

Engaging in a Trade or Profession

Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi

Partial translation



Engaging in a trade or profession

*"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."*¹

*"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."*²

*"O My Servant! The best of men are they that earn a livelihood by their calling and spend upon themselves and upon their kindred for the love of God, the Lord of all worlds."*³

*"O My Servant! The basest of men are they that yield no fruit on earth. Such men are verily counted as among the dead, nay better are the dead in the sight of God than those idle and worthless souls."*⁴

*"It is enjoined upon every one of you to engage in some form of occupation, such as crafts, trades and the like. ..."*⁵

"...man standeth in need of wealth, and such wealth as he acquireth through crafts or professions is commendable and praiseworthy in the estimation of men of wisdom, and

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

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

3. Baha'u'llah, Hidden Words from the Persian, no. 82

4. Baha'u'llah, Hidden Words from the Persian, no. 81

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



*especially in the eyes of servants who dedicate themselves to the education of the world and to the edification of its peoples..."*⁶

*"... To engage in some profession is highly commendable, for when occupied with work one is less likely to dwell on the unpleasant aspects of life."*⁷

*"Concerning the means of livelihood, thou shouldst, while placing thy whole trust in God, engage in some occupation. He will assuredly send down upon thee from the heaven of His favor that which is destined for thee. He is in truth the God of might and power."*⁸

"... All humanity must obtain a livelihood by sweat of the brow and bodily exertion; at the same time seeking to lift the burden of others, striving to be the source of comfort to souls and facilitating the means of living. This in itself is devotion to God. Bahá'u'lláh has thereby encouraged action and stimulated service..."⁹

"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 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, specially 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."¹⁰

"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. 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

6. Baha'u'llah, Tarazat, First Taraz

7. Baha'u'llah, Lawh Maqsud

8. Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, Lawh-i-Haji Ali Langarud, pp. 267

9. Abdu'l-Baha, Promulgation of Universal Peace, Talk at 309 West Seventy-eighth Street, New York

10. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, March 22, 1937, Lights of Guidance, no. 2106; also, in Directives from the Guardian, pp. 82-83

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."¹¹

"You ask about the admonition that everyone must work, and want to know if this means that you, a wife and mother, must work for a livelihood as your husband does. We are requested to enclose for your perusal an excerpt, 'The twelfth Glad-Tidings', from Bahá'u'lláh's 'Tablet of Bisharat'. You will see that the directive is for the friends to be engaged in an occupation which will be of benefit to mankind. Homemaking is a highly honourable and responsible work of fundamental importance for mankind."¹²

"In relation to your specific queries, the decision concerning the amount of time a mother may spend in working outside the home depends on circumstances existing within the home, which may vary from time to time. Family consultation will help to provide the answers."¹³

"The great importance attached to the mother's role derives from the fact that she is the first educator of the child. Her attitude, her prayers, even what she eats and her physical condition have a great influence on the child when it is still in womb. When the child is born, it is she who has been endowed by God with the milk which is the first food designed for it, and it is intended that, if possible, she should be with the baby to train and nurture it in its earliest days and months. This does not mean that the father does not also love, pray for, and care for his baby, but as he has the primary responsibility of providing for the family, his time to be with his child is usually limited, while the mother is usually closely associated with the baby during this intensely formative time when it is growing and developing faster than it ever will again during the whole of its life. As the child grows older and more independent, the relative nature of its relationship with its mother and father modifies and the father can play a greater role." [^14] [^14] From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, August 23, 1984, Lights of Guidance, no. 2120

"For it must be clearly understood that working for the Cause does not and cannot constitute a sort of professional activity of the type current in ecclesiastical organizations, whether Christian, Muslim or otherwise. We have no priesthood, no specialized class of people who can make the Cause their only life-work. In the Bahá'í Cause, where practical considerations are harmoniously

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

12. From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, June 16, 1982: Women, Lights of Guidance, no. 2117

13. From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, August 9, 1984: Women, Lights of Guidance, no. 2119

combined with those of a more theoretical character, where idealism and realism are each duly recognized and are fused into a harmonious whole, men and women are commanded to work for the Cause not as a substitute to their daily professional occupation but in addition to them."¹⁴

“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 Baha'u'llah'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 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 Baha'u'llah 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'lBaha 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 Baha'u'llah'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.”¹⁵



¹⁴. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, June 30, 1936, Lights of Guidance, no. 2111

¹⁵. Notes to the Kitab-i-Aqdas no. 56

Babi Dispensation

“It is not permissible to ask in the markets, and whoever is asked, it is forbidden for him to give. **And indeed, upon each one of you is to earn by his own means.** And whoever is not able, then you are to show off your wealth from Me to them, so that you may convey...”¹⁶



¹⁶. The Bab, Arabic Bayan, Wahid VII, Chapter XVII (Provisional Translation)