

# Idleness and Sloth

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

Partial translation



## Idleness and sloth

*"... 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."*<sup>1</sup>

*"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."*<sup>2</sup>

*"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."*<sup>3</sup>

*"It is enjoined upon every one of you to engage in some form of occupation, such as crafts, trades and the like. ..."*<sup>4</sup>

*"...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 especially in the eyes of servants who dedicate themselves to the education of the world and to the edification of its peoples..."*<sup>5</sup>

*"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."*<sup>6</sup>

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

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

3. Baha'u'llah, Lawh-i-Maqsud

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

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

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



"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." <sup>7</sup>

"The instruction of these children is even as the work of a loving gardener who tendeth his young plants in the flowering fields of the All-Glorious. There is no doubt that it will yield the desired results; especially is this true of instruction as to Bahá'í obligations and Bahá'í conduct, for the little children must needs be made aware in their very heart and soul that "Bahá'í" is not just a name but a truth. Every child must be trained in the things of the spirit, so that he may embody all the virtues and become a source of glory to the Cause of God. Otherwise, the mere word "Bahá'í", if it yield no fruit, will come to nothing." <sup>8</sup>

"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." <sup>9</sup>

"... 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..." <sup>10</sup>

**"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:

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7. Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks, pp. 80

8. Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, sec. 123, pp. 143

9. 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

10. Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 187, Lights of Guidance, no. 2113

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, 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."<sup>11</sup>

***"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)<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>. Notes to the Kitab-i-Aqdas no. 56

<sup>12</sup>. Notes to the Kitab-i-Aqdas no. 162



## Babi Dispensation

The Bab ordained that everyone is to earn by his own means. See Arabic Bayan, Wahid VII, Chapter XVII

