

Workshop 3: *Unlocking Human Potential—Looking to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*

Quotations

While elevating their souls, He [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] challenged their assumptions, reoriented their perspectives, expanded their consciousness, and focused their energies. He demonstrated by word and deed such compassion and generosity that hearts were utterly transformed. No one was turned away. Our great hope is that frequent recollection, during this centennial period, of the Master’s matchless record will inspire and fortify His sincere admirers. Set His example before your eyes and fix your gaze upon it; let it be your instinctive guide in your pursuit of the aim of the Plan.
(The Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world, Ridván 2011)

Ahead of you lie times of trial and promise, of hardship and progress, of anguish and joy. Under all conditions, the Master is your solace and support. For those who aspire to lasting change, His example guides the way—tactful and wise in His approach, penetrating in utterance, indiscriminating in fellowship, unfailing in sympathy for the downtrodden, courageous in conduct, persevering in action, imperturbable in the face of tests, unwavering in His keen sense of justice.
(The Universal House of Justice, 22 July 2020 in a message to the believers in the United States)

Questions

- a) The House of Justice has encouraged us to reach out to the “*largest possible*” number of people, to “*the widest possible cross section of society*”, and to all with whom we “*share a connection*”. You might find it helpful to map out visually your or your family’s current circles of friendship, relations, and acquaintances. How might you go about strengthening your bonds of friendship and kinship with them and conversing with them on themes of spiritual import?
- b) To expand your circle of acquaintances and to make new friends, which social spaces are available to you where you might encounter people of many walks of life with whom you could establish ties of friendship?
- c) How might you go about strengthening your bonds of friendship and kinship with and conversing on themes of spiritual import? What themes might you share with them?
- d) In order to translate your thoughts into reality, what would be your or your family’s systematic endeavours between now and Ridván 2021? In what way could you commit more time and energy and intensify your efforts? What small, yet regular and rapid, steps you and your family could undertake every week, every day, to realise your goals?

Quotations

Yet no matter how high-minded a particular cause might be, if it is advanced through contention and confrontation, it merely provokes and intensifies the flame of a countermovement initiated by others who act on what they consider to be their own high-minded beliefs. Real solutions remain elusive. The cycle of contention continues without end, with one group after the other seizing enough power to implement its views before becoming overcome by those in opposition. One need only look to the endless mutations of racist oppression over hundreds of years, adapting so as to undermine every social advance in that area.

While we should not be idle in addressing social ills as the process of disintegration accelerates, our aim is not to choose sides in contentious social debates simply to proclaim what we believe to be right. Rather the object of our participation is to learn to elevate discourse and improve practice as we work with others in the search for effective solutions. It is through understanding, sharing, and transforming into practical action the distinctly spiritual and social teachings of the Faith that we can offer our greatest contribution to the betterment of society.

(Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 10 August 2018 to an individual)

Withal, the friends must guard against being drawn into the ultimately futile conflict and strife that characterizes so much of the discussion of the affairs of society, or—heaven forbid—allowing interaction of this type to permeate, even fleetingly, the conversations of the community. Yet such vigilance on your part in avoiding discord and in not becoming entangled in society’s controversies should under no circumstances be construed as aloofness from the many pressing concerns of this time. Far from it. You are among the most active and earnest of humanity’s well-wishers. But, whether through deeds or words, the merit of your every contribution to social well-being lies, first, in your resolute commitment to discover that precious point of unity where contrasting perspectives overlap and around which contending peoples can coalesce.

(The Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the world, 25 November 2020)

Question

- a) What are some of the distinctive contributions that we can offer in addressing social ills? Where does the Universal House of Justice say that “the merit of your every contribution to social well-being lies”?

Quotation

Every believer, as the promulgator of Bahá’u’lláh’s central principle of the oneness of humanity, should deeply meditate upon it and weigh its demanding implications for the profound alteration of thought and action required at this time.

Within the context of the framework governing your activities it is necessary to carefully examine the forces unfolding around you to determine where your energies might reinforce the most promising initiatives, what you should avoid, and how you might lend a distinctive contribution.

It is not possible for you to effect the transformation envisioned by Bahá’u’lláh merely by adopting the perspectives, practices, concepts, criticisms, and language of contemporary society. Your approach, instead, will be distinguished by maintaining a humble posture of learning, weighing alternatives in the light of His teachings, consulting to harmonize differing views and shape collective action, and marching forward with unbreakable unity in serried lines.

(The Universal House of Justice, 22 July 2020, to the believers in the United States)

Questions

- a) What specific actions is the Universal House of Justice calling the believers to take in the passages above, as promulgators of "Bahá’u’lláh’s central principle of the oneness of humanity”?
- b) Why would it be important to “carefully examine the forces unfolding” around us, to determine what we should avoid, and how we “might lend a distinctive contribution”? What then should distinguish our contributions in addressing racism and working to promulgate the oneness of humanity?
- c) Share what helps you to turn toward ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as your “instinctive guide” in these efforts and in the pursuit of the aims of the Plans?