

ebbf/IEF Learnshop

**Principles for a
sustainable attitude**

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This learnshop will allow us to discuss a number of principles that provide the foundations for a sustainable attitude as it can be expressed in our individual lives and in our professional activities, enterprises and institutions. Rethinking the concept and place of wealth in a sustainable economy is part of this. We shall consider the relevance of values such as justice, moderation, reciprocity and balance and their expression in our work and economic activities, and as guides to living and working in socially just and environmentally responsible ways.

PRINCIPLES ABOUT MATERIAL WEALTH

Know ye in truth that wealth is a mighty barrier between the seeker and his desire, the lover and his beloved. The rich, but for a few, shall in no wise attain the court of His presence nor enter the city of content and resignation....

(Bahá'u'lláh)

Man's merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches.... Dissipate not the wealth of your precious lives in the pursuit of evil and corrupt affection, nor let your endeavours be spent in promoting your personal interest.... Guard against idleness and sloth, and cling unto that which profiteth mankind, whether young or old, whether high or low.

(Bahá'u'lláh)

...to make the accumulation of wealth the central purpose of one's life is unworthy of any human being.... What will... ensure true happiness both in this world and in the next is 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)

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

(Bahá'u'lláh)

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)

Ye are the trees of My garden; ye must give forth goodly and wondrous fruits, that ye yourselves and others may profit therefrom. Thus it is incumbent on everyone to engage in crafts and professions, for therein lies the secret of wealth... For results depend upon means....

(Bahá'u'lláh)

Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual's own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes. Above all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this....

Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá)

Many would readily acknowledge that the acquisition of wealth should be governed by the requirements of justice, which, as a principle, can be expressed to varying degrees, on different levels. An employer and employee, for example, are bound by the laws and conventions that regulate their work, and each is expected to carry out his or her responsibilities with honesty and integrity.

(Universal House of Justice)

At another level, however, if the deeper implications of justice are to be realized, the other two preconditions to the legitimate acquisition of wealth mentioned above must be taken into account, and prevailing norms reassessed in their light. Here, the relationship between minimum wage and the cost of living merits careful evaluation--this, especially in light of the contribution workers make to a company's success and their entitlement... to a fair share of the profits. The wide margin, often unjustifiable, between the production costs of certain goods and the price at which they are sold likewise requires attention, as does the question of the generation of wealth through measures that "enrich the generality of the people".

(Universal House of Justice)

What such reflection and inquiry will no doubt make abundantly clear is that certain approaches to obtaining wealth--so many of which involve the exploitation of others, the monopolization and manipulation of markets, and the production of goods that promote violence and immorality--are unworthy and unacceptable.

(Universal House of Justice)

...it is the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few that is in urgent need of attention. Indeed, the tremendous wealth generated by transnational corporations could be an integral part of the solution to tackle poverty, through strict regulation to ensure good global citizenship, adherence to human rights norms and the distribution of wealth for the benefit of the larger society.

(Bahá'í International Community)

PRINCIPLES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Against the backdrop of climate change, environmental degradation, and the crippling extremes of wealth and poverty, the transformation from a culture of unfettered consumerism to a culture of sustainability has gained momentum....

(Bahá'í International Community)

The faculties needed to construct a more just and sustainable social order—moderation, justice, love, reason, sacrifice and service to the common good—have too often been dismissed as naïve ideals. Yet, it is these, and related, qualities that must be harnessed to overcome the traits of ego, greed, apathy and violence, which are often rewarded by the market and political forces driving current patterns of unsustainable consumption and production.

(Bahá'í International Community)

A sustainable social order is distinguished, among other things, by an ethic of reciprocity and balance at all levels of human organization.... Within such an order, the concept of justice is embodied in the recognition that the interests of the individual and of the wider community are inextricably linked. The pursuit of justice within the frame of unity (in diversity) provides a guide for collective deliberation and decision-making and offers a means by which unified thought and action can be achieved.

(Bahá'í International Community)

Ultimately, the transformation... will entail no less than an organic change in the structure of society itself so as to reflect fully the interdependence of the entire social body—as well as the interconnectedness with the natural world that sustains it. Among these changes... are: the consciousness of world citizenship; the eventual federation of all nations through an integrated system of governance with capacity for global decision-making; the establishment of structures which recognize humanity's common ownership of the earth's resources; the establishment of full equality between men and women; the elimination of all forms of prejudice; the establishment of a universal currency and other integrating mechanisms that promote global economic justice; the adoption of an international auxiliary language to facilitate mutual understanding; and the redirection of massive military expenditures towards constructive social ends.

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...the pathway to sustainability will be one of empowerment, collaboration and continual processes of questioning, learning and action in all regions of the world.... As the sweeping tides of consumerism, unfettered consumption, extreme poverty and marginalization recede, they will reveal the human capacities for justice, reciprocity and happiness.

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3

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words (Persian) 53)

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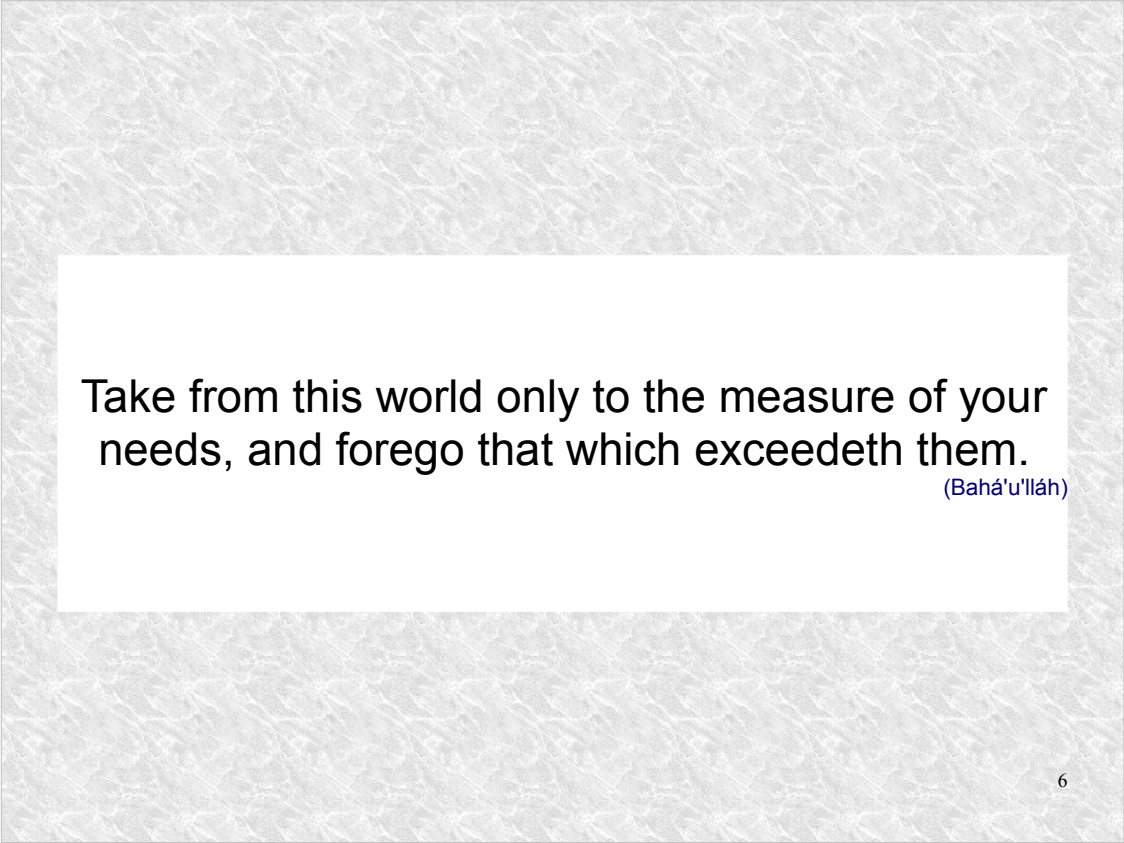
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(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. 1978, p. 138)

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(Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010)



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7

(Bahá'u'lláh [to the Sultan of Turkey], Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXIV, pp. 235-236)

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**(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Secret of
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13

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

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