

Mendicancy

Bahá'u'lláh

Translated



Mendicancy (Begging)

*"It is unlawful to beg, and it is forbidden to give to him who beggeth. All have been enjoined to earn a living, and as for those who are incapable of doing so, it is incumbent on the Deputies of God and on the wealthy to make adequate provision for them. Keep ye the statutes and commandments of God; nay, guard them as ye would your very eyes, and be not of those who suffer grievous loss."*¹

*"O people of Bahá! It is incumbent upon each one of you to engage in some occupation—such as a craft, a trade or the like. We have exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship of the one true God. Reflect, O people, on the grace and blessings of your Lord, and yield Him thanks at eventide and dawn. Waste not your hours in idleness and sloth, but occupy yourselves with what will profit you and others. Thus hath it been decreed in this Tablet from whose horizon hath shone the daystar of wisdom and utterance. The most despised of men in the sight of God are they who sit and beg. Hold ye fast unto the cord of means and place your trust in God, the Provider of all means."*²

*"...The most despised of men in the sight of God are those who sit idly and beg..."*³

"to engage in some occupation"

It is obligatory for men and women to engage in a trade or profession. Bahá'u'lláh exalts *"engagement in such work"* to the *"rank of worship"* of God. The spiritual and practical significance of this law, and the mutual responsibility of the individual and society for its implementation are explained in a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi:

With reference to Bahá'u'lláh's command concerning the engagement of the believers in some sort of profession: the Teachings are most emphatic on this matter, particularly the statement in the Aqdas to this effect which makes it quite clear that idle people who lack the desire to work can have no place in the new World Order. As a corollary of this principle, Bahá'u'lláh further states that mendicity should not only be discouraged but entirely wiped out from the face of society. It is the duty of those who are in charge of the organization of society to give every individual the opportunity of acquiring the necessary talent in some kind of profession, and also

1. Baha'u'llah, The Most Holy Book, para 147

2. Baha'u'llah, The Most Holy Book, para 33

3. Baha'u'llah, Glad-Tidings, The twelfth Glad-Tidings



TRANSLATION

the means of utilizing such a talent, both for its own sake and for the sake of earning the means of his livelihood. Every individual, no matter how handicapped and limited he may be, is under the obligation of engaging in some work or profession, for work, especially when performed in the spirit of service, is according to Bahá'u'lláh a form of worship. It has not only a utilitarian purpose, but has a value in itself, because it draws us nearer to God, and enables us to better grasp His purpose for us in this world. It is obvious, therefore, that the inheritance of wealth cannot make anyone immune from daily work.

In one of His Tablets, 'Abdu'lBahá states that ***"if a person is incapable of earning a living, is stricken by dire poverty or becometh helpless, then it is incumbent on the wealthy or the Deputies to provide him with a monthly allowance for his subsistence.... By 'Deputies' is meant the representatives of the people, that is to say the members of the House of Justice."*** (See also note 162 on mendicancy.)

In response to a question concerning whether Bahá'u'lláh's injunction requires a wife and mother, as well as her husband, to work for a livelihood, the Universal House of Justice has explained that Bahá'u'lláh's directive is for the friends to be engaged in an occupation which will profit themselves and others, and that homemaking is a highly honorable and responsible work of fundamental importance to society.

Concerning the retirement from work for individuals who have reached a certain age, Shoghi Effendi in a letter written on his behalf stated that "this is a matter on which the International House of Justice will have to legislate as there are no provisions in the Aqdas concerning it."⁴

"It is unlawful to beg, and it is forbidden to give to him who beggeth.

In a Tablet 'Abdu'lBahá expounds the meaning of this verse. He states that *"mendicancy is forbidden and that giving charity to people who take up begging as their profession is also prohibited."* He further points out in that same Tablet: *"The object is to uproot mendicancy altogether. However, if a person is incapable of earning a living, is stricken by dire poverty or becometh helpless, then it is incumbent on the wealthy or the Deputies to provide him with a monthly allowance for his subsistence ... By 'Deputies' is meant the representatives of the people, that is to say the members of the House of Justice."*

The prohibition against giving charity to people who beg does not preclude individuals and Spiritual Assemblies from extending financial assistance to the poor and needy or from providing them with opportunities to acquire such skills as would enable them to earn a livelihood (see note 56)⁵

"We have been asked to share with you the following extract from one of the Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha on the subject of begging:

'By the sacred verse: "Begging is forbidden, and it is also prohibited to dispense alms to a beggar" is meant that mendicancy is forbidden and that giving charity to people who take up begging as their profession is also prohibited. The object is to wipe out mendicancy altogether.

⁴. Notes to the Kitab-i-Aqdas no. 56

⁵. Notes to the Kitab-i-Aqdas no. 162

However, if a person is disabled, stricken by dire poverty or becomes helpless, then it is incumbent upon the rich or the trustees to provide him with a monthly allowance for his subsistence. When the House of Justice comes into being it will set up homes for the incapacitated. Thus no one will be obliged to beg, even as the supplementary part of the blessed verse denotes: "It is enjoined upon everyone to earn his livelihood"; then He says: "As to those who are disabled, it devolveth upon the trustees and the rich to make adequate provision for them." By "trustees" is meant the representatives of the people, that is to say the members of the House of Justice.'

"The Universal House of Justice does not wish to go beyond the elucidation given by the Master in the above passage and wishes, for the time being, to leave any matter not entirely covered by this text to the conscience of individual believers."⁶



Babi Dispensation

The Bab Forbade begging and the giving to them by the individual believers. See Arabic Bayan, Wahid VII, Chapter XVII



6. From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, August 13, 1974