

Collective Maturity and an Ever-Advancing Civilisation

Social Action Concepts and Principles

Issues for Social Action with Youth

Bahá'í Social – Social Action2maturity

From a Compilation by the Research Department of Universal House of Justice - August 2020

Ever-advancing Civilisation

*All men have been created to carry forward
an ever-advancing civilization.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, [Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh](#), sec. CIX, par. 2)

Betterment of the World

All men have been called into being for the betterment of the world. It behoveth every soul to arise and serve his brethren for the sake of God.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Tabernacle of Unity*, par. 2.42)

Become a source of social good

And the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world's multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself, should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellow men? No, by the one true God, there is no greater bliss, no more complete delight.

Progress

The world of being hath... been set in wondrous motion and hath been revived and blessed. Minds have soared to new heights, understanding hath increased, movement hath become rapid, and progress hath become powerfully evident in all aspects of life. Thus, great discoveries have been made, mighty enterprises have been established, wonderful inventions have appeared, and the mysteries of the universe have stepped forth from the invisible plane into the realm of the visible. Wherefore must the friends, one and all, exhibit a signal effort to create a new invention, discover a new science, engage in a great enterprise, or manifest a power or a bestowal in the human world.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

Maturity in Intelligence

All created things have their degree, or stage, of maturity. The period of maturity in the life of a tree is the time of its fruit bearing. The maturity of a plant is the time of its blossoming and flower. The animal attains a stage of full growth and completeness, and in the human kingdom man reaches his maturity when the lights of intelligence have their greatest power and development....

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), pp. 617–618)

Age of Maturity

Similarly, there are periods and stages in the life of the aggregate world of humanity, which at one time was passing through its degree of childhood, at another its time of youth but now has entered its long presaged period of maturity, the evidences of which are everywhere visible and apparent. Therefore, the requirements and conditions of former periods have changed and merged into exigencies which distinctly characterize the present age of the world of mankind. That which was applicable to human needs during the early history of the race could neither meet nor satisfy the demands of this day and period of newness and consummation.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), pp. 617–618)

Needs of Maturity

Humanity has emerged from its former degrees of limitation and preliminary training. Man must now become imbued with new virtues and powers, new moralities, new capacities. New bounties, bestowals and perfections are awaiting and already descending upon him. The gifts and graces of the period of youth, although timely and sufficient during the adolescence of the world of mankind, are now incapable of meeting the requirements of its maturity.

Heights we can attain

“The heights,” Bahá’u’lláh Himself testifies, “which, through the most gracious favor of God, mortal man can attain in this Day are as yet unrevealed to his sight. The world of being hath never had, nor doth it yet possess, the capacity for such a revelation. The day, however, is approaching when the potentialities of so great a favor will, by virtue of His behest, be manifested unto men.”

(Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 11 March 1936, in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh: Selected Letters*, pp. 168–169)

Suffering to Prepare

For the revelation of so great a favor a period of intense turmoil and wide-spread suffering would seem to be indispensable. Resplendent as has been the Age that has witnessed the inception of the Mission with which Bahá'u'lláh has been entrusted, the interval which must elapse ere that Age yields its choicest fruit must, it is becoming increasingly apparent, be overshadowed by such moral and social gloom as can alone prepare an unrepentant humanity for the prize she is destined to inherit.

(Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 11 March 1936, in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, pp. 168–169)

Period of Afflictions

Into such a period we are now steadily and irresistibly moving. Amidst the shadows which are increasingly gathering about us we can faintly discern the glimmerings of Bahá'u'lláh's unearthly sovereignty appearing fitfully on the horizon of history.

(Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 11 March 1936, in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, pp. 168–169)

Period of Afflictions

To us, the “generation of the half-light,” living at a time which may be designated as the period of the incubation of the World Commonwealth envisaged by Bahá’u’lláh, has been assigned a task whose high privilege we can never sufficiently appreciate, and the arduousness of which we can as yet but dimly recognize. We may well believe, we who are called upon to experience the operation of the dark forces destined to unloose a flood of agonizing afflictions, that the darkest hour that must precede the dawn of the Golden Age of our Faith has not yet struck.

(Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 11 March 1936, in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh: Selected Letters*, pp. 168–169)

Afflictive Ordeals

Deep as is the gloom that already encircles the world, the afflictive ordeals which that world is to suffer are still in preparation, nor can their blackness be as yet imagined. We stand on the threshold of an age whose convulsions proclaim alike the death-pangs of the old order and the birth-pangs of the new. Through the generating influence of the Faith announced by Bahá'u'lláh this New World Order may be said to have been conceived. We can, at the present moment, experience its stirrings in the womb of a travailing age—an age waiting for the appointed hour at which it can cast its burden and yield its fairest fruit.

(Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 11 March 1936, in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, pp. 168–169)

Twofold Process

As we view the world around us, we are compelled to observe the manifold evidences of that universal fermentation which, in every continent of the globe and in every department of human life, be it religious, social, economic or political, is purging and reshaping humanity in anticipation of the Day when the wholeness of the human race will have been recognized and its unity established. A twofold process, however, 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.

(Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 11 March 1936, in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, pp. 170)

Twofold Process

The first is essentially an integrating process, while the second is fundamentally disruptive. 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.

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, letter dated 11 March 1936, in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, pp. 170)

Stage of Adolescence

The long ages of infancy and childhood, through which the human race had to pass, have receded into the background. Humanity is now experiencing the commotions invariably associated with the most turbulent stage of its evolution, the stage of adolescence, when the impetuosity of youth and its vehemence reach their climax, and must gradually be superseded by the calmness, the wisdom, and the maturity that characterize the stage of manhood. Then will the human race reach that stature of ripeness which will enable it to acquire all the powers and capacities upon which its ultimate development must depend.

(Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 11 March 1936, in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, pp. 202)

Oneness of the Human Race

Of the principles enshrined in these Tablets the most vital of them all is the principle of the oneness and wholeness of the human race, which may well be regarded as the hall-mark of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and the pivot of His teachings.... "We, verily," He declares, "have come to unite and weld together all that dwell on earth." "So potent is the light of unity," He further states, "that it can illuminate the whole earth." ... Unity, He states, is the goal that "excelleth every goal" and an aspiration which is "the monarch of all aspirations." "The world," He proclaims, "is but one country, and mankind its citizens."

(Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 343–344)

Unification of Mankind

He further affirms that the unification of mankind, the last stage in the evolution of humanity towards maturity is inevitable, that “soon will the present day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead,” that “the whole earth is now in a state of pregnancy,” that “the day is approaching when it will have yielded its noblest fruits, when from it will have sprung forth the loftiest trees, the most enchanting blossoms, the most heavenly blessings.”

(Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 343–344)

Love of Mankind

He deploras the defectiveness of the prevailing order, exposes the inadequacy of patriotism as a directing and controlling force in human society, and regards the “love of mankind” and service to its interests as the worthiest and most laudable objects of human endeavor.

(Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 343–344)

Threshold of Maturity

Inseparable from the Bahá'í perspective on politics is a particular conception of history, its course and direction. Humanity, it is the firm conviction of every follower of Bahá'u'lláh, is approaching today the crowning stage in a millennia-long process which has brought it from its collective infancy to the threshold of maturity—a stage that will witness the unification of the human race.

(The Universal House of Justice, from a message dated 2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran)

An unprecedented transition

Not unlike the individual who passes through the unsettled yet promising period of adolescence, during which latent powers and capacities come to light, humankind as a whole is in the midst of an unprecedented transition. Behind so much of the turbulence and commotion of contemporary life are the fits and starts of a humanity struggling to come of age. Widely accepted practices and conventions, cherished attitudes and habits, are one by one being rendered obsolete, as the imperatives of maturity begin to assert themselves.

(The Universal House of Justice, from a message dated 2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran)

Revolutionary Changes

Bahá'ís are encouraged to see in the revolutionary changes taking place in every sphere of life the interaction of two fundamental processes. One is destructive in nature, while the other is integrative; both serve to carry humanity, each in its own way, along the path leading towards its full maturity.

(The Universal House of Justice, from a message dated 2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran)

Revolutionary Changes

The operation of the former is everywhere apparent—in the vicissitudes that have afflicted time-honoured institutions, in the impotence of leaders at all levels to mend the fractures appearing in the structure of society, in the dismantling of social norms that have long held in check unseemly passions, and in the despondency and indifference exhibited not only by individuals but also by entire societies that have lost any vital sense of purpose.

(The Universal House of Justice, from a message dated 2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran)

Process of Integration

Though devastating in their effects, the forces of disintegration tend to sweep away barriers that block humanity's progress, opening space for the process of integration to draw diverse groups together and disclosing new opportunities for cooperation and collaboration. Bahá'ís, of course, strive to align themselves, individually and collectively, with forces associated with the process of integration, which, they are confident, will continue to gain in strength, no matter how bleak the immediate horizons. Human affairs will be utterly reorganized, and an era of universal peace inaugurated....

(The Universal House of Justice, from a message dated 2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran)

Three Protagonists

... Animating the Bahá'í effort to discover the nature of a new set of relationships among these three protagonists [the individual, the institutions, and the community] is a vision of a future society that derives inspiration from the analogy drawn by Bahá'u'lláh, in a Tablet penned nearly a century and a half ago, which compares the world to the human body.

(The Universal House of Justice, from a message dated 2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran)

Cooperation

Cooperation is the principle that governs the functioning of that system. Just as the appearance of the rational soul in this realm of existence is made possible through the complex association of countless cells, whose organization in tissues and organs allows for the realization of distinctive capacities, so can civilization be seen as the outcome of a set of interactions among closely integrated, diverse components which have transcended the narrow purpose of tending to their own existence.

[\(The Universal House of Justice, from a message dated 2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran\)](#)

Cooperation

And just as the viability of every cell and every organ is contingent upon the health of the body as a whole, so should the prosperity of every individual, every family, every people be sought in the well-being of the entire human race.

(The Universal House of Justice, from a message dated 2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran)

Community Life in Sydney

Emerging patterns of community life across Sydney, Australia, demonstrate how families and young people are applying principles of social action at the local level. In diverse settings across the city, new patterns of community life are gradually emerging through engagement in Bahá'í moral and spiritual educational programs as well as social action initiatives, contributing to more resilient neighborhoods.

<https://news.bahai.org/podcasts/insights-from-the-field/1869/insights-from-the-field-emerging-patterns-community-life-sydney>



Sydney, Australia

Community Life in Sydney

In many urban settings around the world, many populations share a common aspiration to be connected to one another in a more meaningful way, and to have connections beyond just material and human connections, maybe even of a spiritual nature.

The Bahá'í community, together with others engaged in community building efforts, is learning how to take more practical steps to build society, to advance it, to build on these principles of trust, of fellowship, of love.



Sydney, Australia



Sydney, Australia

Community Life in Sydney

Across these neighborhoods is growing recognition of the importance of the spiritual education of children. In northern Sydney, this process began with the friendship of two mothers who met while walking their children to school. After talking a lot about the education of their children and the concerns that they have as mothers for their development, they reflected on how they could address these concerns and decided to bring together families within their locality to hold a festival for children, which over time widened to include a growing circle of households engaged in the process. These festivals, which invite families to come together for a few days to reflect and consult as a community, have allowed bonds of friendship to grow.



Sydney, Australia



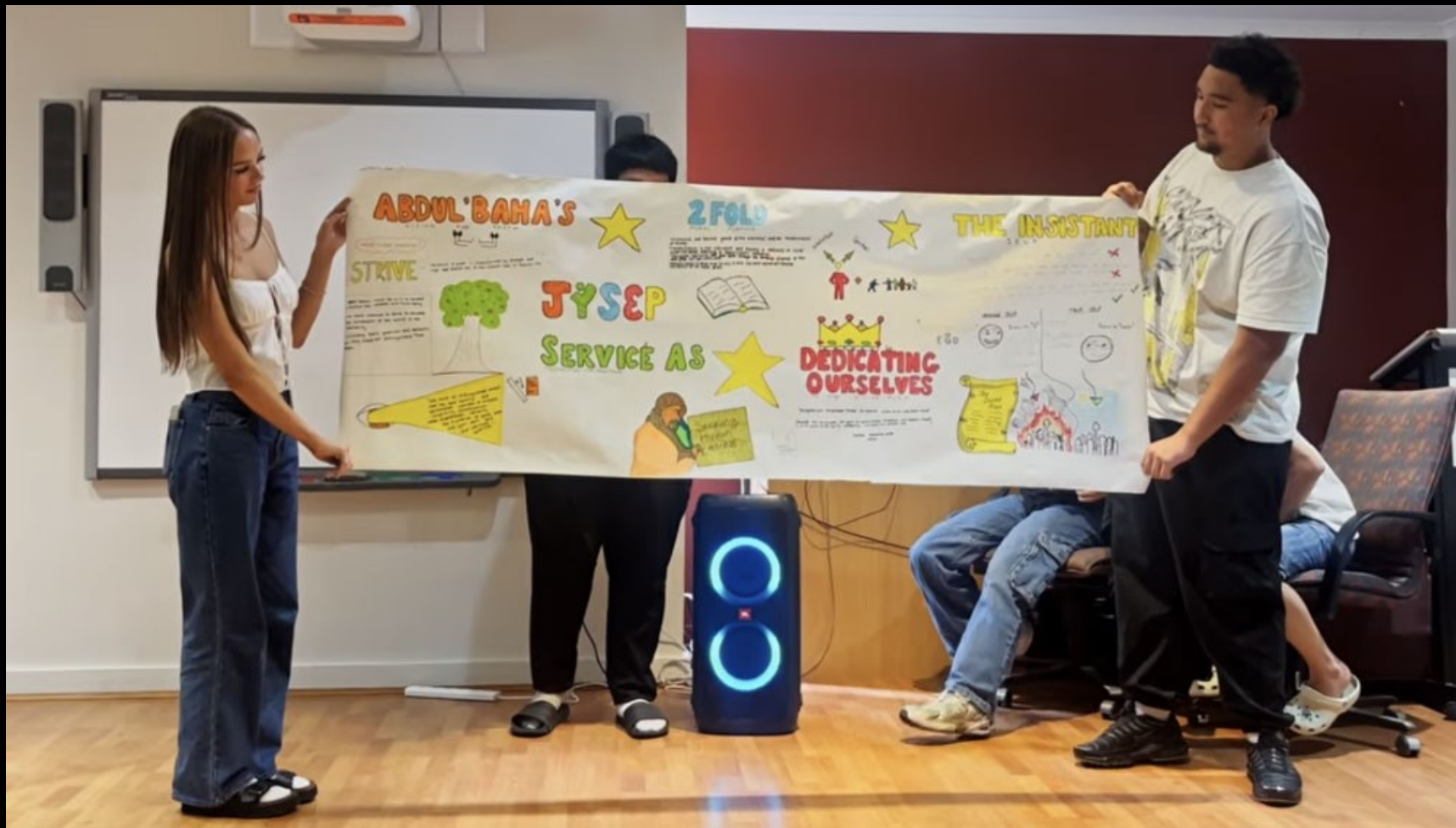
Sydney, Australia

Community Life in Sydney

In western Sydney, where many young people face significant challenges, a group of youth involved in Bahá'í moral and spiritual educational programs responded to the culture of violence in their school by producing a short film. Drawing on ideas such as friendship and seeing the best in others, they recreated scenes from their school environment in which conflict was the norm, alongside alternatives that pointed to more constructive responses. Teachers started to see a distinct change in many of their students because of their involvement in building a moral and spiritual foundation in their locality. Where education had not previously been widely valued, participation in these programs shifted aspirations within the community, with many young people becoming the first in their families to pursue university education.



Sydney, Australia



Sydney, Australia

Community Life in Sydney

In south Sydney, efforts have been taking place among a population, many of whom recently arrived in Australia, who are navigating a different culture, language, and way of life. A group of six mothers came together to establish an organization focused on supporting health and mental wellbeing within their community. As these efforts deepened, a desire grew to address not only material needs but the spiritual life of the community as well, leading to children's festivals and community gatherings in which individuals could collectively explore concepts such as prayer as a "conversation with God." What is striking within this particular population is that these processes are drawing children, youth, and parents into a shared journey in an environment of empowerment.



Sydney, Australia



Sydney, Australia

Community Life in Sydney

Over the past decade, efforts to engage young people in a handful of settings have spread to hundreds of neighborhoods across Sydney. The Bahá'í community in recent years and recent decades has been taking significant, but also small, profound, and consistent steps to really put into practice the vision of Bahá'u'lláh, which is to be all-embracing. This openness for many people to actually contribute is welcomed by the Bahá'í community and is something which is now becoming part of the fabric of many local societies around Sydney.

(<https://news.bahai.org/podcasts/insights-from-the-field/1869/insights-from-the-field-emerging-patterns-community-life-sydney>)



Sydney, Australia