

LII. WORK

Compiled from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l

Original English



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A. Work is Worship

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"It is made incumbent on every one of you to engage in some occupation, such as arts, trades, and the like. We have made this — your occupation — identical with the worship of God, the True One. Reflect, O people, upon the Mercy of God and upon His favors, then thank Him in mornings and evenings."

(Bahá'u'lláh: Bahá'í World Faith, p. 195)

1. Idle People Have No Place in the World Order

"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."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, March 22, 1937)

1. Abdu'l-Bahá Advocates the Need for a Profession — He Said His Was Mat-Making

"In connection with your dear husband, Shoghi Effendi would consider it in full and happy accord with the expressed desire of the Master that every man should have some permanent work. Much as he desires to see you both devote your entire energies to a well-thought out,



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progressive and attractive presentation of the Cause — a thing he feels we lack lamentably — he would be very pleased to see your husband follow what the Master often repeated even to His own immediate family, namely [pg 625] the necessity of a profession. Of course you know that He always said His had been mat-making."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, September 20, 1929)

1. **Bahá'u'lláh Commands that Everyone Should Engage in Some Sort of Profession**

"The Guardian fully realizes that from the material standpoint it would be quite easy for you to devote all your time to the service of the Cause, and he deeply appreciates the strong desire you have expressed to consecrate your full life to this noble aim, which should certainly be the chief and constant ambition of every loyal believer."

"But he thinks that in view of Bahá'u'lláh's emphatic command, as recorded in His Book of Laws, that every person should be engaged in some sort of profession, it would be better and more in conformity with the Teachings if you remain in your profession and teach the Cause at the same time. As you rightly suggest, the middle path, that is to say practicing one's profession and also teaching the Cause, is the best way for you to follow."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, June 30, 1936)

1. **Division of Time**

"The advice that Shoghi Effendi gave you regarding the division of your time between serving the Cause and attending to your other duties was also given to many other friends both by Bahá'u'lláh and the Master. It is a compromise between the two verses of the 'Aqdas': one making it incumbent upon every Bahá'í to serve the promotion of the Faith and the other that every soul should be occupied in some form of occupation that will benefit society. In one of His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh says that the highest form of detachment in this day is to be occupied with some profession and be self-supporting. A good Bahá'í, therefore, is the one who so arranges his life as to devote time both to his material needs and also to the service of the Cause."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, February 26, 1933)

1. **Art is Worship**

"In the Bahá'í Cause arts, sciences and all crafts are (counted as) worship.... Briefly, all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship, if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity. This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer...."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Paris Talks, pp. 176-177)

1. **Working for the Cause Does Not Constitute Professional Activity**

"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 combined with those of [pg 626] 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."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, June 30, 1936)

1. **Practice Economy**

"Thou hast asked regarding the means of livelihood. Trust in God and engage in your work and practice economy; the confirmations of God shall descend and you will be enabled to pay off your debts. Be ye occupied always with the mention of Bahá'u'lláh and seek ye no other hope and desire save Him."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Bahá'í World Faith, p. 375)

1. **All Humanity Must Obtain a Livelihood**

"...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...."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 187)

1. **Retirement from Work**

"As to the question of retirement from work for individuals who have reached a certain age, 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."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, March 22, 1937: Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 12)

1. **Work in the Cause at Whatever Age**

"Even though you are 79 years old, that does not seem in your case to be any handicap; and in this Cause, as the Guardian has told us there is work for everyone of some sort, of whatever age he or she may be."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, August 23, 1954: cited by the Universal House of Justice, December 14, 1970)

1. **"Occupy Yourselves with that which Profiteth Yourselves and Others"**

"It is enjoined upon every one of you to engage in some form of occupation, such as crafts, trades and the like, We have graciously exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship unto God, the True One. Ponder ye in your hearts the grace and the blessings of God

and render thanks unto Him at eventide and at dawn. Waste not your time in idleness and sloth. Occupy yourselves with that which profiteth yourselves and others. Thus hath it been decreed in this Tablet from whose horizon the day-star of wisdom and utterance shineth resplendent."

(Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas, 1978 World Centre ed., p. 26)

1. Must a Wife and Mother Work for Her Livelihood as Her Husband Does?

"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. [pg 627] 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."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, June 16, 1982: Women)

1. The Man Has Primary Responsibility for the Financial Support of the Family and the Woman is the Chief and Primary Educator of the Children

"With regard to your question whether mothers should work outside the home, it is helpful to consider the matter from the perspective of the concept of a Bahá'í family. This concept is based on the principle that the man has primary responsibility for the financial support of the family, and the woman is the chief and primary educator of the children. This by no means implies that these functions are inflexibly fixed and cannot be changed and adjusted to suit particular family situations, nor does it mean that the place of the woman is confined to the home. Rather, while primary responsibility is assigned, it is anticipated that fathers would play a significant role in the education of the children and women could also be breadwinners. As you rightly indicated, Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged women to 'participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world'."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, August 9, 1984: Ibid.)

1. Concerning the Amount of Time a Mother May Spend Outside the Home

"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."

(Ibid.)

1. The Importance of the Mother's Role Derives from the Fact that She is the First Educator of the Child

"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."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, August 23, 1984)

B. Trade Unions and Strikes

1. Guidelines in Respect to Membership in Trade Unions and Participation in Strikes

"On the question of trade unions the Guardian's secretary made the following comment on his behalf in a letter dated 2 February²³. 'Regarding your question about trade unions: The Guardian considers that this is a matter for each National Spiritual Assembly to advise the believers on. As long as the trade unions are not members of any particular political party, there does not seem to be any objection to the Bahá'ís belonging to them.'"

"...the British National Spiritual Assembly wrote to the Guardian as follows: 'In this country the law recognises strikes as legal when called by properly constituted authorities such as a Trade Union, and our own understanding is that in such circumstances the Bahá'í teaching, in spite of Abdu'l-Bahá's express disapproval of strikes, neither requires nor forbids an individual to strike but leaves him free to decide for himself in the particular circumstances of his case what is the proper course of action.'"

"The Guardian's secretary replied on his behalf in a letter dated July 11, 1956: 'As regard strikes, the Guardian feels that your own understanding of the matter as expressed in your letter is quite correct, and he does not see the necessity of adding anything to it. We should avoid becoming rigid and laying down any more rules and regulations of conduct.'"

"Based on the above guidelines, we are to emphasize the following points.¹³ A Bahá'í can become a member of a trade union as long as he is not required to also join a political party. 2. Abdu'l-Bahá in general disapproved of strikes. The Bahá'í attitude is that when the law recognizes strikes as legal, as when called by a properly constituted authority such as a trade union, the Bahá'í teaching neither requires nor forbids an individual to participate in the strike but leaves him free to decide for himself what is the proper course of action in the particular circumstances."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, June 23, 1985) [pg 629]