

Guidance from the Bahá'í Writings on Charity and Service

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

Charity is a prince among goodly deeds...

"Charity is pleasing and praiseworthy in the sight of God and is regarded as a prince among goodly deeds."

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 71)

The purpose of human life is to work for the betterment of the world...

"This Wronged One testifieth that the purpose for which mortal men have, from utter nothingness, stepped into the realm of being, is that they may work for the betterment of the world and live together in concord and harmony."

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations vol. II*, p. 332)

Now is the time to cheer and refresh the down-cast through love, fellowship, friendliness and charity...

"This is the Day whereon the Ocean of God's mercy hath been manifested unto men, the Day in which the Day Star of His loving-kindness hath shed its radiance upon them, the Day in which the clouds of His bountiful favor have overshadowed the whole of mankind. Now is the time to cheer and refresh the down-cast through the invigorating breeze of love and fellowship, and the living waters of friendliness and charity."

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 7)

Well is it with the rich who bestow their wealth upon the needy...

"They who are possessed of riches must have the utmost regard for the poor... Great is the blessedness awaiting the poor that endure patiently and conceal their sufferings, and well is it with the rich who bestow their riches on the needy and prefer them before themselves."

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 202)

During Ayyám-i-Há, Bahá'ís should especially provide for the poor and needy...

"It behoveth the people of Bahá, throughout these days [of Ayyám-i-Há], to provide good cheer for themselves, their kindred and, beyond them, the poor and needy, and with joy and exultation to hail and glorify their Lord, to sing His praise and magnify His Name; and when they end – these days of giving that precede the season of restraint – let them enter upon the Fast."

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 25)

If we seek the Beloved, we should show kindness to animals and to our fellow-man...

"[He who truly seeks the Beloved] should succor the dispossessed, and never withhold his favor from the destitute. He should show kindness to animals, how much more unto his fellow-man, to him who is endowed with the power of utterance."

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 257)

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Knowledge does not feed the starving man, nor warm the poor in winter; practical help is needed...

"We know that to help the poor and to be merciful is good and pleases God, but knowledge alone does not feed the starving man, nor can the poor be warmed by knowledge or words in the bitter winter; we must give the practical help of loving-kindness."

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, p. 60)

What we seek in religion is the spirit of charity and love, which binds the hearts together...

"Man must spiritually perceive that religion has been intended by God to be the means of grace, the source of life and cause of agreement. If it becomes the cause of discord, enmity and hatred, it is better that man should be without it. For in its teachings we seek the spirit of charity and love to bind the hearts of men together. If, on the contrary, we find it alienates and embitters human hearts, we are justified in casting it aside. Therefore, when man through sincere investigation discovers the fundamental reality of religion, his former prejudices disappear, and his new condition of enlightenment is conducive to the development of the world of humanity."

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 327)

We should forget own own ease, and work the well-being of the world...

"Forget thou entirely the ease, tranquility, composure and living of this transitory world and occupy thyself with the well-being and service of the human world and conduct thyself in accord with the advices and exhortations of God."

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol.3*, p. 658)

With purity and sincerity, we should sacrifice ourselves for the welfare of humanity...

"I desire that your hearts may be directed to the Kingdom of God, that your intentions may be pure and sincere, your purposes turned toward altruistic accomplishment unmindful of your own welfare; nay, rather, may all your intentions center in the welfare of humanity, and may you seek to sacrifice yourselves in the pathway of devotion to mankind."

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 54)

Deeds and actions the proof of being a true Bahá'í...

"A man may be a Bahá'í in name only. If he is a Bahá'í in reality, his deeds and actions will be decisive proofs of it. What are the requirements? Love for mankind, sincerity toward all, reflecting the oneness of the world of humanity, philanthropy, becoming enkindled with the fire of the love of God, attainment to the knowledge of God and that which is conducive to human welfare."

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 336)

A true Bahá'í home/center contributes to the material and spiritual development of its surrounding community...

"This is in truth a Bahá'í house. Every time such a house or meeting place is founded it becomes one of the greatest aids to the general development of the town and country to which it belongs. It encourages the growth of learning and science and is known for its intense spirituality and for the love it spreads among the peoples.

The foundation of such a meeting-place is always followed by the greatest prosperity. The first Bahá'í Assembly that existed in Tíhrán was singularly blessed! In one year it had grown so rapidly that its members had increased to nine times their original number. Today, in far-away Persia, there are many such assemblies where the friends of God meet together in the fulness of joy, love and unity. They teach the Cause of God, educate the ignorant, and draw heart to heart in brotherly kindness. It is they who help the poor and needy and give to them their daily bread. They love and care for the sick and are messengers of hope and consolation to the desolate and oppressed... Strive that your assemblies may be like unto this, and may bear even greater fruits!"

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 73)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá clearly identifies six proper foundations and aims for charitable works, as the means for the spiritual growth of the community...

“Oh, friends of God! If ye will trust in the Word of God and be strong; if ye will follow the precepts of Bahá'u'lláh to tend the sick, raise the fallen, care for the poor and needy, give shelter to the destitute, protect the oppressed, comfort the sorrowful and love the world of humanity with all your hearts, then I say unto you that ere long this meeting-place will see a wonderful harvest. Day by day each member will advance and become more and more spiritual. But ye must have a firm foundation and your aims and ambitions must be clearly understood by each member. They shall be as follows:

1. To show compassion and goodwill to all mankind.
2. To render service to humanity.
3. To endeavour to guide and enlighten those in darkness.
4. To be kind to everyone, and show forth affection to every living soul.
5. To be humble in your attitude towards God, to be constant in prayer to Him, so as to grow daily nearer to God.
6. To be so faithful and sincere in all your actions that every member may be known as embodying the qualities of honesty, love, faith, kindness, generosity, and courage. To be detached from all that is not God, attracted by the Heavenly Breath – a divine soul; so that the world may know that a Bahá'í is a perfect being.

Strive to attain this at these meetings. Then, indeed and in truth will ye, the friends of God, come together with great joy! Render help one to the other, become as one man, having reached perfect unity.

I pray to God that daily ye may advance in spirituality, that God's love may be more and more manifested in you, that the thoughts of your hearts may be purified, and that your faces may be ever turned towards Him. May you one and all approach to the threshold of unity, and enter into the Kingdom. May each of you be like unto a flaming torch, lighted and burning bright with the fire of the Love of God."

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 73)

Care must be organized for orphans, refugees, the poor, sick, oppressed, and destitute...

“To the orphans be ye kind fathers, and to the unfortunate a refuge and shelter. To the poor be a treasure of wealth, and to the sick a remedy and healing. Be a helper of every oppressed one, the protector of every destitute one, be ye ever mindful to serve any soul of mankind. Attach no importance to self-seeking, rejection, arrogance, oppression and enmity. Heed them not. Deal in the contrary way. Be kind in truth, not only in appearance and outwardly. Every soul of the friends of God must concentrate his mind on this, that he may manifest the mercy of God and the bounty of the Forgiving One. He must do good to every soul whom he encounters, and render benefit to him."

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 216)

The Bahá'í Temple is not only for worship, but should also become a focal point of charity: all

Temples to include a hospital, pharmacy, pilgrims' house, school for orphans, and university...

"The contribution that thou hast made to the [Bahá'í] Temple is beloved. The Temple is the most great foundation of the world of humanity and it hath many branches. Although the Temple is the place of worship, with it is connected a hospital, pharmacy, pilgrims' house, school for the orphans, and a university for the study of high sciences. Every Temple is connected with these five things. I hope that now in America they will build a Temple and gradually add to it the hospital, school, university, pharmacy and pilgrims' house with the utmost efficiency and thoroughness. Thou shouldst make known to the believers these details, so that they may realize how important the Temple is."
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 416)

Kindness and care for orphans is very important; great consideration should be given to their education...

"In this holy Cause the question of orphans hath the utmost importance. The greatest consideration must be shown towards orphans; they must be taught, trained and educated... I supplicate God that thou mayest become a kind parent to orphaned children, quickening them with the fragrances of the Holy Spirit, so that they will attain the age of maturity as true servants of the world of humanity and as bright candles in the assemblage of mankind."
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 137)

It is not through lip-service that we attain to holiness, but through lives of active service; this is the work of a true Bahá'í and it is expected of us...

"If we are true Bahá'ís speech is not needed. Our actions will help the world, will spread civilization, will help the progress of science, and cause the arts to develop. Without action nothing in the material world can be accomplished, neither can words unaided advance a man in the spiritual Kingdom. It is not through lip-service only that the elect of God have attained to holiness, but by patient lives of active service they have brought light into the world.

Therefore strive that your actions day by day may be beautiful prayers. Turn towards God, and seek always to do that which is right and noble. Enrich the poor, raise the fallen, comfort the sorrowful, bring healing to the sick, reassure the fearful, rescue the oppressed, bring hope to the hopeless, shelter the destitute!

This is the work of a true Bahá'í, and this is what is expected of him. If we strive to do all this, then are we true Bahá'ís, but if we neglect it, we are not followers of the Light, and we have no right to the name. God, who sees all hearts, knows how far our lives are the fulfilment of our words."
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 80)

We should become a refuge, a provider, a treasury, a healing medicine, a doctor and nurse, a friend, a reconciler...

"Be ye a refuge to the fearful; bring ye rest and peace to the disturbed; make ye a provision for the destitute; be a treasury of riches for the poor; be a healing medicine for those who suffer pain; be ye doctor and nurse to the ailing; promote ye friendship, and honour, and conciliation, and devotion to God, in this world of non-existence."
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 72)

We should love and assist the afflicted, the grieved, the fearful, the destitute, the wounded, the dejected, the unfortunate, the begging, the lamenting ones...

"Be thou loving to every afflicted one, a dispeller of sorrows to every grieved one, a refuge to every fearful one, a heavenly food to every destitute one, a balm to every wounded one, a consolation to dejected hearts, a blessing to unfortunate souls, a treasure to every begging one and a succor to every lamenting one – so that thou mayest be a banner of guidance and the essence of piety among the maid-servants of thy Supreme Lord."

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Vol. 1*, p. 201).

We must show kindness and mercy to animals...

"Ye must not only have kind and merciful feelings for mankind, but ye should also exercise the utmost kindness towards every living creature. The physical sensibilities and instincts are common to animal and man. Man is, however, negligent of this reality and imagines that sensibility is peculiar to mankind, therefore he practices cruelty to the animal. In reality what difference is there in physical sensations! Sensibility is the same whether you harm man or animal: there is no difference. Nay, rather, cruelty to the animal is more painful because man has a tongue and he sighs, complains and groans when he receives an injury and complains to the government and the government protects him from cruelty; but the poor animal cannot speak, it can neither show its suffering nor is it able to appeal to the government. If it is harmed a thousand times by man it is not able to defend itself in words nor can it seek justice or retaliate. Therefore one must be very considerate towards animals and show greater kindness to them than to man. Educate the children in their infancy in such a way that they may become exceedingly kind and merciful to the animals. If an animal is sick they should endeavor to cure it; if it is hungry, they should feed it; if it is thirsty, they should satisfy its thirst; if it is tired, they should give it rest."

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

From the Letters of Shoghi Effendi

Charity is the very essence of the Teachings and should be developed in every Bahá’í community...

"This Bahá’í teaching of human fellowship and kindness implies that we must be always ready to extend every assistance and help we can to those who are in distress and suffering. Bahá’í charity is of the very essence of the Teachings, and should therefore be developed in every Bahá’í community. Charitable institutions such as orphanages, free schools and hospitals for the poor, constitute an indispensable part of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár. It is the responsibility of every local Bahá’í community to insure the welfare of its poor and needy members, through whatever means possible."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, June 26, 1936. *Lights of Guidance*, p. 120)

The collective interests of the Cause should continue to be given precedence...

"But, of course, this extension of assistance to the poor, in whatever form should under no circumstances be allowed to seriously interfere with the major collective interests of the Bahá’í community, as distinguished from the purely personal interests of its members. The demands of the Cause transcend those of the individual, and should therefore be given precedence. But these two phases of Bahá’í social life, though not of equal importance, are by no means contradictory. Both of them are essential, and should be fostered..."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, June 26, 1936. *Lights of Guidance*, p. 120)

Local Spiritual Assembly should extend a helping hand to the poor, irrespective of colour, caste or creed...

"They (the Local Spiritual Assembly) must do their utmost to extend at all times the helping hand to the poor, the sick, the disabled, the orphan, the widow, irrespective of colour, caste and creed. "They must promote by every means in their power the material as well as the spiritual enlightenment of youth, the means for the education of children, institute, whenever possible, Bahá'í educational institutions, organize and supervise their work and provide the best means for their progress and development."

(From a letter written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the West, Japan and Australasia, March 12, 1923. *Lights of Guidance*, p. 123)

Bahá'ís should not refrain from extending charity to the needy...

"Regarding your question concerning helping the poor: The Bahá'ís should not go so far as to refrain from extending charity to the needy, if they are able and willing to do so. However, in this, as in many other things, they should exert moderation. The greatest gift that we can give to the poor and the down-trodden is to aid to build up the divine institutions inaugurated in this day by Bahá'u'lláh as these institution, and this World Order when established, will eliminate the causes of poverty and the injustices which afflict the poor. We should, therefore, do both, support our Bahá'í Fund, and also be kind and generous to the needy."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual Believer, March 11, 1942. *Lights of Guidance*, p. 124)

In philanthropic enterprises, let the beloved of God lead all the rest...

"In philanthropic enterprises and acts of charity, in promotion of the general welfare and furtherance of the public good including that of every group without any exceptions whatever, let the beloved of God attract the favourable attention of all, and lead all the rest. Let them, freely and without charge, open the doors of their schools and their higher institutions for the study of sciences and the liberal arts, to non-Bahá'í children and youth who are poor and in need."

(From a letter dated January 1929 written by Shoghi Effendi to the believers of the East- translated from the Persian. *The Compilation of Compilations vol. I*, p. 297)

From the Letters of the Universal House of Justice

It is improper for Bahá'ís to solicit funds from non-Bahá'ís...

"It is improper for Bahá'ís to solicit funds from non-Bahá'ís in the name of the Faith for any purpose. If a non-Bahá'í insists on making a monetary contribution it may be accepted with the express understanding that it will be used only for charitable or philanthropic purposes, but such contributions should be discouraged, not encouraged."

(The Universal House of Justice: From a letter to a Local Spiritual Assembly, March 19, 1973. *Lights of Guidance*, p. 121)

Assemblies should perform charitable works with a pure motive, not for propagandizing the Faith...

"Spiritual Assemblies are, of course, permitted to make contributions to charity – indeed care of the poor and needy is one of the duties assigned to them in the Bahá'í Writings - but they must weigh their [other] responsibilities very carefully... This, clearly, is a matter for wise moderation. Assemblies, moreover, should perform their charitable works with a pure motive, and not with the thought of propagandizing for the Faith. An individual Bahá'í is, of course, free to contribute to charity from his own resources if he wishes, but as a Bahá'í he should bear in mind the needs of the Bahá'í Fund, which only believers can support."

(The Universal House of Justice: Letter to a Local Assembly, March 19, 1973. *Lights of Guidance*, p. 121)

It is not merely material well-being that people need...

"We must not allow ourselves to forget the continuing, appalling burden of suffering under which millions of human beings are always groaning – a burden which they have borne for century upon century and which it is the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh to lift at last. The principal cause of this suffering, which one can witness wherever one turns, is the corruption of human morals and the prevalence of prejudice, suspicion, hatred, untrustworthiness, selfishness and tyranny among men. It is not merely material well-being that people need. What they desperately need is to know how to live their lives – they need to know who they are, to what purpose they exist, and how they should act towards one another; and, once they know the answers to these questions they need to be helped to gradually apply these answers to every-day behavior. It is to the solution of this basic problem of mankind that the greater part of all our energy and resources should be directed..."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Italy, November 19, 1974. *Lights of Guidance*, p. 122)

Community contributions to charity should not have partisan political implications...

"Concerning anonymous contributions to raise funds for a deserving charity: "Such activities or even the making of donations to humanitarian work should be, and should be seen to be, acts of sincere assistance and cooperation. In choosing to engage in such fundraising, a Bahá'í community would need to ensure that assisting the charity would not have partisan political implications or support purposes contrary to the interests of the Faith. It would need to watch carefully that its involvement in such activities does not divert its energies from the vital work of teaching the Faith and consolidating its Institutions."

(Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated August 20, 1987, in Bahá'í Canada Supplement, dated January, 1988, p. 5. NSA USA - *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*)

"Food, Justice, and the Bahá'í Faith"

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"Food charity was a well established religious practice in the Middle East. Both Christianity and Islam had long emphasised the duty of the believer to feed the poor. In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus describes how he will come on the Day of Judgement and condemn those who did not feed or succour those less fortunate, for in failing to do so, they had left Christ Himself hungry, thirsty, sick and unclothed (Matthew 25: 31-46). The Qur'an stresses the responsibility of those with means to provide for the poor and makes the feeding of a specified number of poor people the expiation for certain offences, such as breaches of fasting regulations. Zakat was a tax levied on Muslims for the specific purpose of providing alms for the poor. It required that believers give a fixed portion of certain categories of income, beyond certain limits, for relief of the poor, other charitable activities and to aid the Faith of God. Charity is also a fundamental virtue in Judaism.

What do the Bahá'í sacred writings say about charity? If courtesy is the prince of virtues, charity is similarly esteemed when it comes to action. "Charity is pleasing and praiseworthy in the sight of God and is regarded as a prince among goodly deeds" (Bahá'u'lláh 1988: 71). The essence of charity is for the servant to recount the blessings of his Lord and to render thanks unto Him at all times and under all conditions (156). Charity is associated with humility; recognizing that others are in need is a reminder of one's own good fortune, which is itself a blessing from God. In Bahá'í teachings voluntary giving to the poor is seen to be both noble and of spiritual benefit to the giver, and also is a moral obligation.

"Is it possible that, seeing one of his fellow-creatures starving, destitute of everything, a man can rest and live comfortably in his luxurious mansion? [...]. That is why, in the Religion of God, it is prescribed and established that wealthy men each year give part of their fortune for the maintenance of the poor and

unfortunate" ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1981: 278).

Bahá'u'lláh decreed In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas that the Bahá'í law of zakat should follow what had been decreed in the Qur'an' (Q107). However, the Qur'an did not stipulate detailed regulations concerning amounts and limits for zakat; these have yet to be developed for Bahá'ís by the Universal House of Justice. Meantime Bahá'ís are encouraged to contribute to a Bahá'í fund that is used for administrative, educational and charitable purposes.

[Source: <http://bahai-charity.weebly.com/bahai-writings-on-charity.html>]
{ Note: emphasis (underline) added to quotes; not part of original text }

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