

Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings on the Subject of Agriculture and Related Subjects

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From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

Whilst in the Prison of 'Akká, We revealed in the Crimson Book that which is conducive to the advancement of mankind and to the reconstruction of the world. The utterances set forth therein by the Pen of the Lord of creation include the following which constitute the fundamental principles for the administration of the affairs of men:

First: It is incumbent upon the ministers of the House of Justice to promote the Lesser Peace so that the people of the earth may be relieved from the burden of exorbitant expenditures. This matter is imperative and absolutely essential, inasmuch as hostilities and conflict lie at the root of affliction and calamity.

Second: Languages must be reduced to one common language to be taught in all the schools of the world.

Third: It behoveth man to adhere tenaciously unto that which will promote fellowship, kindness and unity.

Fourth: 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.

Fifth: Special regard must be paid to agriculture. Although it hath been mentioned in the fifth place, unquestionably it precedeth the others....

("Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988/1995 printing), pp. 89-90)

Thou hadst made reference in thy letter to agriculture. On this matter He hath laid down the following universal rule: that it is incumbent upon everyone, even should he be resident in a particular land for no more than a single day, to become engaged in some craft or trade, or agriculture, and that the very pursuit of such a calling is, in the eyes of the one true God, identical with worship. This rule was exemplified by the Bahá'í

community at the time when they were facing exile from 'Iráq, for, while they were making arrangements for their journey, they occupied themselves in cultivating the land; and when they set out, instructions were given for the fruits of their labours to be distributed amongst the friends.

(From a Tablet to an individual believer—translated from the Persian)

From the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

O God! Grant Thy favour, and bestow Thy blessing. Vouchsafe Thy grace, and give a portion of Thy bounty. Enable these men to witness during this year the fulfilment of their hopes. Send down Thy heavenly rain, and provide Thy plenteousness and abundance. Thou art the Powerful, the Mighty.

(From a Tablet to a group of believers—translated from the Persian)

Thy letter was received. Praise be to God it imparted the good news of thy health and safety and indicated that thou art ready to enter an agricultural school. This is highly suitable. Strive as much as possible to become proficient in the science of agriculture, for in accordance with the divine teachings the acquisition of sciences and the perfection of arts are considered acts of worship. If a man engageth with all his power in the acquisition of a science or in the perfection of an art, it is as if he has been worshipping God in churches and temples. Thus as thou enterest a school of agriculture and strivest in the acquisition of that science thou art day and night engaged in acts of worship—acts that are accepted at the threshold of the Almighty. What bounty greater than this, that science should be considered as an act of worship and art as service to the Kingdom of God.

(“Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá” (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997) no. 126)

Commerce, agriculture and industry should not, in truth, be a bar to service of the One True God. Indeed, such occupations are most potent instruments and clear proofs for the manifestation of the evidences of one's piety, of one's trustworthiness and of the virtues of the All-Merciful Lord.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

...all the members of the human family, whether peoples or governments, cities or villages, have become increasingly interdependent. For none is self-sufficiency any longer possible, inasmuch as political ties unite all peoples and nations, and the bonds of trade and industry, of agriculture and education, are being strengthened every day. Hence the unity of all mankind can in this day be achieved....

(Cited in Shoghi Effendi's "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), p. 39)

...Bahá'u'lláh set forth principles of guidance and teaching for economic readjustment. Regulations were revealed by Him which ensure the welfare of the commonwealth. As the rich man enjoys his life surrounded by ease and luxuries, so the poor man must, likewise, have a home and be provided with sustenance and comforts commensurate with his needs. This readjustment of the social economy is of the greatest importance inasmuch as it ensures the stability of the world of humanity; and until it is effected, happiness and prosperity are impossible.

("The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982/1995 printing), pp. 181-82)

His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh has given instructions regarding every one of the questions confronting humanity. He has given teachings and instructions with regard to every one of the problems with which man struggles. Among them are (the teachings) concerning the question of economics that all the members of the body politic may enjoy through the working out of this solution the greatest happiness, welfare and comfort without any harm or injury attacking the general order of things. Thereby no difference or dissension will occur. No sedition or contention will take place. The solution is this:

First and foremost is the principle that to all the members of the body politic shall be given the greatest achievements of the world of humanity. Each one shall have the utmost welfare and well-being. To solve this problem we must begin with the farmer; there will we lay a foundation for system and order because the peasant class and the agricultural class exceed other classes in the importance of their service. In every village there must be established a general storehouse which will have a number of revenues.

The first revenue will be that of the tenths or tithes.

The second revenue (will be derived) from the animals.

The third revenue, from the minerals, that is to say, every mine prospected or discovered, a third thereof will go to this vast storehouse.

The fourth is this: whosoever dies without leaving any heirs all his heritage will go to the general storehouse.

Fifth, if any treasures shall be found on the land they should be devoted to this storehouse.

All these revenues will be assembled in this storehouse.

As to the first, the tenths or tithes: we will consider a farmer, one of the peasants. We will look into his income. We will find out, for instance, what is his annual revenue and also what are his expenditures. Now, if his income be equal to his expenditure, from such a farmer nothing whatever will be taken. That is, he will not be subjected to taxation of any sort, needing as he does all his income. Another farmer may have expenses running up to one thousand dollars we will say, and his income is two thousand dollars. From such an one a tenth will be required, because he has a surplus. But if his income be ten thousand dollars and his expenses one thousand dollars or his income twenty thousand dollars, he will have to pay as taxes, one-fourth. If his income be one hundred thousand dollars and his expenses five thousand, one-third will he have to pay because he has still a surplus, since his expenses are five thousand and his income one hundred thousand. If

he pays, say, thirty-five thousand dollars, in addition to the expenditure of five thousand he still has sixty thousand left. But if his expenses be ten thousand and his income two hundred thousand then he must give an even half because ninety thousand will be in that case the sum remaining. Such a scale as this will determine allotment of taxes. All the income from such revenues will go to this general storehouse.

Then there must be considered such emergencies as follows: a certain farmer whose expenses run up to ten thousand dollars and whose income is only five thousand, he will receive necessary expenses from this storehouse. Five thousand dollars will be allotted to him so he will not be in need.

Then the orphans will be looked after all of whose expenses will be taken care of. The cripples in the village—all their expenses will be looked after. The poor in the village—their necessary expenses will be defrayed. And other members who for valid reasons are incapacitated—the blind, the old, the deaf—their comfort must be looked after. In the village no one will remain in need or in want. All will live in the utmost comfort and welfare. Yet no schism will assail the general order of the body politic.

Hence the expenses or expenditures of the general storehouse are now made clear and its activities made manifest. The income of this general storehouse has been shown. Certain trustees will be elected by the people in a given village to look after these transactions. The farmers will be taken care of and if after all these expenses are defrayed any surplus is found in the storehouse it must be transferred to the National Treasury.

This system is all thus ordered so that in the village the very poor will be comfortable, the orphans will live happily and well; in a word, no one will be left destitute. All the individual members of the body politic will thus live comfortably and well.

For larger cities, naturally, there will be a system on a larger scale. Were I to go into that solution the details thereof would be very lengthy.

The result of this (system) will be that each individual member of the body politic will live most comfortably and happily under obligation to no one. Nevertheless, there will be preservation of degrees because in the world of humanity there must needs be degrees. The body politic may well be likened to an army. In this army there must be a general, there must be a sergeant, there must be a marshal, there must be the infantry; but all must enjoy the greatest comfort and welfare.

("Star of the West", vol. 13, December 1922, no. 9, pp. 228-29; and "Foundations of World Unity" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1972/1979 printing), pp. 39-41)

The fundamental basis of the community is agriculture,—tillage of the soil.

("Star of the West", vol. 4, June 1913, no. 6, p. 103)

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 labourer 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....

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.

("The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982/1995 printing), pp. 216–17)

As to the economic question, it hath been stated briefly and the basis of it hath been set forth, while its details are to be fixed by the Universal House of Justice. The board of the house of finance (storehouse) will direct in every village the revenues of the house, such as tithes, tax on animals, etc. In every village a storehouse and an officer in charge are to be provided, while the notables of the village gather and form a board and to this board and officer the direction of the affairs of the village are entrusted. They take charge of all questions pertaining to the village, and the revenues of the storehouse such as tithes, tax on animals and other revenues are gathered in it and are given out for necessary expenditures.

As to the doubling of tithes in accordance with the size of revenues and of crops: it is not possible to double as a fixed proportion the amount of tithes to be paid when the revenues are doubled. For instance, a man whose revenues amount to 1,000 dollars and whose expenses are 500 dollars, should pay one tenth of his revenues, i.e. 100 dollars. When his revenues reach 2,000 dollars and his expenses remain 500 dollars, he cannot pay two tenths of his revenues, i.e. 400 dollars, for it would be difficult. At most he can pay 1.5 tenths, which is 300 dollars. If his revenues rise to 4,000 dollars, he can give 1.75 tenths of his revenues, i.e. 700 dollars, and if his revenues are 8,000 dollars, he can pay two tenths, i.e. 1,600 dollars, and if they still rise to 16,000 dollars, he can pay one fourth (2.5 tenths), i.e. 4,000 dollars. If they still rise to 32,000 dollars and the tithes to be taken from him were to be fixed at a definite ratio (i.e. doubled every time), they would constitute a huge amount which he would not be able to pay, as the preparation of the harvest entails many expenditures. Therefore, for a revenue of 16,000 dollars, one fourth is taken from him (two and a half tenths). In short the division and the fixing of everyone's share are to be arranged in accordance with the time and place by the House

of Justice.

What hath been stated is only an example and this doth not mean that it should be enforced exactly in this manner. The principle is that as a man's wealth increaseth, his financial obligations should proportionately increase, so that vast riches may not be accumulated in one place. In this manner justice may be exercised between the rich and the poor. Thus there will not be, on one hand, a man owning a thousand million and, on the other, a poor man in need of his necessary subsistence. As to the revenues of the storehouse, the House of Justice must strive by every means possible to increase that amount, i.e. by every just means. Likewise with the expenditures; if anything is deemed necessary for the village such as the providing of hygienic measures, the House of Justice must also make all the necessary provisions. In short, if it is done in this manner in the village, the orphans, the disabled and the poor will secure the means of subsistence; education will be fostered, and the adoption of hygienic measures will become universal. These are only the preliminary principles; the House of Justice will arrange and widen them in accordance with time and place.

(From a Tablet dated 25 July 1919 to an individual believer—Provisional translation from the Persian)

The question of economics must commence with the farmer and then be extended to the other classes inasmuch as the number of farmers is far greater than all other classes. Therefore, it is fitting to begin with the farmer in matters related to economics for the farmer is the first active agent in human society. In brief, from among the wise men in every village a board should be set up and the affairs of that village should be under the control of that board. Likewise a general storehouse should be founded with the appointment of a secretary. At the time of the harvest, under the direction of that board, a certain percentage of the entire harvest should be appropriated for the storehouse.

The storehouse has seven revenues: Tithes, taxes on animals, property without an heir, all lost objects found whose owners cannot be traced, one third of all treasure-trove, one third of the produce of all mines, and voluntary contributions.

This storehouse also has seven expenditures:

1. General running expenses of the storehouse, such as the salary of the secretary and the administration of public health.
2. Tithes to the government.
3. Taxes on animals to the government.
4. Costs of running an orphanage.
5. Costs of running a home for the incapacitated.
6. Costs of running a school.
7. Payment of subsidies to provide needed support of the poor.

The first revenue is the tithes. It should be collected as follows: If, for instance, the income of a person is five hundred dollars and his necessary expenses are the same, no tithes will be collected from him. If another's expenses are five hundred dollars while his income is one thousand dollars, one tenth will be taken from him, for he hath more than his needs; if he giveth one tenth of the surplus, his livelihood will not be adversely

affected. If another's expenses are one thousand dollars, and his income is five thousand dollars, as he hath four thousand dollars surplus he will be required to give one and a half tenths. If another person hath necessary expenses of one thousand dollars, but his income is ten thousand dollars, from him two tenths will be required for his surplus represents a large sum. But if the necessary expenses of another person are four or five thousand dollars, and his income one hundred thousand, one fourth will be required from him. On the other hand, should a person's income be two hundred, but his needs absolutely essential for his livelihood be five hundred dollars, and provided he hath not been remiss in his work or his farm hath not been blessed with a harvest, such a one must receive help from the general storehouse so that he may not remain in need and may live in comfort.

A certain amount must be put aside from the general storehouse for the orphans of the village and a certain sum for the incapacitated. A certain amount must be provided from this storehouse for those who are needy and incapable of earning a livelihood, and a certain amount for the village's system of education. And, a certain amount must be set aside for the administration of public health. If anything is left in the storehouse, that must be transferred to the general treasury of the nation for national expenditures.

(From a Tablet dated 4 October 1912 to an individual believer—translated from the Persian)

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.

(“The Secret of Divine Civilization” (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990/1994 printing), pp. 24–25)

...a plan whereby all the individual members of society may enjoy the utmost comfort and welfare. The degrees of society must be preserved. The farmer will continue to till the soil, the artist pursue his art, the banker to finance the nations. An army has need of its general, captain, and private soldiers. The degrees varying with the pursuits are essential. But in this Bahá'í plan there is no class hatred. Each is to be protected and each individual member of the body politic is to live in the greatest comfort and happiness. Work is to be provided for all and there will be no needy ones seen in the streets.

(“The Bahá'í Magazine” (formerly “Star of the West”), vol. 22, April 1981, no. 1, p. 3)

O seeker after confirmation!

Since thy dear child is taking his examinations, my fervent wish at the divine Threshold is that, by the grace and favour of God, he may meet with success, and that in the future he may go on to study agriculture and master its various branches, practical and theoretical. Agriculture is a noble science and, should thy son become proficient in this field, he will become a means of providing for the comfort of untold numbers of people.

(From a Tablet to an individual believer—translated from the Persian)

From the writings of Shoghi Effendi

[Bahá'u'lláh] urges that special regard be paid to the interests of agriculture....

("God Passes By" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987/1995 printing), p. 219)

DESIRE TO EXPRESS TO HIS MAJESTY THE KING OR HIS MAJESTY'S REPRESENTATIVE AS WELL AS TO ASSEMBLED GUESTS MY HOPE WORK OF MEN OF TREES SO IMPORTANT FOR PROTECTION PHYSICAL WORLD AND HERITAGE FUTURE GENERATIONS MAY BE RICHLY BLESSED AND AT SAME TIME CONSTITUTE YET ANOTHER FORCE WORKING FOR PEACE AND BROTHERHOOD IN THIS SORELY TRIED DIVIDED WORLD.

(Cable dated 23 May 1951 to New Earth Luncheon, London)

DESIRE EXPRESS ADMIRATION YOUR ESSENTIALLY HUMANITARIAN WORK NOBLE OBJECTIVE RECLAIM DESERTS SPIRIT COOPERATION FOSTERED BY YOUR UNDERTAKINGS WISH YOU EVERY SUCCESS.

(Cable dated 21 May 1956 to World Forestry Charter Luncheon, London)

DELIGHTED STEADY PROGRESS ACHIEVED MEN OF THE TREES WORLD OVER ESPECIALLY PLANS RECLAMATION DESERT AREAS AFRICA...

(Cable dated 22 May 1957 to World Forestry Charter Luncheon, London)

From letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to individual believers

He was much interested in your ideas over the solution of the economic problem in the West—a question that must have meant a good deal of thought to many enlightened people—and he is delighted to see in your thoughts much that runs along the same general lines as the principles laid out by the Movement. 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 you will find in different compilations, the principles upon 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.

(28 October 1927)

As to your fourth question, Shoghi Effendi believes that it is preferable not to confuse the methods explained by the Master with present systems. They may have many resemblances but also many points of difference. Moreover these general statements we have in the teachings have to be explained and applied by the House of Justice before we can really appreciate their significance.

(21 October 1932)

As regards your suggestion to write a book on Bahá'í economics: the Guardian has no objection to your writing such a work, but he feels that the task is a tremendously difficult one, especially in view of the fact that there are almost no definite teachings on technical economics as it is known and taught today. The Bahá'í Writings give us only a few principles which can guide future Bahá'í economists in their efforts to bring about the necessary readjustments in the economic and industrial system.

(30 June 1936)

Regarding your questions concerning the Bahá'í attitude on various economic problems, such as the problem of ownership, control and distribution of capital, and of other means of production, the problem of trusts and monopolies, and such economic experiments as social co-operatives: the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá do not provide specific and detailed solutions to all such economic questions, which mostly pertain to the domain of technical economics, and as such do not concern directly the Cause. True, there are certain guiding principles in Bahá'í Sacred Writings on the subject of economics, but these do by no means cover the whole field of theoretical and applied economics, and are mostly intended to guide future Bahá'í economic writers and technicians to evolve an economic system which would function in full conformity with the spirit, and the exact provisions of the Cause on this and similar subjects. The International House of Justice will have, in consultation with economic experts, to assist in the formulation and evolution of the Bahá'í economic system of the future. One thing, however, is certain: that the Cause neither accepts the theories of the Capitalistic economics in full, nor can it agree with the Marxists and Communists in their repudiation of the principle of private ownership and of this vital sacred right of the individual.

(10 June 1939)

He has noted with keen interest the plan you have conceived for the intensification of

agricultural production with the view of meeting any possible food shortage in these times of war. While he is fully aware of the need for putting forth such a plan, and deeply appreciative as he feels of the noble motives that have prompted you to approach this problem, he nevertheless thinks that the time is not yet ripe for the believers, as a body, to undertake social and economic experiments of such character and scope. Neither the material resources at their disposal, nor their numerical strength are sufficient to give them any reasonable hope of embarking successfully upon a project of this kind.

(6 November 1940)
