

A Few Excerpts for FHU Reflection

As to racial prejudice, the corrosion of which, for well-nigh a century, has bitten into the fiber, and attacked the whole social structure of American society, it **should be regarded as constituting the most vital and challenging issue** confronting the Bahá'í community at the present stage of its evolution.

- The **ceaseless exertions** which this issue of paramount importance **calls for**,
- the **sacrifices** it **must impose**,
- the **care** and **vigilance** it **demand**,
- the **moral courage** and **fortitude** it **requires**,
- the **tact** and **sympathy** it **necessitates**,

invest this problem, which the American believers are still far from having satisfactorily resolved, **with an urgency and importance that cannot be overestimated.**

- *White and Negro,*
- *high and low,*
- *young and old,*
- *whether newly converted to the Faith or not,*
- *all who stand identified with it must participate in, and lend their assistance, each according to his or her **capacity, experience, and opportunities**, to the common task of*
 1. **fulfilling the instructions,**
 2. **realizing the hopes,** and
 3. **following the example,** of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Whether colored or noncolored, neither race has the right, or can conscientiously claim, to be regarded

- as **absolved from such an obligation,**
- as **having realized such hopes,** or
- **having faithfully followed such an example.**

A long and thorny road, beset with pitfalls, still remains untraveled, both by the white and the Negro exponents of the redeeming Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. On the distance they cover, and the manner in which they travel that road, must depend, to an extent which few among them can imagine, the operation of those intangible influences which are indispensable to the spiritual triumph of the American believers and the material success of their newly launched enterprise. [Advent of Divine Justice]

"In the 28 December message, the House of Justice explained that

“A small community, whose members are

- **united** by their **shared beliefs**,
- **characterized** by their **high ideals**,
- **proficient** in **managing their affairs and tending to their needs**, and perhaps
- **engaged** in **several humanitarian projects**—a community such as this,
- **prospering but at a comfortable distance from the reality experienced by the masses of humanity**,

can never hope to serve as a pattern for restructuring the whole of society.”

1. **Even if** such a community **were to focus the entirety of its resources on the problem of racial prejudice**,
2. **even if** it **were able to heal itself to some extent of that cancerous affliction**,

In the face of such a monumental social challenge the impact would be inconsequential.

Therefore, the friends **must**

- effectively **assess the forces at work** in their society and,
- **beginning in neighborhoods** and clusters,
- **contribute their share** to the process of
 - learning and
 - systematization which,
- as their **numbers, knowledge, and influence** grow,
 - **will transform their**
 - **lives,**
 - **families, and**
 - **communities.**

Only if

- the efforts to eradicate the bane of prejudice are coherent with the full range of the community’s affairs,

only if

- they arise naturally within the systematic pattern of
 - **expansion,**
 - **community building, and**
 - **involvement with society,**

will the American believers

- **expand their capacity**, year after year and decade after decade, to
- **make their mark on their community and society** and
- **contribute to the high aim set for the Bahá’ís by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá** to eliminate racial prejudice from the face of the earth.”

An Appreciative Inquiry: Share a story about a time when you and/or your community members “got it right” because they were ...

1. **united by their shared beliefs? Around....**
 - **Interracial fellowship (vital, paramount, urgent, important)**
 - *A rectitude of conduct*
 - *A chaste and holy life*
 - *Core activities (study circles, children’s classes, jr. youth, youth)*
 - **How to build vibrant communities**
 - **How to participate in the discourses of society**
 - *Expansion*
 - *Consolidation*
 - *Social action*
2. **characterized** by their *high ideals*?
3. **proficient** in *managing its affairs*
4. **Engaged** in *several humanitarian projects*
5. **Prospering** while closely familiar with the reality **experienced by the masses of humanity**

To disassociate the administrative principles of the Cause from the purely spiritual and humanitarian teachings would be tantamount to

- the **mutilation** of the body,
- a **separation** that can only result in
- the **disintegration** of its component parts, and
- the **extinction** of the Faith itself. (Book 8: Section 25)

What should be apparent is that, if the Administrative Order is to serve as a pattern for future society, then the community within which it is developing must not only

- **acquire capacity** to address increasingly complex material and spiritual requirements but also
- **become larger** and larger in size.

How could it be otherwise? A small community, whose members are united by their shared beliefs, characterized by their high ideals, proficient in managing their affairs and tending to their needs, and perhaps engaged in several humanitarian projects—a community such as this, prospering but at a comfortable distance from the reality experienced by the masses of humanity, can never hope to serve as a pattern for restructuring the whole of society.

That the worldwide Bahá'í community has managed to avert the dangers of complacency is a source of abiding joy to us. Indeed, the community has well in hand its expansion and consolidation. Yet, to administer the affairs of teeming numbers in villages and cities around the globe—to raise aloft the standard of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order for all to see—is still a distant goal.

Therein, then, lies the challenge that must be faced by those in the forefront of the learning process which will continue to advance over the course of the next Plan.

Wherever an intensive programme of growth is established,

1. **let the friends spare no effort** to increase the level of participation.
2. **Let them strain every nerve** to ensure that the system which they have so laboriously erected does not close in on itself but progressively expands to embrace more and more people.
3. **Let them not lose sight** of the remarkable receptivity they found—nay, the sense of eager expectation that awaited them—as they gained confidence in their ability to interact with people of all walks of life and converse with them about the Person of Bahá'u'lláh and His Revelation.
4. **Let them hold fast to the conviction** that a direct presentation of the Faith, when carried out at a sufficient level of depth and reinforced by a sound approach to consolidation, can bring enduring results. And
5. **let them not forget the lessons of the past** which left no doubt that a relatively small band of active supporters of the Cause, no matter how resourceful, no matter how consecrated, cannot attend to the needs of communities comprising hundreds, much less thousands, of men, women and children.

...**On the one hand**, the high standard of conduct inculcated by Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation

- can admit no compromise; it
- can, in no wise, be lowered, and all
- must fix their gaze on its lofty heights.

On the other, it must be acknowledged that, as human beings,

- we are far from perfect;
- what is expected of everyone is sincere daily effort.
- Self-righteousness is to be eschewed.

Apart from the spiritual requisites of a sanctified Bahá'í life,

1. there are **habits of thought** that affect the unfoldment of the global Plan, and their **development has to be encouraged at the level of culture.**
2. There are **tendencies**, as well, that need to be gradually overcome.
 - Many of these **tendencies are reinforced by approaches prevalent in society** at large, which, not altogether unreasonably, enter into Bahá'í activity.
3. The **magnitude of the challenge** facing the friends in this respect is not lost on us.

4. They are called upon to become increasingly involved in the life of society,
 - **benefiting** from its educational programmes,
 - **excelling** in its trades and professions,
 - **learning** to employ well its tools, and
 - **applying** themselves to the advancement of its arts and sciences.
5. At the same time, they are never to lose sight of the aim of the Faith to effect a transformation of society, **remoulding its institutions and processes, on a scale never before witnessed.**
6. To this end, they must remain acutely aware of the inadequacies of current modes of thinking and doing—this,
 - **without feeling** the least degree of **superiority**,
 - **without assuming** an air of **secrecy** or **aloofness**, and
 - **without adopting** an unnecessarily **critical stance towards society**

It is heartening to note that the friends are approaching the study of the messages of the Universal House of Justice related to the Plan with such diligence. The level of discussion generated as they strive to put into practice the guidance received, and to learn from experience, is impressive.

We cannot help noticing, however, that achievements tend to be more enduring in those regions where the friends **strive to understand the totality of the vision conveyed** in the messages, while difficulties often arise when phrases and sentences are taken out of context and viewed as isolated fragments.

The institutions and agencies of the Faith should help the believers

- to **analyse but not reduce**,
- to **ponder meaning but not dwell on words**,
- to **identify distinct areas of action but not compartmentalize**.

We realize that this is no small task. Society speaks more and more in slogans. We hope that the habits the friends are forming in study circles

- to **work with full and complex thoughts** and
- to **achieve understanding** will be extended to various spheres of activity.

Closely related to the habit of reducing an entire theme into one or two appealing phrases is the **tendency to perceive dichotomies, where, in fact, there are none. It is essential that ideas forming part of a cohesive whole not be held in opposition to one another.** In a letter written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi warned:

“We must take the teachings as a great, balanced whole, not seek out and oppose to each other two strong statements that have different meanings; somewhere in between, there are links uniting the two.”

How encouraged we have been to note that many of the misunderstandings of the past have fallen away as appreciation for the provisions of the Plan has grown.

1. **Expansion and consolidation**,
2. **individual action** and
3. **collective campaigns**,

4. **refinement of the inner character** and
5. **consecration to selfless service**—the harmonious relationship between these facets of Bahá'í life is now readily acknowledged.

*It brings us equal pleasure to know that the friends are on their guard, lest new false dichotomies be allowed to pervade their thinking. **They are well aware that the diverse elements of a programme of growth are complementary.***

The tendency to see activities, and the agencies that support them, in competition with one another, a tendency so common in society at large, is being avoided by the community.

Finally, a significant advance in culture, one which we have followed with particular interest, is marked by the rise in capacity to think in terms of process. That, from the outset, the **believers have been asked to be ever conscious of the broad processes that define their work** is apparent from a careful reading of even the earliest communications of the Guardian related to the first national plans of the Faith.

However, in a world focused increasingly on the promotion of events, or at best projects, with a mindset that derives satisfaction from the sense of expectation and excitement they generate, **maintaining the level of dedication required for long-term action demands considerable effort.**

The expansion and consolidation of the Bahá'í community encompasses a number of interacting processes, each of which contributes its share to the movement of humanity towards Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a new World Order.

The lines of action associated with any given process provide

- for the organization of **occasional events**,
- and **from time to time**, activities take the shape of a project
- with a **clear beginning and a definite end.**

If, however, events are imposed on the natural unfolding of a process, they will disrupt its sound evolution.

If the projects undertaken in a cluster are not made subordinate to the explicit needs of the processes unfolding there, they will yield little fruit.

To understand the nature of the interacting processes that, in their totality, engender the expansion and consolidation of the Faith is vital to the successful execution of the Plan. In your efforts to further such understanding, you and your auxiliaries are encouraged to **bear in mind a concept that lies at the foundation of the current global enterprise and, indeed, at the very heart of every stage of the Divine Plan, namely, that progress is achieved through the development of three participants—**

1. the **individual**,
2. the **institutions**, and
3. the **community.**

Throughout human history, interactions among these three have been fraught with difficulties at every turn, with

- the individual *clamouring for freedom*,
- the institution *demanding submission*, and
- the community *claiming precedence*.

Every society has defined, in one way or another, the relationships that bind the three, giving rise to **periods of stability, interwoven with turmoil**. Today, in this age of transition, as humanity struggles to attain its collective maturity, such relationships—nay, the very conception

- of the individual,
- of social institutions, and
- of the community

—continue to be assailed by crises too numerous to count.

The worldwide **crisis of authority** provides proof enough.

- **So grievous** have been its **abuses**, and
- **so deep** the **suspicion** and **resentment** it now arouses, that the world is becoming increasingly ungovernable—a **situation made all the more perilous by the weakening of community ties**.

Every follower of Bahá'u'lláh knows well that the purpose of His Revelation is to bring into being a new creation. No sooner had “*the First Call gone forth from His lips than the whole creation was revolutionized, and all that are in the heavens and all that are on earth were stirred to the depths.*”

The individual, the institutions, and the community—the three protagonists in the Divine Plan—

1. *are being shaped under the direct influence of His Revelation*, and
2. a **new conception** of each, appropriate for a humanity that has come of age, is **emerging**.
3. The *relationships that bind them, too, are undergoing a profound transformation, bringing into the realm of existence civilization-building powers which can only be released through conformity with His decree.*

At a fundamental level these relationships are characterized by **cooperation and reciprocity, manifestations of the interconnectedness** that governs the universe.

So it is that the individual,

- with no regard for “*personal benefits and selfish advantages*,”
- comes to see him- or herself as “*one of the servants of God, the All-Possessing*,”
- whose only desire is to carry out His laws.

So it is that the friends come to recognize

1. **that** “*wealth of sentiment, abundance of good-will and effort*” **are of little avail when their flow is not directed along proper channels,**
2. **that** “*the unfettered freedom of the individual should be tempered with mutual consultation and sacrifice,*” and
3. **that** “*the spirit of initiative and enterprise should be reinforced by a deeper realization of the supreme necessity for concerted action and a fuller devotion to the common weal.*” And so it is
4. **that** all come to discern with ease those areas of activity in which the individual can best exercise initiative and those which fall to the institutions alone. “*With heart and soul*”, the friends follow the directives of their institutions, so
5. **that**, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, “*things may be properly ordered and well arranged*”.

This, of course, is not a blind obedience; it is an obedience that marks the emergence of a mature human race which grasps the implications of a system as far-reaching as Bahá’u’lláh’s new World Order.

And those who are called upon from among the ranks of such enkindled souls to serve on the institutions of that mighty system understand well the Guardian’s words **that**

1. “***their function is not to dictate***, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the friends whom they represent.”
2. “***Never***” would they be “***led to suppose that they are***
 - ***the central ornaments of the body of the Cause,***
 - ***intrinsically superior to others in capacity or merit, and***
 - ***sole promoters of its teachings and principles.***”
3. “***With extreme humility,***” they approach their tasks and “***endeavour, by***
 - ***their open-mindedness,***
 - ***their high sense of justice and duty,***
 - ***their candour,***
 - ***their modesty,***
 - ***their entire devotion to the welfare and interests*** of
 - ***the friends,***
 - ***the Cause,*** and
 - ***humanity,***

4. **to win**, not only
 - **the confidence** and
 - **the genuine support and respect** of those whom they serve, but also
 - **their esteem and real affection.**”

5. Within the environment thus created, **institutions invested with authority see themselves as instruments for**
 - **nurturing human potential,**
 - **ensuring its unfoldment along avenues productive and meritorious.**

Composed of such individuals and such institutions, the community of the Greatest Name becomes that spiritually charged arena in which powers are multiplied in unified action. It is of this community that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes:

“When any souls grow to be true believers,

- *they will attain a spiritual relationship with one another,*
- *and show forth a tenderness which is not of this world.*
- *They will, all of them, become elated from a draught of divine love, and that union of theirs, that connection,*
- *will also abide forever.*
- *Souls, that is, who will*
 - *consign their own selves to oblivion,*
 - *strip from themselves the defects of humankind, and*
 - *unchain themselves from human bondage,*
- *will beyond any doubt be illumined with the heavenly splendours of oneness, and*
- *will all attain unto real union in the world that dieth not.”*

As more and more receptive souls embrace the Cause of God and throw in their lot with those already participating in the global enterprise under way, the development and activity of **the individual, the institutions, and the community are sure to receive a mighty thrust forward.**

May a bewildered humanity see in the **relationships being forged among these three protagonists by the followers of Bahá’u’lláh a pattern of collective life that will propel it towards its high destiny.** This is our ardent prayer in the Holy Shrines.
[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

(28 December 2010 – To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)