

Preparing for the Future

Living through Challenging Times

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse – Future 2

Beyond Moderation

Shoghi Effendi wrote that Bahá'u'lláh “inculcates the principle of ‘moderation in all things’; declares that whatsoever, be it ‘liberty, civilization and the like,’ ‘passeth beyond the limits of moderation’ must ‘exercise a pernicious influence upon men’; observes that western civilization has gravely perturbed and alarmed the peoples of the world; and predicts that the day is approaching when the ‘flame’ of a civilization ‘carried to excess’ ‘will devour the cities.’”

(Universal House of Justice, 29 December 1988, *Messages 1986-2001*, p.115)

A Twofold Process

A twofold process... can be distinguished, each tending, in its own way and with an accelerated momentum, to bring to a climax the forces that are transforming the face of our planet. The first is essentially an integrating process, while the second is fundamentally disruptive.

(Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p.179)

A Twofold Process

The former, as it steadily evolves, unfolds a System which may well serve as a pattern for that world polity towards which a strangely-disordered world is continually advancing; while the latter, as its disintegrating influence deepens, tends to tear down, with increasing violence, the antiquated barriers that seek to block humanity's progress towards its destined goal.

(Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p.179)

A Twofold Process

The constructive process stands associated with the nascent Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and is the harbinger of the New World Order that Faith must ere long establish. The destructive forces that characterize the other should be identified with a civilization that has refused to answer to the expectation of a new age, and is consequently falling into chaos and decline.

(Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p.179)



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Integration and Disintegration

At its heart, the challenge presented by the interplay of the processes of integration and disintegration is the challenge of holding fast to Bahá'u'lláh's description of reality and to His teachings, while resisting the pull of controversial and polarizing debates and beguiling prescriptions that reflect futile attempts to define human identity and social reality through limited human conceptions, materialist philosophies, and competing passions.

(Universal House of Justice, Reflections on the First Century of the Formative Age, 28 November 2023)

Avoid Entanglement

If Bahá'ís become entangled in the delusory notions of contending peoples, if they emulate the values, attitudes, and practices that define a self-absorbed and self-serving age, the release of those forces necessary to redeem humanity from its plight will be delayed and obstructed.

(Universal House of Justice, *Reflections on the First Century of the Formative Age*, 28 November 2023)

Forge ahead into the future

Rather, as the Guardian explains, “The champion builders of Bahá’u’lláh’s rising World Order must scale nobler heights of heroism as humanity plunges into greater depths of despair, degradation, dissension, and distress. Let them forge ahead into the future serenely confident that the hour of their mightiest exertions and the supreme opportunity for their greatest exploits must coincide with the apocalyptic upheaval marking the lowest ebb in mankind’s fast-declining fortunes.”



What will the future bring?

It seems likely that the Lesser Peace will only come about after another World War. We have seen Shoghi Effendi's warning to America. The first World War led to the League of Nations, which failed to prevent World War II. That led to the United Nations, which has so far prevented a world war, but not conflicts, and is now paralyzed. The number of ego-driven autocratic leaders is rising.

The real solution is a spiritual revolution. This is our real challenge, especially for youth.

Advice on how to respond

The Bahá'í Faith has often passed through perilous times, with warnings and guidance from its leaders. Some examples follow.

Challenges to Youth 1931

The prevailing distress in America and Europe should awaken the youth to the futility of concentrating their whole life on purely material pursuits. They should learn the lesson that spiritual considerations should be the dominating factors of our life, that our guiding purpose should be to enhance our moral life and seek what is eternal and abiding. Should the different nations continue to go wrong and be guided by the selfish desire of personal aggrandizement, you will be the group that will suffer most. Our present policies bear their fruits only in the future and it is the youth of the present that are the men and women of the future.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1931, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §16)

Challenges to Youth 1932

The present condition of the world—its economic instability, social dissensions, political dissatisfaction and international distrust—should awaken the youth from their slumber and make them inquire what the future is going to bring. It is surely they who will suffer most if some calamity sweep over the world.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1932, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §20)

Challenges to Youth 1932

They should therefore open their eyes to the existing conditions, study the evil forces that are at play and then with a concerted effort arise and bring about the necessary reforms—reforms that shall contain within their scope the spiritual as well as social and political phases of human life.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1932, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §20)

Challenges to Youth 1932

Surely in this very critical period of human history when old institutions are beginning to crumble down or being considerably modified, there is a certain amount of maladjustments and unfortunate happenings; but such a condition is not permanent. The Cause and its institutions will gradually take their place and with its virile spirit secure the full obedience of its followers and of the people of the world as a whole. So we need not be too pessimistic as to the future or take passing conditions too seriously.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1932, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §22)

Challenges to Youth 1932

The young people who are living between these two eras, and seeing the destruction of old institutions are therefore apt to discard all respect for them and in fact view with contempt any person that may still cherish the old. Hence we see the loose morality prevalent among them. This condition is not true only of America and Europe but also of the East, and I dare say in the East more than in the West.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1932, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §22)

Challenges to Youth 1932

Even though the Bahá'í Youth should feel with the condition in which they see their non-Bahá'í friends and not indict them for it, they should not let themselves be carried by the wave of world events as they are being carried. Whereas they see before them only a world that is crumbling down we are also seeing a new world being built up. Whereas they experience the destruction of old institutions that commanded their respect, we are beholding the dawn of a new era with its strict commands and new social bonds. Their materialistic outlook shows them the futility of all things while our faith in a regenerated and spiritualized man makes us look to the future and build for it.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1932, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §22)

Challenges to Youth 1932

To make them follow our ways we should sympathize with their plight but should not follow their ways. We should take our stand on a higher plane of moral and spiritual life and, setting for them the true example, urge them up to our level. The young people should read what Bahá'u'lláh and the Master say on such matters and follow them conscientiously. That is if they desire to be true to the teachings and establish them throughout the world.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1932, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §22)

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Lack of Spirituality 1936

The problem with which you are faced is one which concerns and seriously puzzles many of our present-day youth. How to attain spirituality is, indeed, a question to which every young man and woman must sooner or later try to find a satisfactory answer. It is precisely because no such satisfactory reply has been given or found, that modern youth finds itself bewildered, and is being consequently carried away by the materialistic forces that are so powerfully undermining the foundation of man's moral and spiritual life.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1936, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §30)

Lack of Spirituality 1936

Indeed, the chief reason for the evils now rampant in society is a lack of spirituality. The materialistic civilization of our age has so much absorbed the energy and interest of mankind, that people in general no longer feel the necessity of raising themselves above the forces and conditions of their daily material existence.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1936, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §30)

Lack of Spirituality 1936

There is not sufficient demand for things that we should call spiritual to differentiate them from the needs and requirements of our physical existence. The universal crisis affecting mankind is, therefore, essentially spiritual its causes. The spirit of the age, taken on the whole, is irreligious. Man's outlook upon life is too crude and materialistic to enable him to elevate himself into the higher realms of the spirit.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1936, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §30)

Lack of Spirituality 1936

It is this condition, so sadly morbid, into which society has fallen, that religion seeks to improve and transform. For the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling that unites man with God. This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer. And this is the reason why Bahá'u'lláh has so much stressed the importance of worship. It is not sufficient for a believer to merely accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality, which he can acquire chiefly by the means of prayer.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1936, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §30)

Lack of Spirituality 1936

The Bahá'í Faith, like all other Divine religions, is thus fundamentally mystic in character. Its chief goal is the development of the individual and society, through the acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers. It is the soul of man that has first to be fed. And this spiritual nourishment prayer can best provide. Laws and institutions, as viewed by Bahá'u'lláh, can become really effective only when our inner spiritual life has been perfected and transformed. Otherwise religion will degenerate into a mere organization, and become a dead thing.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1936, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §30)

Lack of Spirituality 1936

The believers, particularly the young ones, should therefore fully realize the necessity of praying. For prayer is absolutely indispensable to their inner spiritual development, and this, already stated, is the very foundation and purpose of the Religion of God.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1936, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §30)



Samoa House of Worship

Lack of Spirituality 1941

The responsibility of young believers is very great, as they must not only fit themselves to inherit the work of the older Bahá'ís and carry on the affairs of the Cause in general, but the world which lies ahead of them—as promised by Bahá'u'lláh—will be a world chastened by its sufferings, ready to listen to His Divine Message at last, and consequently a very high character will be expected of the exponents of such a religion. To deepen their knowledge, to perfect themselves in the Bahá'í standards of virtue and upright conduct, should be the paramount duty of every young Bahá'í.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1941, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §38)

Challenges to Youth 1942

If ever it could be said that a religion belonged to the youth, then surely the Bahá'í Faith today is that religion. The whole world is suffering, it is sunk in misery, crushed beneath its heavy problems. The task of healing its ills and building up its future devolves mainly upon the youth. They are the generation who, after the war, will have to solve the terrible difficulties created by the war and all that brought it about. And they will not be able to upbuild the future except by the laws and principles laid down by Bahá'u'lláh. So their task is very great and their responsibility very grave.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1942, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §41)

Challenges to Youth 1944

Aside from teaching the Cause, the greatest service the Bahá'í Youth can render is to exemplify in their lives the teachings and especially to be promoters—within the Bahá'í communities and in the world at large— of love and harmony, qualities so sadly lacking in these days of hatred, suspicion, vindictiveness and prejudice.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1944, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §49)

Challenges to Youth 1945

The youth are indeed those to whom the Cause should perforce offer its greatest appeal, as it holds alone the promise for their future security. Without that which Bahá'u'lláh has given to humanity the outlook for the future of the world would appear truly hopeless, for the evil forces in men's nature seem to have gained the ascendancy, and only a spiritual force, direct from God, can enable the good side of human nature to again assume command of men's lives.

(on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1945, quoted in *Youth*, compiled by the Research Department of UHJ, §50)

It is up to Youth

...young people have a crucial part to play in helping humanity navigate this tumultuous passage to maturity.... Young people have repeatedly proven their readiness to take on a significant measure of responsibility for the well-being of those around them and for the advancement of their societies. Numerous forces, destructive and distracting, can act as obstacles. But these are, at most, only able to obscure the phenomenal potential of youth, never destroy it.

(Bahá'í International Community, *In the Vanguard: The Role of Youth in an Ever-Advancing Global Society*, 2024)