good.

(The Qur'an (E.H. Palmer tr), Sura 2 - The Heifer)

They will ask thee what they are to expend in alms: say, 'Whatsoever good ye expend it should be for parents and kinsmen, and the orphan and the poor, and the son of the road; and whatsoever good ye do, verily, of it God knows.'

(The Qur'an (E.H. Palmer tr), Sura 2 - The Heifer)

O ye who believe! expend in alms of the good things that ye have earned, and of what we have brought forth for you out of the earth, and do not take the vile thereof to spend in alms,- what you would not take yourselves save by connivance at it; but know that God is rich and to be praised.

(The Qur'an (E.H. Palmer tr), Sura 2 - The Heifer)

Zarathushtra chanted aloud the Ahuna-Vairya: 'The will of the Lord is the law of righteousness. The gifts of Vohu-mano to the deeds done in this world for Mazda. He who relieves the poor makes Ahura king.'

(The Zend-Avesta, Avesta - Vendidad)

49. O CHILDREN OF DUST!

Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Persian Hidden Words)

54. 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.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Persian Hidden Words)

57. O SON OF MAN!

Bestow My wealth upon My poor, that in heaven thou mayest draw from stores of unfading splendor and treasures of imperishable glory. But by My life! To offer up thy soul is a more glorious thing couldst thou but see with Mine eye.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Arabic Hidden Words)

The beginning of magnanimity is when man expendeth his wealth on himself, on his family and on the poor among his brethren in his Faith.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 156)

But in the divine teachings equality is brought about through a ready willingness to share. It is commanded as regards wealth that the rich among the people, and the aristocrats should, by their own free will and for the sake of their own

happiness, concern themselves with and care for the poor. This equality is the result of the lofty characteristics and noble attributes of mankind.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 37-44)

Man reacheth perfection through good deeds, voluntarily performed, not through good deeds the doing of which was forced upon him. And sharing is a personally chosen righteous act: that is, the rich should extend assistance to the poor, they should expend their substance for the poor, but of their own free will, and not because the poor have gained this end by force. For the harvest of force is turmoil and the ruin of the social order. On the other hand voluntary sharing, the freely-chosen expending of one's substance, leadeth to society's comfort and peace. It lighteth up the world; it bestoweth honour upon humankind.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 115)

The rich too must be merciful to the poor, contributing from willing hearts to their needs without being forced or compelled to do so.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 107)

Bahá'u'lláh, likewise, commanded the rich to give freely to the poor.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 217)

O ye lovers of God! Be kind to all peoples; care for every person; do all ye can to purify the hearts and minds of men; strive ye to gladden every soul. To every meadow be a shower of grace, to every tree the water of life; be as sweet musk to the sense of humankind, and to the ailing be a fresh, restoring breeze. Be pleasing waters to all those who thirst, a careful guide to all who have lost their way; be father and mother to the orphan, be loving sons and daughters to the old, be an abundant treasure to the poor. Think ye of love and good fellowship as the delights of heaven, think ye of hostility and hatred as the torments of hell.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 244)

We must be like the fountain or spring that is continually emptying itself of all that it has and is continually being refilled from an invisible source. To be continually giving out for the good of our fellows undeterred by fear of poverty and reliant on the unfailing bounty of the Source of all wealth and all good -- this is the secret of right living.

(Shoghi Effendi, cited in "Bahá'í News" 13 (September 1926), p. 1 - Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol. I, p. 529)

5.3.3 PROFIT SHARING

For instance, the owners of properties, mines and factories should share their incomes with their employees and give a fairly certain percentage of their products to their workmen in order that the employees may receive, beside their wages, some of the general income of the factory so that the employee may strive with his soul in the work.

No more trusts will remain in the future. The question of the trusts will be wiped away entirely. Also, every factory that has ten thousand shares will give two thousand shares of these ten thousand to its employees and will write the shares in their names, so that they may have them, and the rest will belong to the capitalists. Then at the end of the month or year whatever they may earn after the expenses and wages are paid, according to the number of shares, should be divided among both. In reality, so far great injustice has befallen 44 the common people.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 43)

The Master has definitely stated that wages should be unequal, simply because that men are unequal in their ability and hence should receive wages that would correspond to their varying capacities and resources.

(Shoghi Effendi, Directives from the Guardian, p.20)

No, Bahá'u'lláh did not bring a complete system of economics to the world. "Profit-sharing is recommended as a solution to one form of economic problems. "There is nothing in the teachings against some kind of capitalism; its present form, though, would require adjustments to be made.\

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, November 19, 1945: Bahá'í News, No. 210, August 1948, p. 3 - Compilations, Lights of Guidance, p. 550)

The work done by the individual in trade, craft, art or profession is the core of his life and not merely the source of his living. Work performed in the spirit of service can today be accounted as an act of worship. The obligation to work is

essentially a moral obligation and one not discharged by possession of wealth. The community owes nothing to those who can work but refuse to do so.

The right to a living is established by work. In addition, the worker has right to share in the profits of the enterprise.

Wealth results from the co-ordination of a variety of efforts directed upon the equipment and material. A sound economy deals with the whole process in its variety of human relationships and does not seek to center the process around the point of any group advantage, whether ownership, direction, technical knowledge, manual skill or consumption. Wealth in part is the right of the individual and in part the right of the community. Under conditions of international competition desperate social emergencies arise when no just distinction between private and public wealth can be made. True justice and social philosophy await the formation of world institutions and the predominance of the world view.

(Bahá'í International Community, 1947 Feb, A Bahá'í Declaration of Human Obligations and Rights)

The Bahá'í writings call for both voluntary giving and government measures, such as the "equalization and apportionment" of excess wealth, so that the great disparities between the rich and the poor are eliminated. The Bahá'í writings also prescribe specific measures, such as profit-sharing and the equation of work with worship, that promote general economic prosperity across all classes.

(Bahá'í International Community, 2001 Aug 31, Statement to World Conference against Racism)

5.3.4 GRADUATED INCOME TAX

Difference of capacity in human individuals is fundamental. It is impossible for all to be alike, all to be equal, all to be wise. Bahá'u'lláh has revealed principles and laws which will accomplish the adjustment of varying human capacities. He has said that whatsoever is possible of accomplishment in human government will be effected through these principles. When the laws He has instituted are carried out, there will be no millionaires possible in the community and likewise no extremely poor. This will be effected and regulated by adjusting the different degrees of human capacity. The fundamental basis of the community is agriculture, tillage of the soil. All must be producers. Each person in the community whose need is equal to his individual producing capacity shall be exempt from taxation. But if his income is greater than his needs, he must pay a tax until an adjustment is effected. That is to say, a man's capacity for production and his needs will be equalized and reconciled through taxation. If his production exceeds, he will pay a tax; if his necessities exceed his production, he shall receive an amount sufficient to equalize or adjust. Therefore, taxation will be proportionate to capacity and production, and there will be no poor in the community.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 217)

Some regulation and redistribution is necessary to promote material justice. In this regard, a tax on income is, in principle, one of the fairest and most equitable means. There must also be a role for the voluntary sharing of wealth -- both at an individual and an institutional level. Equal opportunities for economic advancement and progress, however, must be woven into the very fabric of the new order. Ultimately, the most important regulation on any economic system is the moral regulation that begins in the hearts and minds of people.

(Bahá'í International Community, 1995 Oct, Turning Point For All Nations)

5.3.5 INTEREST

278 O ye who believe! Observe your duty to Allah, and give up what remaineth (due to you) from usury, if ye are (in truth) believers.

279 And if ye do not, then be warned of war (against you) from Allah and His messenger. And if ye repent, then ye have your principal (without interest). Wrong not, and ye shall not be wronged.

280 And if the debtor is in straitened circumstances, then (let there be) postponement to (the time of) ease; and that ye remit the debt as almsgiving would be better for you if ye did but know.

281 And guard yourselves against a day in which ye will be brought back to Allah. Then every soul will be paid in full that which it hath earned, and they will not be wronged.

As to thy question concerning interest and profit on gold and silver: Some years ago the following passage was revealed from the heaven of the All-Merciful in honor of the one who beareth the name of God, entitled Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin -- upon him be the glory of the Most Glorious. He -- exalted be His Word -- saith: Many people stand in need of this. Because if there were no prospect for gaining interest, the affairs of men would suffer collapse or dislocation. One can seldom find a person who would manifest such consideration towards his fellow-man, his countryman or towards his own brother and would show such tender solicitude for him as to be well-disposed to grant him a loan on benevolent terms. Therefore as a token of favour towards men We have prescribed that interest on money should be treated like other business transactions that are current amongst men. Thus, now that this lucid commandment hath descended from the heaven of the Will of God, it is lawful and proper to charge interest on money, that the people of the world may, in a spirit of amity and fellowship and with joy and gladness, devotedly engage themselves in magnifying the Name of Him Who is the Well-Beloved of all mankind. Verily He ordaineth according to His Own choosing. He hath now made interest on money lawful, even as He had made it unlawful in the past. Within His grasp He holdeth the kingdom of authority. He doeth and ordaineth. He is in truth the Ordainer, the All-Knowing.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 132)

6. A NEW PARADIGM OF WORK

6.1 WORK AS AN ACT OF WORSHIP

Whoever has virtue and insight, who is just, truthful, and does one's own work, the world will love.

(Buddhist, Dhammapada - Sayings of the Buddha 2 (tr. J. Richards))

Work is more excellent than idleness.

(Hindu, Bhagavad Gita (Edwin Arnold tr))

Concerning thine own affairs, if thou wouldst content thyself with whatever might come to pass it would be praiseworthy. To engage in some profession is highly commendable, for when occupied with work one is less likely to dwell on the unpleasant aspects of life.

(Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 175)

It is enjoined upon every one of you to engage in some form of occupation, such as crafts, trades and the like. We have graciously exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship unto God, the True One. Ponder ye in your hearts the grace and the blessings of God and render thanks unto Him at eventide and at dawn. Waste not your time in idleness and sloth. Occupy yourselves with that which profiteth yourselves and others. Thus hath it been decreed in this Tablet from whose horizon the day-star of wisdom and utterance shineth resplendent.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 26)

O people of Bahá! It is incumbent upon each one of you to engage in some occupation -- such as a craft, a trade or the like. We have exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship of the one true God. Reflect, O people, on the grace and blessings of your Lord, and yield Him thanks at eventide and dawn. Waste not your hours in idleness and sloth, but occupy yourselves with what will profit you and others. Thus hath it been decreed in this Tablet from whose horizon hath shone the day-star of wisdom and utterance. The most despised of men in the sight of God are they who sit and beg. Hold ye fast unto the cord of means and place your trust in God, the Provider of all means.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 30)

All humanity must obtain a livelihood by sweat of the brow and bodily exertion, at the same time seeking to lift the burden of others, striving to be the source of comfort to souls and facilitating the means of living. This in itself is devotion to God. Bahá'u'lláh has thereby encouraged action and stimulated service

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 182)

Man must work with his fellows. Everyone should have some trade, or art or profession, be he rich or poor, and with this he must serve humanity. This service is acceptable as the highest form of worship.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p. 92)

... Whatever the progress of the machinery may be, man will have always to toil in order to earn his living. Effort is an inseparable part of man's life. It may take different forms with the changing conditions of the world, but it will be always present as a necessary element in our earthly existence. Life is after all a struggle. Progress is attained through struggle, and without such a struggle life ceases to have a meaning; it becomes even extinct. The progress of machinery has not made effort unnecessary. It has given it a new form, a new outlet.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, December 26, 1935 - Compilations, Lights of Guidance, p. 550)

To the extent that work is consciously undertaken in a spirit of service to humanity, Bahá'u'lláh says, it is a form of prayer, a means of worshipping God. Every individual has the capacity to see himself or herself in this light, and it is to this inalienable capacity of the self that development strategy must appeal, whatever the nature of the plans being pursued, whatever the rewards they promise. No narrower a perspective will ever call up from the people of the world the magnitude of effort and commitment that the economic tasks ahead will require.

(Bahá'í International Community, 1995 Mar 03, The Prosperity of Humankind)

6.2 WORK TO BENEFIT THE SELF AND OTHERS

Disciples, the doctrines, which I advised you to penetrate, you should well preserve, well guard, so that this Holy Life may take its course and continue for ages, for the weal and welfare of the many, as a consolation to the world, for the happiness, weal and welfare of heavenly beings and men.

((The Eightfold Path), Buddha, the Word (The Eightfold Path))

Learning, mechanical arts, work for wages, service, rearing cattle, traffic, agriculture, contentment (with little), alms, and receiving interest on money, are the ten modes of subsistence (permitted to all men in times of distress).

(Hindu, Laws of Manu)

But he who, with strong body serving mind,
Gives up his mortal powers to worthy work,
Not seeking gain, Arjuna! such an one
Is honourable. Do thine allotted task!
Work is more excellent than idleness;
The body's life proceeds not, lacking work.

(Hindu, Bhagavad Gita (Edwin Arnold tr))

Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 157 - 174)

80. O MY SERVANTS! Ye are the trees of My garden; ye must give forth goodly and wondrous fruits, that ye yourselves and others may profit therefrom. Thus it is incumbent on every one to engage in crafts and professions, for therein lies the secret of wealth, O men of understanding! For results depend upon means, and the grace of God shall be all-sufficient unto you. Trees that yield no fruit have been and will ever be for the fire.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Persian Hidden Words)

81. O MY SERVANT! The basest of men are they that yield no fruit on earth. Such men are verily counted as among the dead, nay better are the dead in the sight of God than those idle and worthless souls.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Persian Hidden Words)

82. O MY SERVANT! The best of men are they that earn a livelihood by their calling and spend upon themselves and upon their kindred for the love of God, the Lord of all worlds.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Persian Hidden Words)

It is well to know that riches are good, but that knowledge will not make a man rich; he must work, he must put his knowledge into practice.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p. 60)

Forget self and work for the whole race. Remember always that one is working for the world, not for a town or even for a country; because, as all are brethren, so every country is, as it were, one's own.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p. 124)

Again, is there any deed in the world that would be nobler than service to the common good? Is there any greater blessing conceivable for a man, than that he should become the cause of the education, the development, the prosperity and honor of his fellow-creatures? No, by the Lord God! The highest righteousness of all is for blessed souls to take hold of the hands of the helpless and deliver them out of their ignorance and abasement and poverty, and with pure motives, and only for the sake of God, to arise and energetically devote themselves to the service of the masses, forgetting their own worldly advantage and working only to serve the general good. "They prefer them before themselves, though poverty be their own lot." "The best of men are those who serve the people; the worst of men are those who harm the people." [Qur'án 59:9.]

(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 103)

6.3 WORK NOT TO BE A BURDEN TO OTHERS

It would be better for a bad, unrestrained person to swallow a ball of red-hot iron than to live off the charity of the land.
(Buddhist, Dhammapada - Sayings of the Buddha 2 (tr. J. Richards))

Every person must have an occupation, a trade or a craft, so that he may carry other people's burdens, and not himself be a burden to others.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, From a Tablet - translated from the Persian - The Compilation of Compilations vol. I, p. 3)

7. VALUES-BASED LEADERSHIP

7.1 A RESPONSIBILITY; NOT A PATH TO PRIVILEGE

My son, go on with thy business in meekness; so shalt thou be beloved of him that is approved.
The greater thou art, the more humble thyself, and thou shalt find favour before the Lord.
Many are in high place, and of renown: but mysteries are revealed unto the meek.
For the power of the Lord is great, and he is honoured of the lowly.

(The Book of Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus), Deuterocanonical Apocrypha)

Thy day of service is now come. ... Thou must show forth that which will ensure the peace and the well-being of the miserable and the down-trodden. Gird up the loins of thine endeavor, that perchance thou mayest release the captive from his chains, and enable him to attain unto true liberty.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 92)

How long shall we drift on the wings of passion and vain desire; how long shall we spend our days like barbarians in the depths of ignorance and abomination? God has given us eyes, that we may look about us at the world, and lay hold of whatsoever will further civilization and the arts of living. He has given us ears, that we may hear and profit by the wisdom of scholars and philosophers and arise to promote and practice it. Senses and faculties have been bestowed upon us, to be devoted to the service of the general good; so that we, distinguished above all other forms of life for perceptiveness and reason, should labor at all times and along all lines, whether the occasion be great or small, ordinary or extraordinary, until all mankind are safely gathered into the impregnable stronghold of knowledge. We should continually be establishing new bases for human happiness and creating and promoting new instrumentalities toward this end. How excellent, how honorable is man if he arises to fulfil his responsibilities; how wretched and contemptible, if he shuts his eyes to the welfare of society and wastes his precious life in pursuing his own selfish interests and personal advantages. Supreme happiness is man's, and he beholds the signs of God in the world and in the human soul, if he urges on the steed of high endeavor in the arena of civilization and justice. "We will surely show them Our signs in the world and within themselves."

(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 3)

Again, is there any deed in the world that would be nobler than service to the common good? Is there any greater blessing conceivable for a man, than that he should become the cause of the education, the development, the prosperity and honor of his fellow-creatures? No, by the Lord God! The highest righteousness of all is for blessed souls to take hold of the hands of the helpless and deliver them out of their ignorance and abasement and poverty, and with pure motives, and only for the sake of God, to arise and energetically devote themselves to the service of the masses, forgetting their own worldly advantage and working only to serve the general good. "They prefer them before themselves, though poverty be their own lot." [1] "The best of men are those who serve the people; the worst of men are those who harm the people."

(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 103)

Happy the soul that shall forget his own good, and like the chosen ones of God, vie with his fellows in service to the good of all; until, strengthened by the blessings and perpetual confirmations of God, he shall be empowered to raise this mighty nation up to its ancient pinnacles of glory, and restore this withered land to sweet new life, and as a spiritual springtime, array those trees which are the lives of men with the fresh leaves, the blossoms and fruits of consecrated joy.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 116)

Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of god is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá'í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion, and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candor, and courage on the other.

(Shoghi Effendi: Bahá'í Administration, pp. 63-64)

Bahá'u'lláh was also among the first to invoke the phrase "new world order" to describe the momentous changes in the political, social and religious life of the world. "The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned,

inasmuch as the prevailing Order appeareth to be lamentably defective," He wrote. "Soon will the present-day order be rolled up and a new one spread out in its stead."

To this end, He laid a charge on the leaders and members of society alike. "It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens." [

Above all else, leaders for the next generation must be motivated by a sincere desire to serve the entire community and must understand that leadership is a responsibility; not a path to privilege. For too long, leadership has been understood, by both leaders and followers, as the assertion of control over others. Indeed, this age demands a new definition of leadership and a new type of leader.

This is especially true in the international arena. In order to establish a sense of trust, win the confidence, and inculcate a fond affinity in the hearts of the world's people for institutions of the international order, these leaders will have to reflect on their own actions.

Through an unblemished record of personal integrity, they must help restore confidence and trust in government. They must embody the characteristics of honesty, humility and sincerity of purpose in seeking the truth of a situation. They must be committed to and guided by principles, thereby acting in the best long-term interests of humanity as a whole.

"Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own selves," Bahá'u'lláh wrote. "Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns; let your thoughts be fixed upon that which will rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men."

(Bahá'í International Community, 1995 Oct, Turning Point For All Nations)

29:18 Where there is no vision, the people perish.

(King James Bible, Proverbs)

7.2 SPIRITUAL QUALITIES OF LEADERSHIP (BEYOND SERVANT LEADERSHIP)

I heard the Prophet saying, "Any man whom Allah has given the authority of ruling some people and he does not look after them in an honest manner, will never feel even the smell of Paradise."

(Hadith, Bukhari Vol 9)

When the Day-Star of Wisdom rose above the horizon of God's Holy Dispensation it voiced this all-glorious utterance: They that are possessed of wealth and invested with authority and power must show the profoundest regard for religion. In truth, religion is a radiant light and an impregnable stronghold for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world, for the fear of God impelleth man to hold fast to that which is good, and shun all evil. 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. Unto this will bear witness every man of true understanding.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 125)

O peoples of the world! Forsake all evil, hold fast that which is good. Strive to be shining examples unto all mankind, and true reminders of the virtues of God amidst men. He that riseth to serve My Cause should manifest My wisdom, and bend every effort to banish ignorance from the earth. Be united in counsel, be one in thought. Let each morn be better than its eve and each morrow richer than its yesterday. Man's merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches. Take heed that your words be purged from idle fancies and worldly desires and your deeds be cleansed from craftiness and suspicion. Dissipate not the wealth of your precious lives in the pursuit of evil and corrupt affection, nor let your endeavours be spent in promoting your personal interest. Be generous in your days of plenty, and be patient in the hour of loss. Adversity is followed by success and rejoicings follow woe. Guard against idleness and sloth, and cling unto that which profiteth mankind, whether young or old, whether high or low. Beware lest ye sow tares of dissension among men or plant thorns of doubt in pure and radiant hearts.

O ye beloved of the Lord! Commit not that which defileth the limpid stream of love or destroyeth the sweet fragrance of friendship. By the righteousness of the Lord! Ye were created to show love one to another and not perversity and rancour. Take pride not in love for yourselves but in love for your fellow-creatures. Glory not in love for your country, but in love for all mankind. Let your eye be chaste, your hand faithful, your tongue truthful and your heart enlightened. Abase not the station of the learned in Bahá and belittle not the rank of such rulers as administer justice amidst you. Set your reliance on the army of justice, put on the armour of wisdom, let your adorning be forgiveness and mercy and that which cheereth the hearts of the well-favoured of God.

7.3 JUSTICE

2. O SON OF SPIRIT!

The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Arabic Hidden Words)

And now concerning thy question regarding the nature of religion. Know thou that they who are truly wise have likened the world unto the human temple. As the body of man needeth a garment to clothe it, so the body of mankind must needs be adorned with the mantle of justice and wisdom. Its robe is the Revelation vouchsafed unto it by God. Whenever this robe hath fulfilled its purpose, the Almighty will assuredly renew it. For every age requireth a fresh measure of the light of God. Every Divine Revelation hath been sent down in a manner that befitted the circumstances of the age in which it hath appeared.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 81)

Know verily that the essence of justice and the source thereof are both embodied in the ordinances prescribed by Him Who is the Manifestation of the Self of God amongst men, if ye be of them that recognize this truth. He doth verily incarnate the highest, the infallible standard of justice unto all creation. Were His law to be such as to strike terror into the hearts of all that are in heaven and on earth, that law is naught but manifest justice. The fears and agitation which the revelation of this law provokes in men's hearts should indeed be likened to the cries of the suckling babe weaned from his mother's milk, if ye be of them that perceive. Were men to discover the motivating purpose of God's Revelation, they would assuredly cast away their fears, and, with hearts filled with gratitude, rejoice with exceeding gladness.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 174)

The sixth leaf of the Most Exalted Paradise is the following: 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. The ocean of divine wisdom surgeth within this exalted word, while the books of the world cannot contain its inner significance. Were mankind to be adorned with this raiment, they would behold the day-star of the utterance, 'On that day God will satisfy everyone out of His abundance,'⁽¹⁾ shining resplendent above the horizon of the world. Appreciate ye the value of this utterance; it is a noble fruit that the Tree of the Pen of Glory hath yielded. Happy is the man that giveth ear unto it and observeth its precepts. Verily I say, whatever is sent down from the heaven of the Will of God is the means for the establishment of order in the world and the instrument for promoting unity and fellowship among its peoples.

(Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Pages: 66-67)

You have questioned me about strikes. This question is and will be for a long time the subject of great difficulties. Strikes are due to two causes. One is the extreme sharpness and rapacity of the capitalists and manufacturers; the other, the excesses, the avidity and ill-will of the workmen and artisans. It is therefore necessary to remedy these two causes.

But the principal cause of these difficulties lies in the laws of the present civilization; for they lead to a small number of individuals accumulating incomparable fortunes, beyond their needs, whilst the greater number remains destitute, stripped and in the greatest misery. This is contrary to justice, to humanity, to equity; it is the height of iniquity, the opposite to what causes divine satisfaction.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i World Faith - Abdu'l-Bahá Section, p. 280)

Justice is the one power that can translate the dawning consciousness of humanity's oneness into a collective will through which the necessary structures of global community life can be confidently erected. An age that sees the people of the world increasingly gaining access to information of every kind and to a diversity of ideas will find justice asserting itself as the ruling principle of successful social organization. With ever greater frequency, proposals aiming at the development of the planet will have to submit to the candid light of the standards it requires.

At the individual level, justice is that faculty of the human soul that enables each person to distinguish truth from falsehood. In the sight of God, Bahá'u'lláh avers, justice is "the best beloved of all things" since it permits each individual to see with his own eyes rather than the eyes of others, to know through his own knowledge rather than the

knowledge of his neighbor or his group. It calls for fair-mindedness in one's judgments, for equity in one's treatment of others, and is thus a constant if demanding companion in the daily occasions of life.

(Bahá'í International Community, 1995 Mar 03, The Prosperity of Humankind)

7.4 MODERATION

Not to speak harshly and not to harm others, self restraint in accordance with the rules of the Order, moderation in food, a secluded dwelling, and the cultivation of the higher levels of consciousness - this is the teaching of the Buddhas.

(Buddhist, Dhammapada - Sayings of the Buddha 1 (tr. J. Richards))

A person is not an elder simply because one's head is gray. Age can be ripe, but one may be called "old in vain." The one in whom there is truth, virtue, nonviolence, restraint, moderation, whoever is free from impurity and is wise, may be called an elder.

(Buddhist, Dhammapada - Sayings of the Buddha 2 (tr. J. Richards))

For regulating the human (in our constitution) and rendering the (proper) service to the heavenly, there is nothing like moderation.

(Tao, Tao Te Ching (J. Legge tr))

4:5 Let your moderation be known unto all men.

(King James Bible, Philipians)

It is incumbent upon them who are in authority to exercise moderation in all things. Whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence. Consider for instance such things as liberty, civilization and the like. However much men of understanding may favorably regard them, they will, if carried to excess, exercise a pernicious influence upon men....

(Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 216)

Overstep not the bounds of moderation, and deal justly with them that serve thee. Bestow upon them according to their needs and not to the extent that will enable them to lay up riches for themselves, to deck their persons, to embellish their homes, to acquire the things that are of no benefit unto them, and to be numbered with the extravagant. Deal with them with undeviating justice, so that none among them may either suffer want, or be pampered with luxuries. This is but manifest justice.

Allow not the abject to rule over and dominate them who are noble and worthy of honor, and suffer not the high-minded to be at the mercy of the contemptible and worthless, for this is what We observed upon Our arrival in the City (Constantinople), and to it We bear witness. We found among its inhabitants some who were possessed of an affluent fortune and lived in the midst of excessive riches, whilst others were in dire want and abject poverty. This ill beseemeth thy sovereignty, and is unworthy of thy rank.

(Bahá'u'lláh: Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh, Page: 50)

In the utmost moderation they should make the law; then announce to the public that the rights of the working people are to be strongly preserved. Also the rights of the capitalists are to be protected.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 43)

They must endeavour to consort in a friendly spirit with everyone, must follow moderation in their conduct, must have respect and consideration one for another and show loving-kindness and tender regard to all the peoples of the world.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 233)

For desire is a flame that has reduced to ashes uncounted lifetime harvests of the learned, a devouring fire that even the vast sea of their accumulated knowledge could never quench. How often has it happened that an individual who was graced with every attribute of humanity and wore the jewel of true understanding, nevertheless followed after his passions until his excellent qualities passed beyond moderation and he was forced into excess. His pure intentions changed to evil ones, his attributes were no longer put to uses worthy of them, and the power of his desires turned him aside from righteousness and its rewards into ways that were dangerous and dark. A good character is in the sight of God and His chosen ones and the possessors of insight, the most excellent and praiseworthy of all things, but always on condition that its center of emanation should be reason and knowledge and its base should be true moderation.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 59)

7.5 PLANNING PROJECTS

The eagerness of the friends to serve, often carries them away, and they forget that a sound sense of business management is also much needed, if we are to harbour our resources and accomplish all our goals.

(Shoghi Effendi, The Light of Divine Guidance v I, p. 216)

Armed with the strength of action and the co-operation of the individual believers composing it, the community as a whole should endeavor to establish greater stability in the patterns of its development, locally and nationally, through sound, systematic planning and execution of its work -- and this in striking contrast to the short-lived enthusiasms and frenetic superficialities so characteristic of present-day American life.

(The Universal House of Justice, A Wider Horizon, Selected Letters 1983-1992, p. 26)

People need, for example, to learn how to separate fact from conjecture -- indeed to distinguish between subjective views and objective reality; the extent to which individuals and institutions so equipped can contribute to human progress, however, will be determined by their devotion to truth and their detachment from the promptings of their own interests and passions. Another capacity that science must cultivate in all people is that of thinking in terms of process, including historical process; however, if this intellectual advancement is to contribute ultimately to promoting development, its perspective must be unclouded by prejudices of race, culture, sex, or sectarian belief. Similarly, the training that can make it possible for the earth's inhabitants to participate in the production of wealth will advance the aims of development only to the extent that such an impulse is illumined by the spiritual insight that service to humankind is the purpose of both individual life and social organization.

(Bahá'í International Community, 1995 Mar 03, The Prosperity of Humankind)

Projects should be properly organized from the outset with the participants' roles, responsibilities and lines of authority clearly understood by all. The work to be done should be broken down into activities with schedules and, where necessary, estimated resources required. The level of detail should be commensurate with the complexity of the project, and should be as simple as possible.

The aim of community self-reliance should be kept constantly in mind and care should be taken to ensure that projects do not become self-serving. Local authorities should be kept informed, all local labor regulation and other laws observed, and permits and permissions obtained where required.

A project record should be kept so that important events, decisions and actions taken are recorded promptly and accurately. Finances should be handled with scrupulous attention to accuracy, and financial records kept in a manner that will facilitate subsequent auditing.

Regular project reviews should be held at which the progress of the work and expenditures are discussed and compared with planned schedules and cash flows. Future plans and schedules should be adjusted where necessary through experience gained.

Where resources from outside the community are used in a project, the supporting agency (Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í) should receive regular reports according to procedures agreed upon at the outset.

Some projects may have a short term objective and should be brought to a clear termination point. All records should be brought up to date, any material and equipment properly disposed of and care taken of project records. Local authorities should be notified and thanked where appropriate. A factual project report should be written recording significant events and deviations from the original plans, to provide data for the project evaluation.

(Some Guidelines for SED Projects, Office of Social and Economic Development, Dec. 1985)

It is also worth remembering that projects may need amendment to or alteration of their objectives as operational experience may show. The need for such changes can only be realized if constant monitoring is carried out and is accepted as a component part of the project.

(Some Guidelines for SED, Office of Social and Economic Development, Dec. 1985)

7.6 CONFLICT RESOLUTION

In the Book of God, the Mighty, the Great, ye have been forbidden to engage in contention and conflict. Lay fast hold on whatever will profit you, and profit the peoples of the world. Thus commandeth you the King of Eternity, Who is manifest in His Most Great Name. He, verily, is the Ordainer, the All-Wise.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 24)

The Guardian wishes to emphasize the importance of avoiding references to civil courts of cases of dispute between believers, even in non-Bahá'í issues. It is the Assembly's function to endeavour to settle amicably such disputes, both in order to safeguard the fair name and prestige of the Cause, and to acquire the necessary experience for the extension of its functions in the future.

(Shoghi Effendi, Compilations, Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 28)

With regard to your question concerning the Bahá'í attitude towards labour problems; these cannot assuredly be solved, 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us, through the sheer force of physical violence. Non-cooperation too, even though not accompanied by acts of violence, is ineffective. The conflict between labour and capital can best be solved through the peaceful and constructive methods of cooperation and of consultation.

The Bahá'ís, therefore, are advised to avoid, as much as they can, getting mixed in labour strikes and trouble, and particularly to desist from all acts of physical violence which indeed run counter to the very spirit of the Cause. The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh stands for peace, harmony, and cooperation between the individuals and nations of the world."

(From letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Luxembourg, April 4, 1973 - Compilations, Lights of Guidance, p. 427)

7.7 THE BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER: AN EXAMPLE OF LEADERSHIP

The work of the Assembly should be to capitalize the energy and devotion that exists among the friends and guide them along proper channels, whereby good work would be accomplished and no harm be done to the Cause. The first quality for leadership, both among individuals and Assemblies, is the capacity to use the energy and competence that exists in the rank and file of its followers.

(30 August 1930, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly)

...The importance of the Bahá'í administration is its values in serving as a facilitator of the emergence and maintenance of community life in a wholly new mode, and in catering to the requirements of the spiritual relationships which flow from love and unity among the friends. This touches upon a distinguishing characteristic of Bahá'í life which such spiritual relationships foster, namely, the spirit of servitude to God, expressed in service to the Cause, to friends and to humanity as a whole. The attitude of the individual as a servant, an attitude pre-eminently exemplified in the life and person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is a dynamic that permeates the activities of the Faith; it acquires collective, transformative force in the normal functioning of a community. In this regard, the Institutions of the Faith stand as channels for the promotion of this salient characteristic. It is in this framework that the concepts of rulership and leadership, authority and power are properly understood and actualized.

(From a letter dated 19 May 1994 from the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

The appearance of a united, firmly based and self-sustaining community must be a major goal of a Spiritual Assembly. Composed of a membership reflecting a diversity of personalities, talents, abilities and interests, such a community requires a level of internal interaction between the Assembly and in which a sense of partnership based on appreciation of each other's distinctive sphere of action is fully recognized and unfailingly upheld, and no semblance of a dichotomy between the two appears. In such a community leadership is that expression of service by which the Spiritual Assembly invites and encourages the use of the manifold talents and abilities with which the community is endowed, and stimulates and guides the diverse elements of the community towards goals and strategies by which the effects of a coherent force for progress can be realized.

(From a letter dated 19 May 1994 from the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

8. PARTNERSHIP OF WOMEN AND MEN

Women must be honoured and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands, and brothers-in-law, who desire (their own) welfare.

Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards.

Where the female relations live in grief, the family soon wholly perishes; but that family where they are not unhappy ever prospers.

(Hindu, Laws of Manu)

The happiness of mankind will be realized when women and men coordinate and advance equally, for each is the complement and helpmeet of the other.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith - Abdu'l-Bahá Section, p. 241)

And among the teachings of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh is the equality of women and men. The world of humanity has two wings -- one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible. Not until the world of women becomes equal to the world of men in the acquisition of virtues and perfections, can success and prosperity be attained as they ought to be.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 301)

Work ye for the guidance of the women in that land, teach the young girls and the children, so that the mothers may educate their little ones from their earliest days, thoroughly train them, rear them to have a goodly character and good morals, guide them to all the virtues of humankind, prevent the development of any behaviour that would be worthy of blame, and foster them in the embrace of Bahá'í education. Thus shall these tender infants be nurtured at the breast of the knowledge of God and His love. Thus shall they grow and flourish, and be taught righteousness and the dignity of humankind, resolution and the will to strive and to endure. Thus shall they learn perseverance in all things, the will to advance, high mindedness and high resolve, chastity and purity of life. Thus shall they be enabled to carry to a successful conclusion whatsoever they undertake.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 124)

"In the Tablet of the World, Bahá'u'lláh Himself has envisaged that women as well as men would be breadwinners in stating:

'Everyone, whether man or woman, should hand over to a trusted person a portion of what he or she earneth through trade, agriculture or other occupation, for the training and education of children, to be spent for this purpose with the knowledge of the Trustees of the House of Justice.'"(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas p.90)

"A very important element in the attainment of such equality is Bahá'u'lláh's provisions that boys and girls must follow essentially the same curriculum in schools."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, December 28, 1980 - Lights of Guidance, p. 224)

You ask about the admonition that everyone must work, and want to know if this means that you, a wife and mother, must work for a livelihood as your husband does. We are requested to enclose for your perusal an excerpt, "The twelfth Glad-Tidings", from Bahá'u'lláh's "Tablet of Bisharat". You will see that the directive is for the friends to be engaged in an occupation which will be of benefit to mankind. Homemaking is a highly honourable and responsible work of fundamental importance for mankind....

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, June 16, 1982: Women, a compilation of the Universal House of Justice - Lights of Guidance, p. 625)

In relation to your specific queries, the decision concerning the amount of time a mother may spend in working outside the home depends on circumstances existing within the home, which may vary from time to time. Family consultation will help to provide the answers....

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, August 9, 1984 - Lights of Guidance, p. 626)

The obvious biological differences between the sexes need not be a cause for inequality or disunity. Rather, they are an aspect of complementarity. If the role of women as mothers is properly valued, their work in nurturing and educating children will be respected and properly rewarded. It should also be acknowledged that the child-bearing role does not diminish one's aptitude for leadership, or undermine one's intellectual, scientific or creative capacity. Indeed, it may be an enhancement.

(Bahá'í International Community, 1995 Oct, Turning Point For All Nations)

9. NON-ADVERSARIAL DECISION MAKING THROUGH CONSULTATION

He avoids vain talk, and abstains from it. He speaks at the right time, in accordance with facts, speaks what is useful, speaks about the law and the discipline; his speech is like a treasure, at the right moment accompanied by arguments, moderate and full of sense.

((The Eightfold Path), Buddha, the Word (The Eightfold Path))

The ignorant, foolish folk
Indulge in heedlessness,
But the wise preserve heedfulness
As their greatest treasure.

(Buddhist, Dhammapada - Sayings of the Buddha 3 (tr. J. Richards))

And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand

(King James Bible, Matthew)

The Great Being saith: 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.

(Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 168)

O people of God! Give ear unto that which, if heeded, will ensure the freedom, well-being, tranquillity, exaltation and advancement of all men. Certain laws and principles are necessary and indispensable for Persia. However, it is fitting that these measures should be adopted in conformity with the considered views of His Majesty - may God aid him through His grace - and of the learned divines and of the high-ranking rulers. Subject to their approval a place should be fixed where they would meet. There they should hold fast to the cord of consultation and adopt and enforce that which is conducive to the security, prosperity, wealth and tranquillity of the people. For were any measure other than this to be adopted, it could not but result in chaos and commotion.

(Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Pages: 92-93)

QUESTION: Concerning consultation.

ANSWER: If consultation among the first group of people assembled endeth in disagreement, new people should be added, after which persons to the number of the Greatest Name, or fewer or more, shall be chosen by lot. Whereupon the consultation shall be renewed, and the outcome, whatever it is, shall be obeyed. If, however, there is still disagreement, the same procedure should be repeated once more, and the decision of the majority shall prevail. He, verily, guideth whomsoever He pleaseth to the right way.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Q99, p. 136)

Say: no man can attain his true station except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation.

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

Bahá'u'lláh has established consultation as one of the fundamental principles of His Faith and has exhorted the believers to "take counsel together in all matters". He describes consultation as "the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way" and as "the bestower of understanding". Shoghi Effendi states that the "principle of consultation ... constitutes one of the basic laws" of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. In Questions and Answers, number 99, Bahá'u'lláh outlines an approach to consultation and stresses the importance of achieving unanimity in decision-making, failing which the majority decision must prevail. The Universal House of Justice has clarified that this guidance concerning consultation was revealed before Spiritual Assemblies had been established and was in answer to a question about the Bahá'í teachings on consultation. The House of Justice affirms that the emergence of Spiritual Assemblies, to which the friends may always turn for assistance, in no way prohibits them from following the procedure outlined in Questions and Answers. This approach may be used by the friends, should they wish, when they desire to consult on their personal problems.

(Notes of The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, n52, p. 190)

In like manner, the members of each profession, such as in industry, should consult, and those in commerce should similarly consult on business affairs. In short, consultation is desirable and acceptable in all things and on all issues.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Consultation: A Compilation, quoted in the Guardian’s letter to Persia, February 15, 1922)

The purpose is to emphasize the statement that consultation must have for its object the investigation of truth. He who expresses an opinion should not voice it as correct and right but set it forth as a contribution to the consensus of opinion, for the light of reality becomes apparent when two opinions coincide. A spark is produced when flint and steel come together. Man should weigh his opinions with the utmost serenity, calmness and composure. Before expressing his own views he should carefully consider the views already advanced by others. If he finds that a previously expressed opinion is more true and worthy, he should accept it immediately and not willfully hold to an opinion of his own. By this excellent method he endeavors to arrive at unity and truth. Opposition and division are deplorable. It is better then to have the opinion of a wise, sagacious man; otherwise, contradiction and altercation, in which varied and divergent views are presented, will make it necessary for a judicial body to render decision upon the question. Even a majority opinion or consensus may be incorrect. A thousand people may hold to one view and be mistaken, whereas one sagacious person may be right. Therefore, true consultation is spiritual conference in the attitude and atmosphere of love. Members must love each other in the spirit of fellowship in order that good results may be forthcoming. Love and fellowship are the foundation.

(Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 72)

Regarding thy question about consultation of a father with his son, or a son with his father, in matters of trade and commerce, consultation is one of the fundamental elements of the foundation of the Law of God. Such consultation is assuredly acceptable, whether between father and son, or with others. There is nothing better than this. Man must consult in all things for this will lead him to the depths of each problem and enable him to find the right solution."

(Abdu’l-Bahá, Compilations, Lights of Guidance, p. 228)

Central to the task of reconceptualizing the system of human relationships is the process that Bahá'u'lláh refers to as consultation. "In all things it is necessary to consult," is His advice. "The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation."

The standard of truth seeking this process demands is far beyond the patterns of negotiation and compromise that tend to characterize the present-day discussion of human affairs. It cannot be achieved -- indeed, its attainment is severely handicapped -- by the culture of protest that is another widely prevailing feature of contemporary society. Debate, propaganda, the adversarial method, the entire apparatus of partisanship that have long been such familiar features of collective action are all fundamentally harmful to its purpose: that is, arriving at a consensus about the truth of a given situation and the wisest choice of action among the options open at any given moment.

What Bahá'u'lláh is calling for is a consultative process in which the individual participants strive to transcend their respective points of view, in order to function as members of a body with its own interests and goals. In such an atmosphere, characterized by both candor and courtesy, ideas belong not to the individual to whom they occur during the discussion but to the group as a whole, to take up, discard, or revise as seems to best serve the goal pursued. Consultation succeeds to the extent that all participants support the decisions arrived at, regardless of the individual opinions with which they entered the discussion. Under such circumstances an earlier decision can be readily reconsidered if experience exposes any shortcomings.

Viewed in such a light, consultation is the operating expression of justice in human affairs. So vital is it to the success of collective endeavor that it must constitute a basic feature of a viable strategy of social and economic development. Indeed, the participation of the people on whose commitment and efforts the success of such a strategy depends becomes effective only as consultation is made the organizing principle of every project. "No man can attain his true station," is Bahá'u'lláh's counsel, "except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation."

(Bahá'í International Community, 1995 Mar 03, The Prosperity of Humankind)

10. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In one of the Tablets these words have been revealed: O people of God! Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns; let your thoughts be fixed upon that which will rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men. This can best be achieved through pure and holy deeds, through a virtuous life and a goodly behavior. Valiant acts will ensure the triumph of this Cause, and a saintly character will reinforce its power. Cleave unto righteousness, O people of Bahá! This, verily, is the commandment which this wronged One hath given unto you, and the first choice of His unrestrained Will for every one of you.

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

Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self. The Evil One is he that hindereth the rise and obstructeth the spiritual progress of the children of men.

It is incumbent upon every man, in this Day, to hold fast unto whatsoever will promote the interests, and exalt the station, of all nations and just governments. Through each and every one of the verses which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed, the doors of love and unity have been unlocked and flung open to the face of men. We have erewhile declared -- and Our Word is the truth -- : "Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship." Whatsoever hath led the children of men to shun one another, and hath caused dissensions and divisions amongst them, hath, through the revelation of these words, been nullified and abolished. From the heaven of God's Will, and for the purpose of ennobling the world of being and of elevating the minds and souls of men, hath been sent down that which is the most effective instrument for the education of the whole human race. The highest essence and most perfect expression of whatsoever the peoples of old have either said or written hath, through this most potent Revelation, been sent down from the heaven of the Will of the All-Possessing, the Ever-Abiding God. Of old it hath been revealed: "Love of one's country is an element of the Faith of God." The Tongue of Grandeur hath, however, in the day of His manifestation proclaimed: "It is not his to boast who loveth his country, but it is his who loveth the world." Through the power released by these exalted words He hath lent a fresh impulse, and set a new direction, to the birds of men's hearts, and hath obliterated every trace of restriction and limitation from God's holy Book.

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

Regarding reciprocity and cooperation: each member of the body politic should live in the utmost comfort and welfare because each individual member of humanity is a member of the body politic and if one member of the members be in distress or be afflicted with some disease all the other members must necessarily suffer. For example, a member of the human organism is the eye. If the eye should be affected that affliction would affect the whole nervous system. Hence, if a member of the body politic becomes afflicted, in reality, from the standpoint of sympathetic connection, all will share that affliction since this (one afflicted) is a member of the group of members, a part of the whole. Is it possible for one member or part to be in distress and the other members to be at ease? It is impossible! Hence God has desired that in the body politic of humanity each one shall enjoy perfect welfare and comfort.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 37)

... By the statement 'the economic solution is divine in nature' is meant that religion alone can, in the last resort, bring in man's nature such a fundamental change as to enable him to adjust the economic relationships of society. It is only in this way that man can control the economic forces that threaten to disrupt the foundations of his existence, and thus assert his mastery over the forces of nature.

(Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 550)

And for a Bahá'í the ultimate issues are spiritual. The Cause is not a political party nor an ideology, much less an engine for political agitation against this or that social wrong. The process of transformation it has set in motion advances by inducing a fundamental change of consciousness, and the challenge it poses to everyone who would serve it is to free oneself from attachment to inherited assumptions and preferences that are irreconcilable with the Will of God for humanity's coming of age. Paradoxically, even the distress caused by prevailing conditions that violate one's conscience aids in this process of spiritual liberation.

(Commissioned by The Universal House of Justice, Century of Light, p. 137)

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.

(Baha'i International Community, 1998 Feb 18, Valuing Spirituality in Development)