

Work

What occupation?

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse – Economy - Work

Employment

Today the concept of work means employment for pay so as to buy and consume available goods. The system is circular: buying and consuming maintains the production of goods which supports paid employment. Individually, all these activities are essential to the well-being of society. But the overall concept does not work, as seen in the lack of motivation among large numbers of the employed in every land and the demoralisation of the many unemployed.

Work

What the world needs is a new "work ethic". ...only the creative interaction of the scientific and religious systems of knowledge can help us to change our habits and attitudes. While animals depend for their living on whatever they can find in their environment, human beings must express the capacities they are born with through productive work with which they meet their own needs and those of others. In this way they participate in advancing civilization. They fulfil purposes that unite them with others.

(Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, §48)

Work as Service

When 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 way.... Only this perspective will call up from the people of the world the great effort and commitment that the economic tasks ahead will require.

(Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, §48)

Work as Worship

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.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, para.33)

Work as Worship

Waste not your hours in idleness and sloth, but occupy yourselves with what will profit you and others.

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.

Obligation to Work

It is obligatory for men and women to engage in a trade or profession. Bahá'u'lláh exalts “*engagement in such work*” to the “*rank of worship*” of God. The spiritual and practical significance of this law, and the mutual responsibility of the individual and society for its implementation are explained in a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi:

(note in Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, note 56)

Obligation to Work

With reference to Bahá'u'lláh's command concerning the engagement of the believers in some sort of profession: the Teachings are most emphatic on this matter, particularly the statement in the Aqdas to this effect which makes it quite clear that idle people who lack the desire to work can have no place in the new World Order.

(Shoghi Effendi, note in Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, note 56)

Obligation to Work

As a corollary of this principle, Bahá'u'lláh further states that mendicity should not only be discouraged but entirely wiped out from the face of society. It is the duty of those who are in charge of the organization of society to give every individual the opportunity of acquiring the necessary talent in some kind of profession, and also the means of utilizing such a talent, both for its own sake and for the sake of earning the means of his livelihood.

(Shoghi Effendi, note in Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, note 56)

Obligation to Work

Every individual, no matter how handicapped and limited he may be, is under the obligation of engaging in some work or profession, for work, especially when performed in the spirit of service, is according to Bahá'u'lláh a form of worship. It has not only a utilitarian purpose, but has a value in itself, because it draws us nearer to God, and enables us to better grasp His purpose for us in this world. It is obvious, therefore, that the inheritance of wealth cannot make anyone immune from daily work.

(Shoghi Effendi, note in Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, note 56)

Obligation to Work

In one of His Tablets, ‘Abdu’l–Bahá states that *“if a person is incapable of earning a living, is stricken by dire poverty or becometh helpless, then it is incumbent on the wealthy or the Deputies to provide him with a monthly allowance for his subsistence.... By ‘Deputies’ is meant the representatives of the people, that is to say the members of the House of Justice.”*

(note in Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, note 56)

Obligation to Work

In response to a question concerning whether Bahá'u'lláh's injunction requires a wife and mother, as well as her husband, to work for a livelihood, the Universal House of Justice has explained that Bahá'u'lláh's directive is for the friends to be engaged in an occupation which will profit themselves and others, and that homemaking is a highly honorable and responsible work of fundamental importance to society.

(note in Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, note 56)

An Obligation to Work

Many seemingly ordinary economic activities gain new significance because of their potential to add to human welfare and prosperity. *"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-Baha, quoted in Universal House of Justice, To the Baha'is of the World, 1 March 2017)

Retirement

Concerning the retirement from work for individuals who have reached a certain age, Shoghi Effendi in a letter written on his behalf stated that “this is a matter on which the International House of Justice will have to legislate as there are no provisions in the Aqdas concerning it.”

(note in Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, note 56)

Work has a spiritual dimension

The members of the younger generation would do well to ponder the difference between gaining wealth through earnest effort in fields such as agriculture, commerce, the arts, and industry, on the one hand, and, on the other, obtaining it without exertion or through dishonourable means.

Work has a spiritual dimension

Let them consider the consequences of each for the spiritual development of the individual, as well as the progress of society, and ask themselves what possibilities exist for generating income and acquiring wealth that will ensure true happiness through the development of spiritual qualities, such as honesty, trustworthiness, generosity, justice, and consideration for others, and the recognition that material means are to be expended for the betterment of the world.

(Universal House of Justice, To Baha'is in the Cradle of the Faith, 2 April 2010)

Choosing individual vocations

...individual Bahá'ís striving to contribute to society's progress in ways available to them

As a personal response to Bahá'u'lláh's summons to work for the betterment of the world, believers have variously chosen to adopt certain vocations and have sought out opportunities to support the activities of like-minded groups and organizations.

(Universal House of Justice, 30 December 2021, §20)

Meaningful work for youth

The meaningful engagement of young people becomes even more important as urban populations swell and, with them, the increase of slums, rising crime rates, use of drugs, unemployment, breakdown of family structures and social isolation.... Lack of meaningful employment only feeds their hopelessness and frustration.

(Bahá'í International Community, [Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward As One](#), 2008)

Meaningful work

Yet it is not only the quantity but also the quality and meaning of work that needs to be reconsidered. Whether tilling the soil or selling goods, one's work should not be reduced to a means for acquiring more goods or as an expendable cost of production. One's work is the means of developing one's craft, of refining one's character, and contributing to the welfare and progress of society.

(Bahá'í International Community, [Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward As One](#), 2008)



New and emerging careers

- alternative economics, work as service
- eliminating poverty, reducing inequality
- new social structures, institutions, governance
- building unity in local communities, managing migration
- saving the Earth, endangered species, ecosystems
- regeneration, food and agriculture, water, biocapacity
- renewable energy, climate adaptation, loss and damage
- education to enable individual capacity

Work for the environment

One of the pressing concerns of humanity today is how the resources of nature can be utilized in a way that safeguards the health of the environment, and there is a large community of people who are giving attention to this challenge. Some are scientists investigating climate change or searching for means to curb pollution. Others are working to raise consciousness about the effects of present-day society on the natural world. Still others are associated with endeavors aimed at establishing environmentally sound policies.

(based on Ruhi Book 14: Participating in public discourse)