

Moderation

A Virtue with Many Applications

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse - Moderation

Moderation

What is moderation?

- avoidance of extremes
- self-control, temperance
- becoming less violent

(Oxford Universal Dictionary)

The virtue of the golden mean

Moderation

In all matters moderation is desirable. If a thing is carried to excess, it will prove a source of evil.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 69)

Individual Moderation

Moderation means self-restraint in conduct, expression, indulgence in appetites, eating and drinking. It is the virtue of self-discipline to create and safeguard inner balance, harmony of soul and spiritual progress. Through it reason gains control over the individual's natural inclinations and impulses, emotions, desires and passions. It leads to inner harmony that must be attained and defended throughout life.

(after Udo Schaefer, Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture, vol2, pp.150-153)



Moderation in Food

...man hath perversely continued to serve his lustful appetites, and he would not content himself with simple foods. Rather,... he abandoned the temperance and moderation of a natural way of life. The result was the engendering of diseases both violent and diverse.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p.152-153)

Individual Moderation

Moderation is the mean between excess and deprivation. It rejects the “dictates of evil passions and corrupt desires” and defines the limits of man’s freedom.

Moderation also applies to virtues and good qualities. Overemphasis and exaggeration of a virtue can lead to its deformation.

(after Udo Schaefer, Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture, vol2, pp.157-160)

Moderation in Pious Acts

Pride not yourselves on much reading of the verses or on a multitude of pious acts by night and day; for were a man to read a single verse with joy and radiance it would be better for him than to read with lassitude all the Holy Books of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Read ye the sacred verses in such measure that ye be not overcome by languor and despondency. Lay not upon your souls that which will weary them and weigh them down, but rather what will lighten and uplift them...

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, §149)

Moderation in Qualities

How often has it happened that an individual who was graced with every attribute of humanity and wore the jewel of true understanding, nevertheless followed after his passions until his excellent qualities passed beyond moderation and he was forced into excess.... A good character is in the sight of God and His chosen ones and the possessors of insight, the most excellent and praiseworthy of all things, but always on condition that its center of emanation should be reason and knowledge and its base should be true moderation.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Secret of Divine Civilization, pp.59-60)

Moderation

A moderate perspective is a practical and principled standpoint from which one can recognize and adopt valid and insightful ideas whatever their source, without prejudice. *“Whoso cleaveth to justice, can, under no circumstances, transgress the limits of moderation,”* Bahá’u’lláh states. *“He discerneth the truth in all things, through the guidance of Him Who is the All-Seeing.”*

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



Moderation in Speech

Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation. As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure. As to its moderation, this hath to be combined with tact and wisdom as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and Tablets.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 143)

Moderation in Speech

[Utterance] needeth moderation, without which the hearer would be unable to bear it, rather he would manifest opposition from the very outset. And moderation will be obtained by blending utterance with the tokens of divine wisdom which are recorded in the sacred Books and Tablets.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 199)

Moderation in Consultation

They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views. They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden. The honoured members must with all freedom express their own thoughts, and it is in no wise permissible for one to belittle the thought of another, nay, he must with moderation set forth the truth, and should differences of opinion arise a majority of voices must prevail, and all must obey and submit to the majority.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p.88)

Moderation in Speech

This call for moderation includes in particular the manner of speech if a just conclusion is to be achieved. *“Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation,”* Bahá’u’lláh writes. *“One word is like unto springtime causing the tender saplings of the rose-garden of knowledge to become verdant and flourishing, while another word is even as a deadly poison,”* He explains. *“It behoveth a prudent man of wisdom to speak with utmost leniency and forbearance so that the sweetness of his words may induce everyone to attain that which befitteth man’s station.”*

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



Moderation

By moderation, Bahá'u'lláh is in no way referring to mere compromise, the dilution of truth, or a hypocritical or utopian consensus. The moderation He calls for demands an end to destructive excesses that have plagued humanity and fomented ceaseless contention and turmoil. Moderation in deliberation and action stands in contrast to the arbitrary imposition of views through power or insistence upon ideological aims, both of which obstruct the search for truth and sow the seeds of continuing injustice.

Moderation in All Things

It is incumbent upon them who are in authority to exercise moderation in all things. Whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence. Consider for instance such things as liberty, civilization and the like. However much men of understanding may favorably regard them, they will, if carried to excess, exercise a pernicious influence upon men.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, CX; *Tablets* p. 169)

Liberty in Moderation

We approve of liberty in certain circumstances, and refuse to sanction it in others.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, 124)

Moderation in Freedom

...with regard to the peoples who clamor for freedom: the moderate freedom which guarantees the welfare of the world of mankind and maintains and preserves the universal relationships, is found in its fullest power and extension in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p.305)

Justice and Moderation

Whoso cleaveth to justice, can, under no circumstances, transgress the limits of moderation.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLXIV, p. 342)



Moderation in Civilization

The civilization, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men.... If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation.... The day is approaching when its flame will devour the cities.... All other things are subject to this same principle of moderation.

Moderation Exceeded

The Bahá'ís should realize that today's intensely materialistic civilization, alas, most perfectly exemplified by the United States, has far exceeded the bounds of moderation, and, as Bahá'u'lláh has pointed out in His Writings, civilization itself, when carried to extremes, leads to destruction. The Canadian friends should be on their guard against this deadly influence to which they are so constantly exposed, and which we can see is undermining the moral strength of not only America, but indeed of Europe and other parts of the world to which it is rapidly spreading.

(Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to Canada*, 18 July 1957)

Moderation for Rulers

Fear ye God, and take heed not to outstrip the bounds of moderation and be numbered among the extravagant.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, Suratu'l-Mulik §8; *Gleanings* p. 251)

Moderation in Environment

The environmental crisis is another challenge to economic thinking. The belief that there is no limit to nature's capacity to fulfil any demand made on it by human beings is false. A culture which values endless growth, increasing wealth, and the satisfaction of people's wants must recognise that these are not good goals.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §49)



Environmental Crisis – Santa Barbara Oil Spill 1969

Moderation in Consumption

As current imbalances are driven in large part by numerous forms of excess, the principle of moderation will need to find much fuller expression in global arrangements. Concepts of contentment, sufficiency, and simplicity, which find little place in growth-driven paradigms, will have to be reclaimed and expanded. Patterns of life that have come to be associated with extreme wealth — devotion to convenience and luxury, for example, or high levels of consumption and waste — will need to be set aside. Basic notions of progress, development, and prosperity will need to be recast in far more holistic terms.

Moderation for Environment

Recognition that creation is an organic whole and that humanity has the responsibility to care for this whole, welcome as it is, cannot by itself make people conscious of a new system of values. Only an understanding that is both scientific and spiritual will give the human race the power to take on the responsibility for environmental management now required.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §50)

Material Needs

Take from this world only to the measure of your needs, and forego that which exceedeth them.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Súriy-i-Mulúk §19, in *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 193.)

Moderation in Desires

How complex is the life of the present age and how much more complex we are making it daily! The needs of humanity seem never to come to an end. The more men accumulate the more they want. There is only one way of freedom and that is by shutting one's eyes and heart to all these things which distract the mind.

(Words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, from the Diary of Ahmad Sohrab, September 21, 1913. Star of the West, Vol. 8 (April 9, 1917) no. 2, p. 17. Quoted in *The Wisdom of the Master: The Spiritual Teachings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*. Los Angeles, Kalimát Press, 2002)

Moderation in Conduct

They must endeavor to consort in a friendly spirit with everyone, must follow moderation in their conduct, must have respect and consideration one for another and show loving-kindness and tender regard to all the peoples of the world.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p.233)

Moderation in Behaviour

Such a chaste and holy life... involves no less than the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations.... It calls for the abandonment of a frivolous conduct, with its excessive attachment to trivial and often misdirected pleasures.... It can tolerate no compromise with the theories, the standards, the habits, and the excesses of a decadent age.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 30)

Contentment

All people will have to recover, for example, the capacity for contentment, the welcoming of moral discipline, and the devotion to duty that used to be essential to being human. All through history, the Founders of the great religions have taught these qualities of character to their followers. The qualities themselves are even more vital today, but they need to be expressed in modern ways.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §51)



Contentment

Religion's challenge is to free itself from the past: contentment is not accepting whatever happens; morality has nothing in common with the past rigid denial of life's pleasures; and a genuine devotion to duty brings feelings not of self-importance but of self-worth.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, 51)

Moderation in Revenue

Overstep not the bounds of moderation, and deal justly with them that serve thee. Bestow upon them according to their needs, and not to the extent that will enable them to lay up riches for themselves, to deck their persons, to embellish their homes, to acquire the things that are of no benefit to them, and to be numbered with the extravagant. Deal with them with undeviating justice, so that none among them may either suffer want, or be pampered with luxuries. This is but manifest justice.

(Bahá'u'lláh [to the Sultan of Turkey], Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXIV, p. 235)

Moderation in Interest

[interest and profit on money] is a matter that should be practiced with moderation and fairness. Our Pen of Glory hath, as a token of wisdom and for the convenience of the people, desisted from laying down its limit. Nevertheless We exhort the loved ones of God to observe justice and fairness, and to do that which would prompt the friends of God to evince tender mercy and compassion towards each other.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 134)

Moderation in Wealth

It is preferable... that some measure of moderation be achieved, and by moderation is meant the enactment of such laws and regulations as would prevent the unwarranted concentration of wealth in the hands of the few and satisfy the essential needs of the many.

Moderation in the Economy

...the appropriation of excessive wealth by a few individuals, notwithstanding the needs of the masses, is unfair and unjust, and... conversely, absolute equality would also disrupt the existence, welfare, comfort, peace, and orderly life of the human race.... The best course is therefore to seek moderation, which is for the wealthy to recognize the advantages of moderation in the acquisition of profits and to show regard for the welfare of the poor and the needy, that is, to fix a daily wage for the workers and also to allot them a share of the total profits of the factory.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, §78)

Path of Moderation

It is most essential that in times of such national excitement and emergency as those through which so many countries in the world are now passing that the believers should not allow themselves to be carried away by the passions agitating the masses, and act in a manner that would make them deviate from the path of wisdom and moderation, and lead them to violate, however reluctantly and indirectly, the spirit as well as the letter of the Teachings.

(Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*, Messages to the British Isles, 4 June 1939)

