

## The real causes of our environmental crisis

### Main Points

- We face many environmental challenges, not just global climate change:
  - Depleting earth's resources beyond sustainable levels.
  - Overuse of pesticides and chemicals.
  - Massive amounts of garbage, especially plastic.
  - Deforestation and land conversion.
  - Species extinction, including vital fish populations.
  - Air and water pollution. Nearly 2 billion people do not have access to clean drinking water.
  - Over-farming, over-hunting, over-fishing, over-everything.
  - By the end of the century we will have 4 billion MORE people.
- We know WHAT we are doing and HOW we are doing this, the question is WHY?
- Nature is an outer reflection of our inner condition. We have an environmental crisis because we have a spiritual, moral crisis.
- Materialism and selfishness are the principle causes of our environmental crisis. Materialism is a "world-devouring fire" and "cancerous".
- Disunity, mistrust, corruption, old patterns of thought are the "threat multipliers".
- We are prevented from adequately addressing these problems because we fail to understand our true nature as spiritual beings, and as a single humanity.
- What is required is a fundamental change of consciousness and practice at the individual, community, national and international levels. Any attempt to address the environmental crisis must include a new orientation:
  - We are spiritual beings, and our true happiness and prosperity lies in nurturing our souls. Material means, although vital, are not the only area in which we must measure progress. More is not always better.
  - Institutionalize cooperation and reciprocity. Selfishness has no place at any level of society.
  - We are stewards of this world. God has given us, each one of us, this beautiful world. We must treat it as a gift for all of us, and for generations to come.
  - We are a single people. The Oneness of Humanity is a fundamental truth that must be embraced. What affects one affects the whole. Whatever we do we must consider everyone, and must do it together.

## Quotations

The civilization, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men.... If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation.... The day is approaching when its flame will devour the cities...

*-Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 342-343*

We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.

*-Shoghi Effendi, Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, February 1933*

Consumer culture, today's inheritor by default of materialism's gospel of human betterment, is unembarrassed by the ephemeral nature of the goals that inspire it. For the small minority of people who can afford them, the benefits it offers are immediate, and the rationale unapologetic. Emboldened by the breakdown of traditional morality, the advance of the new creed is essentially no more than the triumph of animal impulse, as instinctive and blind as appetite, released at long last from the restraints of supernatural sanctions... Selfishness becomes a prized commercial resource.

*-Universal House of Justice, One Common Faith, 2005, p. 10*

However, until material achievements, physical accomplishments and human virtues are reinforced by spiritual perfections, luminous qualities and characteristics of mercy, no fruit or result shall issue therefrom, nor will the happiness of the world of humanity, which is the ultimate aim, be attained. For although, on the one hand, material achievements and the development of the physical world produce prosperity, which exquisitely manifests its intended aims, on the other hand dangers, severe calamities and violent afflictions are imminent.... Progress and barbarism go hand in hand, unless material civilization be confirmed by Divine Guidance... and be reinforced by spiritual conduct...

*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 283-284*

According to the Bahá'í International Community, the unfettered exploitation of planetary natural resources is one symptom of a "sickness of the human spirit". Thus, any lasting solution to the environmental and developmental challenges will need to recognize the spiritual nature of each human, the interdependency of all humans, and their relationship with the environment. In other words, development will need to be more than simply for short-term economic advantage; it must also further and benefit the minds and spirits of all humanity

*Richard Landau, The Baha'i Faith and the Environment*