The Environment
Nature and Spirituality

Participating in Public Discourse

International Environment Forum

Youth Class – Discourse 1 Nature

Public discourse on environment

One of the pressing concerns of humanity today is how the resources of nature can be utilized in a way that safeguards the health of the environment, and there is a large community of people around the world who are giving attention to the many dimensions of this challenge. Some are, for instance, scientists investigating the causes of phenomena such as climate change or searching for means to curb pollution. Others are working to raise consciousness about the effects of the systems and processes of present-day society on the natural world. Still others are associated with endeavors aimed at establishing environmentally sound policies.

(Ruhi Book 14: Participating in public discourse)

Public discourse on environment

In short, the question of environment is being addressed by a diversity of groups and in numerous ways. And all these efforts require engagement in ongoing interconnected conversations, of different degrees of formality, from the local to the international level. We can refer to the totality of what is being expressed about this concern of humanity – in books and articles, at summits and conferences, in the media, in classrooms and so on – as the discourse on the environment. Like any other significant discourse of society, it has a direction, and it is, to an extent that may vary, rigorous. It is public in the sense that it aspires to reach everyone who wishes to follow its unfoldment.

(Ruhi Book 14: Participating in public discourse)

Participation in Discourse

Discourse is capacity for participating in a conversation about a matter that affects people's lives and offering a perspective based on Bahá'í principles and Bahá'í experience.

What are some Bahá'í principles on the environment that we use in discourse?

Norms & Values for Transformation

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, Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism, 2010)

Norms & Values for Transformation

...it is a transformation that will require an earnest examination of our understanding of human nature and of the cultural frameworks driving institutions of government, business, education, and media around the world. Questions of what is natural and just will need to be critically re-examined.

(Bahá'í International Community, Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism, 2010)

Norms & Values for Transformation

The issue of sustainable consumption and production... will need to be considered in the broader context of an ailing social order—one characterized by competition, violence, conflict and insecurity—of which it is a part.

(Bahá'í International Community, Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism, 2010)

The environment

We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.

(Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 17 February 1933)

Respect for the earth

Every man of discernment, while walking upon the earth, feeleth indeed abashed, inasmuch as he is fully aware that the thing which is the source of his prosperity, his wealth, his might, his exaltation, his advancement and power is, as ordained by God, the very earth which is trodden beneath the feet of all men. There can be no doubt that whoever is cognizant of this truth, is cleansed and sanctified from all pride, arrogance, and vainglory.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, Wilmette, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988, p. 44)

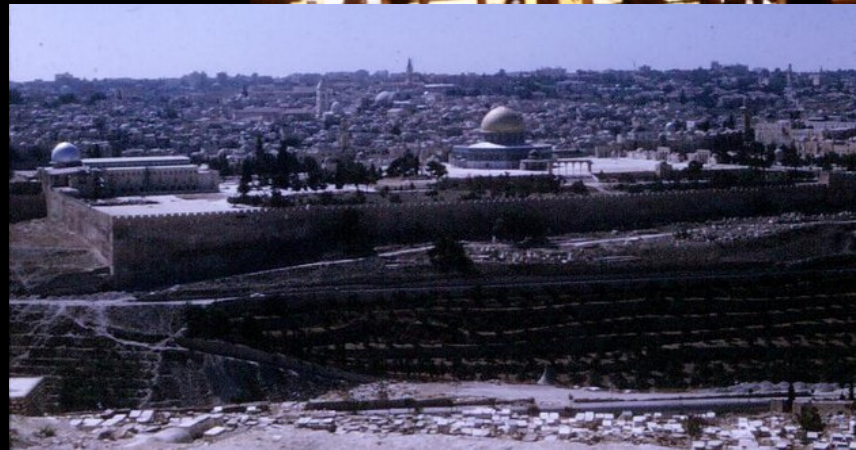
The country is the world of the soul

Bahá'u'lláh loved the beauty and verdure of the country. One day He passed the remark: '*I have not gazed on verdure for nine years. The country is the world of the soul, the city is the world of bodies.*'

('Abdu'l-Bahá, in J. E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*. Chpt. 3, p. 35)

Nature and Spirituality

All religions
have teachings
about ecology



Bahá'í Faith

Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 142)

Nature and Spirituality

When... thou dost contemplate the innermost essence of all things, and the individuality of each, thou wilt behold the signs of thy Lord's mercy in every created thing, and see the spreading rays of His Names and Attributes throughout all the realm of being

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 41-42)

Nature and Spirituality

Then wilt thou observe that the universe is a scroll that discloseth His hidden secrets, which are preserved in the well-guarded Tablet. And not an atom of all the atoms in existence, not a creature from amongst the creatures but speaketh His praise and telleth of His attributes and names, revealeth the glory of His might and guideth to His oneness and His mercy....

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 41-42)

Nature and Spirituality

And whensoever thou dost gaze upon creation all entire, and dost observe the very atoms thereof, thou wilt note that the rays of the Sun of Truth are shed upon all things and shining within them, and telling of that Day-Star's splendours, Its mysteries, and the spreading of Its lights.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 41-42)

Nature and Spirituality

Look thou upon the trees, upon the blossoms and fruits, even upon the stones. Here too wilt thou behold the Sun's rays shed upon them, clearly visible within them, and manifested by them.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 41-42)

Loving kindness to all creatures

...it is not only their fellow human beings that the beloved of God must treat with mercy and compassion, rather must they show forth the utmost loving-kindness to every living creature.... The feelings are one and the same, whether ye inflict pain on man or on beast.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 158-159)

Loving kindness to all creatures

Train your children from their earliest days to be infinitely tender and loving to animals. If an animal be sick, let the children try to heal it, if it be hungry, let them feed it, if thirsty, let them quench its thirst, if weary, let them see that it rests.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 158-159)