

THE PROSPERITY OF HUMANKIND

Bahá'í International Community

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Part VI – Power and Authority

in simplified language

Prosperity of Humankind - 7

Power

Transforming society on this scale raises both the question of the power to make this change, and who or what authority can use that power. With the rapid integration of the planet and its people, both of these familiar terms need to be redefined.

Power

Throughout history power has largely meant the advantage enjoyed by persons or groups. Often, this is just some means to be used against others. Power in this way has become part of our culture of division and conflict for several thousand years, regardless of the social, religious, or political groups in power in different ages and parts of the world. In general, power has been something held by individuals, factions, peoples, classes, and nations, mostly by men rather than women. Those who hold power are able to acquire, to surpass, to dominate, to resist, to win.

Power in history

The historical use of power has both ruined and set back human well-being, and made great advances in civilization. We can appreciate the benefits and recognise the setbacks, as well as the limits in the behaviour that has produced both. Habits and attitudes related to the use of power in the past are no longer effective.

Power today

Today, when most pressing problems are global, we cannot see power as advantage to some people, which is wrong in theory and of no practical use to the social and economic development of the planet. Those who still try to use power in this way are blocked and frustrated. The traditional, competitive use of power is as useless to the needs of humanity's future as the technologies of railways would be to launching satellites into orbit.

Power of truth

In the same way, the human race in its maturity must give up its inherited understanding and use of power. This is possible because humanity has always been able to think of power in other ways to support its hopes. People everywhere, down the ages, have found a wide range of creative resources within themselves. The best example is the power of truth itself, an agent of change leading to great advances in our philosophical, religious, artistic, and scientific experience.

Power of unity

A strong character is another means of mobilising a great human response, as is the influence of example, whether in the lives of individuals or in human societies. Imagine how great will be the force generated by the achievement of unity, an influence "*so powerful*", in Bahá'u'lláh's words, "*that it can illuminate the whole Earth.*"

Authority

The institutions of society will be able to draw on and direct the potential in human consciousness when authority is exercised by applying principles that are in the interest of a rapidly maturing human race.

Authority

Such principles include the obligation of those in authority to win the confidence, respect, and genuine support of those they govern; to consult openly and fully with all who are affected by their decisions; to assess objectively the real needs and hopes of the communities they serve; to benefit from scientific and moral progress to make appropriate use of the community's resources, including the energies of its members.

Authority

The most important principle of effective authority is building and maintaining unity among the members of a society and the members of its administrative institutions. Also important is the commitment to the search for justice in all matters.



Newly elected Universal House of Justice 1963

Democracy

Such principles can only be applied within a culture that is democratic in spirit and method. This does not mean the partisan form of democracy with parties in conflict which, despite past contributions to human progress, has led today to cynicism, apathy, and corruption.

Democracy

In selecting decision-makers, society does not need and is not well served by the politics of nominations, candidates, electioneering, and solicitation. As people become educated and see that their real development interests are being served, they can adopt electoral procedures to improve the selection of their decision-making bodies.

Welfare of all humankind

As humanity becomes more integrated, those who are thus selected will have to see all their efforts in a global perspective. At both the national and local levels, the elected governors of human affairs should, in Bahá'u'lláh's view, consider themselves responsible for the welfare of all of humankind.



Seat of the Universal House of Justice, Haifa