

The Environment

Bahá'í Sources for Discourse
Ecology and Climate Change

Participating in Public Discourse

Learning about the Bahá'í Faith

Bahá'í Class – Discourse 3

The laws of nature

This nature is subjected to an absolute organization, to determined laws, to a complete order and to a finished design, from which it will never depart - to such a degree, indeed, that if you look carefully and with keen sight, from the smallest invisible atom up to such large bodies of the world of existence as the globe of the sun or the other great stars and luminous spheres, whether you regard their arrangement, their composition, their form or their movement, you will find that all are in the highest degree of organization....

Ecological principles

The innumerable created things that are found in the world of existence - be they man, animal, plant, or mineral - must each be composed of elements. There is no doubt that the completeness seen in each and every thing arises, by divine creation, from the component elements, their appropriate combination, their proportionate measure, the manner of their composition, and the influence of other created things. For all beings are linked together like a chain; and mutual aid, assistance, and interaction are among their intrinsic properties and are the cause of their formation, development and growth.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, Chpt. 46, p. 205)



Ecological interdependence

Consider for instance how one group of created things constituteth the vegetable kingdom, and another the animal kingdom. Each of these two maketh use of certain elements in the air on which its own life dependeth, while each increaseth the quantity of such elements as are essential for the life of the other. In other words, the growth and development of the vegetable world is impossible without the existence of the animal kingdom, and the maintenance of animal life is inconceivable without the co-operation of the vegetable kingdom.

Ecological interdependence

Of like kind are the relationships that exist among all created things. Hence it was stated that co-operation and reciprocity are essential properties which are inherent in the unified system of the world of existence, and without which the entire creation would be reduced to nothingness.

Higher orders of complexity

In surveying the vast range of creation thou shalt perceive that the higher a kingdom of created things is on the arc of ascent, the more conspicuous are the signs and evidences of the truth that co-operation and reciprocity at the level of a higher order are greater than those that exist at the level of a lower order. For example, the evident signs of this fundamental reality are more discernible in the vegetable kingdom than in the mineral, and still more manifest in the animal world than in the vegetable.

Re-establishing an
ecological balance



The elements and lower organisms are synchronized in the great plan of life. Shall man, infinitely above them in degree, be antagonistic and a destroyer of that perfection?

('Abdu'l-Bahá, talk at Leland Stanford Junior University, Palo Alto, California, 8 October 1912. Promulgation of Universal Peace. Wilmette, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982. p. 350)

The Palo Alto

THE PALO ALTO TRIBUNE IS MERGED WITH THE PALO ALTAN

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Abdul Baha, the Bahai Prophet, Speaks at Stanford University

A great assembly of students and teachers crowd the auditorium to hear the Bahai Prophet of Persia expound the doctrine of a new day for Universal Brotherhood International Peace and Religious Unity

Oriental Savant with Entourage of Twenty-nine Persons Spent the Day at Stanford University and Are Entertained in Palo Alto

A crowded Assembly Hall, holding nearly two thousand people, awaited with eager expectancy the appearance last Tuesday morning, of Abdul Baha, Abbas Effendi, the world leader of the Bahai movement. The venerable prophet, with his long gray beard and Persian cloak and turban, gave a true impression of the reincarnation of the Far Eastern prophet of old. He spoke in Persian, and his remarks were translated by Dr. Ameen Fareed, a graduate of the University of Illinois and also of Johns Hopkins University.

Abdul Baha is revolutionizing the religion of Asia, bringing Mohammedans, Jews and Christians together on the basis of the laws of Moses, which they all ratify. He already has a vast host of followers and has aroused great interest by his present tour of America and England.

A pilgrimage through England and America undertaken by Abdul Baha has created great interest in the Bahai movement. The knowledge of the movement has been brought home to thousands of people who are willing and eager to spread its beneficent teachings. On this far western shore of America the seeds of peace and welfare find fertile ground and abundant fruitage. At Stanford there is a keen interest taken in International.

"For there is neither East nor West, Border nor Breed nor Birth, When two strong men stand face to face,

Though they come from the ends of the earth."

Abdul Baha carries the message of religion and Doctor Jordan carries the message of science, both aiming for one great result. As all men are the children of one God so are they all brothers and we are at the dawning of a new day when the relationship of world fraternity will be seen and recognized.

The prophets of Israel, Moses, Elijah and Christ, are firmly established in the heart and mind of humanity as great teachers who delivered the message of God to the world. They lived and taught in one small country, never getting far away from the place of their nativity. In the case of Moses, who led the children of Israel up out of Egypt to Canaan, a notable journey in its day, would be a slight migration in the modern sense of people accustomed to traverse the globe. Our Savior lived and taught only in Palestine. Yet with all the differences which obtain in the stretch of two thousand years, one feels in the presence of Abdul Baha, that he is a living embodiment of the old patriarchs and prophets. He has accomplished a great journey.



Abdul Baha, the Effendi

Sketch of the Life of Abbas Effendi the "Servant of God" Reprinted from the London Chronicle, Bahaiism and its Prophet

quote Abbas Effendi's own commands, amongst the purposes of the Bahai are—

"To never allow ourselves (alas, for that infinitive!) to speak one unkind word about another; even though that other be our enemy. To rebuke those who speak to us of the faults of others. * * To be truthful, to be hopeful, to be reverent. To be a cause of healing for every sick one; a pleasant water for every thirsty one; a heavenly table for every hungry one; a guide for every seeker; rain for cultivation; a star to every horizon; a light for every lamp; a herald to every yearning one for the kingdom of God."

It is a condition of healthy-minded self-abnegation. There is no enthusiasm of asceticism, no flagellation or self-torturing for the sake of the dreams to come; but a joyous and serviceable self-training to helpfulness and devotion. "Oh, God, protect me from myself!" is the Bahai's prayer.

A Spiritual Pilgrimage.

But the Mystic Way is also to be trodden. This is illustrated by a pilgrimage Mr. Hammond proves an admirable goal, and exponent—through the Seven Valleys. How universal is that mystical, number

kind's unity with that One. That process accomplished, the way for the time becomes lighter, and the feet less weary. The traveler reaches the Valley of Contentment, wherein all things are joyous and beautiful, and the mystic finds his reward of happiness. But there follows the Valley of Astonishment or Perplexity, wherein old appearances are seen as really they are, old ideas are cleared of their errors and prejudice and the truth as it is recognized with such amazement as the child would show had he the wit to wonder at the miracles of life which surround him, to which we of older growth have become blindly accustomed.

Lastly, we reach the Valley of Poverty, wherein we recognize that all the earthly splendor, the tinsel, the tufts, the glories, the honors, and the ornaments of worldly fortune are really an organized make-believe. Here, again, obviously, the spirit of Bahai comes very close to that of Francis.

The principles which govern the Bahai movement are, doubtless, in their details not new. They are, indeed, older than the hills; yet, their application to these noisy, tumultuous times they are new enough. The absolute equality and spiritual

Preserving the ecological balance

For the sustainable economic and social development of all countries, agriculture and the preservation of the ecological balance of the world are fundamental.

(adapted from Universal House of Justice 1985)

Preservation of ecological diversity

Bahá'í Scriptures describe nature as a reflection of the sacred. They teach that nature should be valued and respected, but not worshipped; rather, it should serve humanity's efforts to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. However, in light of the interdependence of all parts of nature, and the importance of evolution and diversity "to the beauty, efficiency and perfection of the whole," every effort should be made to preserve as much as possible the earth's bio-diversity and natural order.



Climate Change

One of the most pressing problems of humanity in the current century is how a growing, rapidly developing, and not yet united global population can, in a just manner, live in harmony with the planet and its finite resources.... The limited availability and inequitable distribution of resources profoundly impact social relations within and between nations in many ways, even to the point of precipitating upheaval and war [and] devastating consequences for the environment.

(Universal House of Justice, letter of 29 November 2017 https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20171129_001)

Climate Change

The question of the impact of climate change... is today a major aspect of this larger problem. The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh directly and indirectly touches on a range of such concerns in a manner that speaks to a harmony between society and the natural world.

(Universal House of Justice, letter of 29 November 2017 https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20171129_001)

Climate Change

On the matter of climate change and other vital issues with profound implications for the common good,... humanity would be best and most effectively served by setting aside partisan disputation, pursuing united action that is informed by the best available scientific evidence and grounded in spiritual principles, and thoughtfully revising action in the light of experience.

(Universal House of Justice, letter of 29 November 2017 https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20171129_001)

Climate Change

While as a fundamental principle Bahá'ís do not engage in partisan political affairs, this should not be interpreted in a manner that prevents the friends from full and active participation in the search for solutions to the pressing problems facing humanity. Given that the question of climate change gives rise to social, economic, and environmental concerns across the world, interested Bahá'ís and Bahá'í institutions and agencies have naturally addressed it, whether at local, regional, national, or international levels

Climate Change

Whenever Bahá'ís do participate in activities associated with this topic in the wider society, they can help to contribute to a constructive process by elevating the discourse above partisan concerns and self-interest to strive to achieve unity of thought and action.

(Universal House of Justice, letter of 29 November 2017 https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20171129_001)

Sustainability - valuing nature

As trustees or stewards of the planet's resources and biodiversity, we must:

- ensure sustainability and equity of resource use into distant future
- consider the environmental consequences of development activities
- temper our actions with moderation and humility
- value nature in more than economic terms
- understand the natural world and its role in humanity's collective development both material and spiritual

Sustainability - fundamental responsibility

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.

How can we be more sustainable?

- make our lifestyles more sustainable, resisting the superficial attractions of the materialistic consumer society
- transform our values, giving priority to principles of justice, equity, generosity, moderation, service and unity in diversity
- draw motivation from the moral, ethical and spiritual principles common to the great religious traditions and most recently elaborated in the Bahá'í Faith
- understand how the lack of spirituality is behind the rising frustration, fear, hate, rejection and division threatening social catastrophes
- counter the forces of disintegration with stronger forces of integration, of solidarity and unity, starting with ourselves, our families, and in our own communities