

Constructive Resilience

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Constructive work and how will Bahá'u'lláh's exalted Resilience1 realized? Bahá'u'lláh says that if it be God's pleasure, God Himself could render FIRAYDOUN JAVAHERI together. Who, then, can do this purpose for humankind be the Cause victorious through the power of a single divine Word. Should The purpose of Divine Revelation, as individuals of Bahá'u'lláh, is "to effect a transformation in the whole character of God's mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly" (Kitáb-i-Íqán 240). Thus, Revelation has a twofold purpose: the first, to liberate humanity from the darkness here on earth and guide it to the light of true understanding; the second, to ensure the peace and tranquility of mankind. One without the other will not work. The Universal House of Justice has expounded upon the interconnectedness of this twofold purpose of God. First, individuals recognize the station of Bahá'u'lláh. They then arise to serve the Cause of God and together. Who, then, can do this purpose for humankind be the Cause victorious through the power of a single divine Word. Should this be His intention, indomitable strength could achieve victory. However, due to loving providence and wisdom, it has been ordained that complete victory can only be achieved through utterance, and by the efforts of His ordinary servants on earth. One of the early believers, who was deeply affected by the power of Bahá'u'lláh, writes when in His presence: I said to myself: What a pity! only the kings of the world recognize Him and arise to serve Him, both the Cause and the believers would be exalted in

this
by doing so, their own transformation
takes effect as they develop the capac-
Bahá'u'lláh
ities latent within them. They also
develop habits and attitudes that make
them able to persevere and be more
lov-
effective in contributing their share to
an ever-advancing civilization.

had
Bringing together material and
you
spiritual civilization is not an easy job.
an
It is a task that lies beyond the com-
You
prehension and ability of any ordinary
oppor-
human being, whether acting alone or
nor

1 Edited transcript of a keynote ad-
dress at the 42nd Annual Conference of
of
the Association for Bahá'í Studies, Atlanta,
course,
Georgia, August 2018.
kings

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and rulers of the world will be-
come believers, and the Cause of
God will be glorified outward-
society.

ly. But this will happen after the
meek and lowly ones of the earth
have won this inestimable boun-
ty." (Taherzadeh, Revelation 160)
"Indeed, the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh
Bahá'u'lláh, in His emphatic prom-
the in-
ise of ultimate triumph, also states
invincibility
that God will "provide all the means
divinely-ordained
by which" His purpose "can be es-
ful-

day. The following day when we
attained His presence,

turned His face to me and ad-
dressed the following words to
me with infinite charm and

ing-kindness. He said "If the
kings and rulers of the world

embraced the Faith in this day,

people could never have found

entry into this exalted Court.

could never have had the

tunity to attain Our presence,

could you ever have acquired the
privilege of hearing the words

the Lord of Mankind. Of

the time will come when the

humanity. The Covenant is a means to
protect and advance the process of cre-
ating a just and peaceful global

An inseparable part of His Covenant is
His Administrative Order, which pro-
vides a pattern of governance that is
unfailingly coherent with His purpose:

has been and will continue to be

violable guarantor of the

of the Cause and its

institutions and the means of the

tablished" (Gleanings 34:5). What are
 (Ta-
 these means? I will mention a few.
 First is the spiritual energy needed
 provid-
 to create a renewed civilization. Just as
 guid-
 the animating energies of the spring-
 Dis-
 time penetrate the core of all mate-
 rial things and create the conditions
 purpose
 for new life, the creative Words of
 Bahá'u'lláh has
 the Manifestations of God influence
 hearts and souls and revolutionize hu-
 "Book,"
 man society. The irresistible spiritual
 forces of integration released by the
 Manifestations break down manmade
 the in-
 barriers to progress, and thereby bring
 forth new potentialities for creating a
 Shoghi
 new race of humanity and establish-
 Universal
 ing a new civilization. The workings
 institu-
 of these spiritual energies can be dis-
 human
 cerned in both integrative and disinte-
 progressive,
 grative processes.
 authority
 Bahá'u'lláh has also revealed teach-
 ings, principles, concepts, and methods
 that shape the framework for building
 responsibili-
 that divine civilization, which is the
 and
 integrative process. At the core of
 teachings,
 His Revelation, He has established
 and
 His Covenant, a line of succession and
 spiritual guidance that preserves the

filment of Bahá'u'lláh's Words"
 herzadeh, Child 41).
 In addition, Bahá'u'lláh has
 ed for the continuation of Divine
 ance to humanity throughout His
 pensation—an indispensable means
 which the fulfillment of His
 is ensured. To this end,
 given us two divinely-guided Cen-
 ters of Authority: One is the
 which comprises the Writings of the
 Manifestations of God for this day
 (the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh) and
 terpretations of His two authorized
 Interpreters ('Abdu'l-Bahá and
 Effendi); the other is the
 House of Justice. This unique
 tion—which, in a world where
 knowledge is mutable and
 is invested with the sacred
 to decide on whatever is not in the
 Book—has also been charged, among
 other duties, with the
 ty for maintaining the integrity
 flexibility of Bahá'u'lláh's
 managing the affairs of the Faith,
 guiding the Bahá'í community.
 Divine assistance,

Bahá'u'lláh as-

unity of the Faith and ultimately of beings

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to undertake tasks that would otherwise require superhuman effort and therefore seem impossible to attain.

the history of our Faith abounds with stories of victories that can only be attributed to the operation of Divine assistance: from the undaunted courage exhibited by the believers in the earliest days of the Cause in Persia, the land of its birth; to the intrepid spirit of the pioneers from East and West, who spread the Faith's teachings to the farthest corners of the globe; to the exuberant community-building efforts we witness in this very day.

In reviewing the factors ensuring ultimate success, the nature of the Cause of God itself must be examined.

Bahá'u'lláh asserts that His Revelation is established upon an unassailable foundation that the storms of human

strife are powerless to undermine, and oppression, whose structure the fanciful theories of human beings cannot succeed in

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need to
damaging. We all know these words of
with which Bahá'u'lláh, referring to
country.
Himself, proclaims: "Should they cast
Him into a fire kindled on the conti-
in
nent, He will assuredly rear His head
in the midmost heart of the ocean...
and if they cast Him into a dark-
running
some pit, they will find Him seated
on earth's loftiest heights" (Summons
in
160). In other words, the DNA of the
Cause of God is such that it cannot
be destroyed; it cannot be derailed; it
clerical
cannot be stopped from achieving its
as
objectives. a challenge to essential Shi'a
doctrines

What, then, should be our attitude, and to their own interests. As Shoghi
mindset, and approach to our individ- Effendi noted about the early days
ual and collective services in the path of the Báb's Dispensation:
"Fearful,

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envious, thoroughly angered, the efforts to contribute to its advance-
mullahs were beginning to perceive ment and, instead, propagated slander
the seriousness of their position" (God against them.
Passes By 11) as they foresaw not only During the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925-
the waning of their influence, but also 1979), the government purported-
the end of their power. The House of ly followed a system in accord with
Justice has explained that the clergy secular ideas of freedom of worship,
recognized in Bahá'u'lláh the Voice and the Bahá'ís were able to
exercise
of a coming society of justice and a few of their basic rights. However,
enlightenment in which they will have as the power struggle between the
no place, and this is the fundamental Shah and the mullahs went on,
Bahá'ís
reason why they so desperately were often used as a scapegoat,
suffer-
opposed Bahá'u'lláh (26 November ing a great deal of discrimination
and
2003). injustice.

As self-proclaimed enemies of the Faith, the mullahs have used not only their pulpits and assumed moral authority over their congregations, but goals.

also, whenever they could, the machinery of government to implement com-

their plans to persecute the Bahá'ís. present,

Across various periods of history, they have employed diverse approaches in their efforts against the Bahá'í plan

community. During the rule of the short

Qajar Dynasty (1794-1925), the clerical establishment had significant influence. It therefore comes as no surprise that in the decades following the gov-

proclamation of the Báb (1844), until of-

the overthrow of the Qajar Dynasty of

in 1925, the mullahs instigated virulent and ongoing attacks on Bahá'ís in Iran

cities and villages across the nation. They spread disinformation and distorted the facts of history, playing on an ill-informed population's ingrained in

prejudices and widespread enslavement to conspiracy theories. They deliberately ignored the Bahá'ís' loyalty to their country and their sincere Constructive Resilience

Iranian Bahá'í community. Bahá'í institutions were banned. A massive con-

and ever-expanding anti-Bahá'í prothe

In 1979, with the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini and his clergy came to power with specific political, social and religious

Key among these goals was (and is) systemic opposition to the Bahá'í

munity. This makes Iran, at

the only country in the world with a government-sponsored plan against the Faith. So extensive is this

that it would be difficult, in this

space, to make even a cursory review of all the repressive activities in

the government is engaged. Suffice it to say that the overall aim of the

ernment, as blatantly stated in its

ficial documents, is the eradication

the Bahá'í community in Iran and

crediting of the Bahá'ís outside

(Dugal). This aim is being pursued

vigorously through a multidimensional plan, notwithstanding, among other things, its high cost to the nation

both material and moral terms.

The first decade of the revolution witnessed hundreds of killings and thousands of arrests within the

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citizens while suffering at the

of an oppressive regime. Instead,

structive resilience refers to how

paganda machine began demonizing Bahá'ís in Iran have continued to grow

the Bahá'ís, and it continues to this community life and stay empowered, very day, some forty years later. Bahá'í even while being deprived of funda-

holy places and cemeteries have been mental civil liberties and human rights.

destroyed across Iran. Efforts aimed The Iranian Bahá'ís are systemat-

at the economic strangulation of the ically modeling community-building Bahá'ís were initiated from the outset at the grassroots level, a response

and still continue. The believers are demonstrated by Bahá'u'lláh during prevented from teaching or studying His exile to Baghdad. Little by little,

in any university or other institution He guided the believers in exemplify-

of higher learning in the country. A ing such kindness and virtuous com- large amount of wealth belonging portment that they won the hearts of to both the Bahá'í community, as the citizenry, even to the point of gain-

well as individual Bahá'ís, has been ing the trust of the official representa-

confiscated. tives of the Ottoman government.

The manner in which the believers In light of this background, let me in the Cradle of the Faith have re- begin by first simply defining resil-

sponded to this opposition has been ience itself. According to the common

described by the Universal House of understandings of the term, resilience

Justice as "constructive resilience." is the capacity to recover from difficul-

A letter written on its behalf to the ties; elasticity and toughness are often

friends in Iran praises them for striv- mentioned in this regard. In psycho- ing to transcend the opposition "with logical terms, resilience is the process

that same constructive resilience that of adapting well in the face of adver-

characterized" the actions of the ear- sity, trauma, tragedy, or significant

ly believers when responding "to the sources of stress. the duplicity of their detractors" (9 Sep- Many among the survivors of in- tember 2007). justice, who number in the millions

The term "constructive resilience" today, demonstrate resilience and was first used by the Universal House achieve positive results. But the

re-
of Justice with a specific meaning in
also
mind, and I would like to share with
It
you my personal understanding of that
meaning. Before I do so, let me provide
con-
a brief caveat. Members of the Bahá'í
violence.
Faith do not claim to be the first group
con-
or community to have responded be-
nignly to injustice or to remain loyal
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become drained of that spirit of initia-
essence
tive so integral to human nature, and
that
can be reduced to the level of objects
and passive victims of their rulers'
rather
decree. Indeed, some who are exposed
opportunities
to sustained oppression can become so
and
conditioned that, in their turn, should
this
the opportunity offer itself, they ac-
cept the prevailing norms and take
others,
actions that are not in harmony with
the very reasons for which they were
fos-
persecuted. If they eventually come
individ-
to power, these oppressed groups can
easily fall into the same behaviors as
provides
their former oppressors. And the cycle
to
goes on.
and
Constructive resilience is different.
In the case of the Bahá'ís of Iran, it
mistreat-

sponse to injustice and oppression
varies considerably among peoples.
ranges from submission and accep-
tance, to protest, resistance, open
frontation, and, at times, even
In some cases, those affected lose
confidence in their perception of them-
selves and their own strength. They
deviate, even slightly, from the
of the Faith's spirit. It implies
they remain undisturbed by the pre-
vailing chaos in the world but
that they see in it great
to promote the Divine Teachings,
labor with steadfastness within
disorder, with the aim of growing
their spiritual capacity, serving
and promoting human oneness. Such
a spirit of constructive resilience
ters a process through which
uals and communities are preserved
from spiritual corrosion. It
resources that enable the friends
to act with magnanimity toward those
who have taken part in their

does not consist of submission or passive and patient acceptance of injustice. Neither does it rely on believing in some mysterious power that—disconnected from their actions—will free them from the chains of oppression. Instead, constructive resilience is an energetic and purposeful response that is coherent with the very aim of the Faith: unity. For the Bahá'ís of Iran, it constitutes a non-adversarial, violence-free, but dynamic approach to creating patterns of social engagement that move away from contention. At the same time, community members are vigorously pursuing every possible legal avenue available to correct and remedy the prevailing injustice. Acting within the central tenets of the Faith, constructive resilience requires that members of the Faith avoid compromising their beliefs and adherence to the Teachings. They must not

Promoting constructive resilience certainly does not constitute criticism or belittlement of those who fight injustice using other means. Rather, it is an approach that the Bahá'ís are committed to, inspired by Divine Teachings and having positive and practical results. The spirit of constructive resilience discerned in every aspect of the community in Iran.

One such example concerns the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE). Immediately following the 1979 Revolution, the doors of institutions of higher education were utterly closed to Bahá'í students and professors. Over several years, extensive efforts to explore possible solutions with Muslim officials proved futile. By the late 1980s, it had become obvious that Bahá'ís would not be allowed to enroll in Iranian universities.

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House of Justice writes: "Perhaps the most compelling and clear example of your constructive resilience is

evident services of dismissed Bahá'í professors who would teach Bahá'í youth deprived of university coursework. Individual families offered their homes for classes and laboratories. The Bahá'ís did not seek to publicize this initiative, it attributes so as to avoid provoking the authorities. The BIHE was not presented as a "win" over the oppressor nor was it portrayed as retaliation. Rather, it was a thoughtful and quiet act of collective self-empowerment and moral imagination. The aim of the BIHE was and remains to nurture the intellectual faculties of youth and to prepare them for service to their society. Despite enormous political pressure, the Bahá'ís of Iran took fate into their own hands. Their youth did not accede to being deprived of higher education and the Bahá'í community found resources, knowledge, and space to cultivate their innate gifts. The BIHE has withstood the Iranian government's ongoing efforts to shut it down, and continues to operate under harsh, fearful conditions. It

currently in your earnest knowledge, in your commitment to the loftiest values of faith and which the Cause inculcates, and in your perseverance in pursuit of education." In that same letter, butes this success to the friends "well aware of [their] mission" (January 2014). In addition to educational sion, the Bahá'ís of Iran have faced tremendous difficulties as a result of the government's banning of the Bahá'í leadership and community institutions. Some politicians ined that the imposition of such a ban in 1983 and the imprisonment of the Yárán² in 2008 would cause believers to lose direction and and that it would eventually cause the general weakening of the community. But the Bahá'ís the Divine Will and held firm to belief that all that transpires the Cause of God, as long as they adhere to Bahá'í principles. The munity stood firm and did not

allow

has produced thousands of graduates Bahá'í

in a number of fields, some of whom on 14

have been able to continue their edu- The

cation in more than ninety accredited arrested on

universities around the world. Mashhad.

This year marks the 30th anni- membership

versary of the establishment of the as

BIHE and Bahá'ís around the world Iran," tending

are proud of what the believers in of the

Iran have achieved. Expressing its of

joy at the operation of the BIHE, the 14

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apprehension and anxiety to take root, nor tests to perturb their hearts. They realized that the door to attend to their darkness

individual and collective affairs is still closure

open through consultation amongst insti-

families and in small groups. Relying as

on the power of divine assistance, they remained engaged in the field protagonists—sus-

of service and managed their affairs with moral rectitude. They carried out their spiritual obligations with loss.

steadfastness, devotion, and wisdom, and worked ever harder to maintain a vibrant community life. So exemplary communi-

ty was their response to this persecution exerts

2 This term refers to seven

leaders, six of whom were arrested

May 2008 at their homes in Tehran.

seventh, Mahvash Sabet, was

5 March 2008 while on a trip to

The seven formed the entire

of the now-disbanded group known

the "Yárán" or "Friends in

to the spiritual and social needs

300,000-member Bahá'í community

that country.

organism seeks to maintain its integrity and compensate for the loss of a part, when the

of injustice resulted in the

of the Bahá'í administrative

tutions in your land, you—both

a community and as individuals, the other two

tained by the creative power of the Covenant, succeeded in compensating for this temporary

(12 May 2016)

In an effort to weaken the

ty, the Iranian government still

that, in 2016, on the occasion of the eighth anniversary of the imprisonment of the Yárán, the House of Justice remarked: I must mention that the Bahá'í prisoners, You of course know full well that the purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is to bring about a civilization that is neither of the East nor of the West, a civilization based on coherence between the material and the spiritual needs of humankind. You also know that recognizing Him marks the commencement of a commitment to dedicate one's personal and family life to contributing to the establishment of that civilization. You are well aware that the fulfilment of this goal is facilitated through the activities At and the maturation of the three protagonists in the advancement of civilization: the individual, the community, and the institutions. Even as every living and active innocent

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of Bahá'ís, and ask the detainees not third to explain their philosophies during interrogation. On one occasion, one of

every effort to create a gap between the believers and the Universal House of Justice. Many stories tell of failure. Let me share one. First, when answering their interrogators, often explain the philosophy behind their actions as a way to prove innocence. Many of the interrogators apparently become affected by the sincerity and the compelling nature of these explanations. For instance, one Bahá'í was arrested for having served as a teacher of Bahá'í children's classes and an interrogator began his questioning of the believer harshly. But when he learned the reasons for educating children with spiritual values, he eventually asked if and how he could send his own children to these classes. At the same time, there are also those interrogators who try to avoid the challenge altogether. They wish to bypass the inconvenience of convincing their supervisors of the

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Economic strangulation is a tactic used by the government of Iran as a way to weaken the spirit

part of our efforts to build a better world."3 weeks later, the government unsealed his shop. The Iranian Bahá'í community has always found ways and means of assisting those in need. This and following examples are my personal recollections from letters that were sent to the Bahá'í World Centre. A fourth strategy of the Iranian government in its efforts to demoralize

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the Bahá'ís is to evoke prejudice and a Bahá'í and my heart is illuminated with the light of Bahá'u'lláh. spread slander about them among the masses, hoping to deter Bahá'ís from Bahá'í prayers in the company of other believers. Please tell me, what can that the believers not associate with their Muslim friends and neighbors. I do? Their aim is to exclude Iran's largest non-Muslim religious minority from meaningful social discourse, barring Bahá'ís from promoting the wellbeing of the wider community. Notwithstanding these constraints, the Bahá'ís remain determined to live purposeful lives in their society. In a letter sent to the Bahá'í World Centre, a young Bahá'í

Iranian wrote: was no sign of him. I asked someone to look for him. This person reported to me as follows: One day I saw the person in the street. I am a 24-year-old student. A few years ago I had a very bad traffic accident. A man who was not involved in the accident brought me to hospital and stayed patiently until I was safely in the hands of medical staff. He then left. I was very impressed with his kindness. He was very different in his outlook. "I called him by the name I knew him. But he said "I am not so and so. I am now so (a modern Iranian name)." I asked him, Before he left I asked his name so that I could thank him when I left the hospital. He said there was no need to know his name. However, "What has happened to you?" He did say "I am a Bahá'í, and we replied: "Do you remember the day when you and I in the company of the cleric got stuck on the road outside Tehran because our car had run out of fuel? Do you

are all humans and supposed to assist each other." He kissed my face and left and I had no idea who he was. This shook me and I decided to study the Bahá'í Faith. No one was able to give me a book. I went to the internet and found an address. A kind lady from abroad sent me materials and accompanied me for two years. I am now Constructive Resilience

and later on learned that she is a
It is

Bahá'í. With her kind behavior I and com-
was encouraged to investigate her Faith

faith and I am a Bahá'í now."

An important characteristic of the

If there is one area of activity that facing all

the government wants to see com-
of content-

pletely stopped, it is the sharing of
painstaking-

Bahá'í principles with Muslim people
to gov-

and conducting activities related to
levels,

the institute process and communi-
influence in

ty-building.⁴ Since the government is
discrimination

aware that Iranian citizens are more
favor-

eager to learn about the Faith, it tries
assistance for

to counteract this receptiveness by
their

spreading false information about the
as well

Bahá'ís and preventing Bahá'ís from
other countries.

openly correcting this misinformation.
first,

Likewise, Bahá'ís understand that en-

remember how many people, all
supposedly Muslim, we stopped
and asked for help and nobody re-
sponded? Do you remember that a
lady stopped on her own to see if
we needed help? Do you remem-
ber that she gave us fuel and did
not accept any payment for it and
at the end she gave us her busi-
ness card? I followed up with her

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of local culture and conditions.

largely through their actions

portment that they defend their

against misrepresentation.

way the Iranian Bahá'ís are

these tests is a certain spirit

ment and conviction. They

ingly make ongoing petitions

ernment institutions at various

as well as to individuals of

order to end this unjust

against them. Not receiving a

able solution, they seek

the defense of their rights from

spiritual sisters and brothers,

as Bahá'í institutions in

Not relying on others to act

they patiently and creatively

continue gaging in collective teaching plans and solutions other activities that are part of Bahá'í as community life elsewhere in the world society, are not appropriate in Iran under the obligations. present conditions. Nevertheless, the paths Bahá'ís in Iran do their best to teach spirit of the Faith while taking into account friendship local realities. in all Thus, on the one hand, they do not spiritual accept being deprived of their individual influence ual expression of faith or contributing to the betterment of the world. On the un- other hand, they do not teach or openly into ly share Bahá'í ideas in public places, at Yárán sent school, or at work. Whatever they do of is done with wisdom and consideration the

4 The institute process includes activities aimed at assisting interested individuals to enhance their capacities for involvement in community building efforts and participation in constructive discourses of result society. spirit of

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the members of the Yárán at the time

their efforts to find peaceful at home. Their aim is to live tributing members of their and to fulfill their spiritual Furthermore, they pursue these of service with an exemplary love for their country and for their compatriots. They see of this an opportunity for growth and the enlightening of the Cause of God. As one demonstration of this conquerable spirit, a few years their imprisonment, the a message to the Universal House Justice. They respectfully asked Bahá'ís of the world to refrain praying for the Yárán's Because they could see with eyes that doors were being the progress of the Faith as a of their imprisonment. The

Divine assistance and to their

whole-
of their release, following ten years of imprisonment, was a testimony to this magnanimity. have
of their release, following ten years of imprisonment, the Universal House of Justice. In this process, the Bahá'ís have
One of the Yárán, when discharged from prison, said: "I do not remember fervently to during these years talking to anyone certitude in about animosity, hate, or grudges.... age;
I was never thinking of revenge or historically fighting anyone or rising up against any group. I was constantly thinking of equipping myself with spiritual power and energy" (Sabet).
There are also stories telling of the spirit of joy that many of the friends courage try to maintain, even in the harshest conditions in prison. In brief, over the course of the past 175 years of every unremitting oppression, the Bahá'ís of Iran have steadily increased their Through clarity of vision about the mission of Bahá'u'lláh and their role in it. They material have retained a confident mastery of their moral purpose. They have on learned to nourish an abiding love for their fellow citizens and for the land patience.
in which they suffer so greatly. It is, therefore, an immense joy to observe the

hearted obedience to the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.
In this process, the Bahá'ís further developed a number of capacities: the capacity to hold one's faith and to maintain the Manifestation of God for this age;
the ability to frame events within the processes of integration and disintegration; the wisdom to cultivate a deeper understanding of the vision that Bahá'u'lláh has given to the world of the oneness of humanity and of a just society; and the courage to enact this vision by following an all-encompassing, coherent, and practical Plan, a path through which individual can contribute to the establishment of that just society.
hardship, the Bahá'ís of Iran can perceive the bankruptcy of the world, humbly beseech Him for Divine assistance, place complete reliance on Him and endure difficulties in His path with unfailing and legendary patience.
Through a lack of freedom, they have developed the strength to fulfill

a positive sea change in the attitude of many Iranian people toward the Faith and the Bahá'ís.

The spiritual energies released by so great a number of sacrifices offered in the path of God, as well as the efforts of both Bahá'ís and members of the larger community elsewhere in the world to arise to defend their rights, have no doubt significantly contributed to the realization of these signal accomplishments. The Bahá'ís of Iran often say that they owe this success to Constructive Resilience

Moving from the spirit of constructive resilience demonstrated by the Bahá'ís of Iran, let us look at the necessary larger global context. The rest of humanity is also being battered by forces of oppression, whether generated from the depths of religious, racial, and gender-based intolerance, or from the onslaught of rampant materialism. Such "What 'oppression' is more grievous," Bahá'u'lláh asks, "than that a soul seeking the truth, and wishing to attain unto the knowledge of God, should

daily necessities of life, survive oppression, and exhibit courage in the face of hatred. Their unwavering determination to seek justice with quiet fortitude demonstrates the will and the discipline required to live a purposeful life. Ultimately, the Bahá'ís of Iran have learned to experience the deep joy and comfort that arises from service to others and to God. Are all of these among the very and abilities that, in our prayers, we beseech God to help us develop?

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No matter where we live, nurturing spiritual capacities, and habits of thought is to strengthening our own spirit of constructive resilience. As we strive for the betterment of the world, messages of the House of Justice addressed to the Bahá'ís of Iran the past few years identify some capacities. We live at a time when vision of Bahá'u'lláh of the assumptions that shape temporary discourse. In a letter

know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it?" (Kitáb-i-Íqán 31). The fact is that the act of living in a society engulfed in materialistic philosophies and entangled in outmoded traditions and assumptions is not without its own tests for the Bahá'ís. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said that the believers in the West would experience mental tests so as to purify them and enable them to achieve their Divinely-conferred potential as a force for change in the world:

And yet, how often we seem to forget the clear and repeated warnings of our beloved Master, who, in particular during the concluding years of His mission on earth, laid stress on the "severe mental tests" that would inevitably sweep over His loved ones of the West—tests that would purge, purify and prepare them for their noble mission in life. (Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration 50)

the occurrence of events derived

from illogical and superstitious responsibility notions. It professes to uphold virtue yet, in practice, perpetuates every- oppression and greed. Among the deplorable results of the operation of such forces are a deepening confusion on the part of young people everywhere, a sense any of hopelessness in the ranks of

to the Bahá'ís of the World, the Universal House of Justice states:

Today the world is assailed by an array of destructive forces. Materialism, rooted in the West, now spread to every corner of planet, breeding, in the name of a strong global economy and human welfare, a culture of consumerism. It skillfully and promotes a habit of consumption that seeks to satisfy the vilest

aging the expenditure of wealth so as to prolong and exacerbate social conflict. How vain and foolish a worldview! And meanwhile, a rising tide of fundamentalism, bringing with it an exceedingly narrow understanding of religion and spirituality, continues to gather strength, threatening to engulf humanity in rigid dogmatism. In its most extreme form, it conditions the resolution of the problems of the world upon

it is they who have the

to champion this mighty task.

The experience of Bahá'ís

where in the past few decades attests that, with the help of Divine assistance and under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, they are indeed capable of initiating, under circumstances, a sustainable and ex-

those who would drive progress, and the emergence of a myriad social maladies. (20 October 2008)

part of our constructive resilience, we need Growing numbers of people grapple with how to advance social change forces in the face of political disorder and temptation mounting injustice. They wonder how pre- to respond to our global interconnectedness, which demands new approaches that build rather than erode social cohesion. As a result, questioning prevailing assumptions, established paradigms, and common wisdom is, in the insight of many, a necessity. In the same letter, the House of Justice appeals only to us to be conscious that the continued strengthening of our community-building efforts will be matched by a further decline in the old world order, collaboration and to be on our guard lest the development of capacity in the community not keep pace with the rise in receptivity of a disillusioned humanity. The rel- House of Justice expresses confidence that such developments in the world thy will cause the believers in every land thou to reflect on the lamentable condition

pandable framework for social change, and of inviting large numbers of people to contribute to this effort. As part of society and to avoid the temptation to give into pressures to adopt the prevailing materialistic assumptions. Guided by the House of Justice, we must develop a deeper understanding of the Bahá'í approach to the ills of humanity, firmly adhere to Bahá'í principles, and resist the impulse to defend prevailing ideas that are popular in the wider society because it seems expedient in the moment. We must further consolidate our capacity to realize that only through sacrificial efforts and collaboration with like-minded people can world chaos and confusion be remedied and rebalanced. Bahá'u'lláh's advice to one of the believers is profoundly relevant in this respect: "Sharp must be thy sight, O Dhabíh, and adamant thy soul and brass-like thy feet, if wishest to be unshaken by the

assaults

of the present order, will reinforce in
in
them the conviction that material and
injunc-
spiritual civilization must be advanced
Great
together, and will remind Bahá'ís that
of
Constructive Resilience

the Ancient King, been moved to re-
veal" (Gleanings 115:13).
suffering and confused; we cannot
'Abdu'l-Bahá likewise says:
not to suffer—but we don't have
The beloved of the Lord must
stand fixed as the mountains, firm
as impregnable walls. Unmoved
must they remain by even the dir-
est adversities, ungrieved by the
worst of disasters. Let them cling
to the hem of Almighty God,
and put their faith in the Beauty
of the Most High; let them lean
on the unfailing help that cometh
from the Ancient Kingdom, and
depend on the care and protec-
tion of the generous Lord. . . . Let
them rise up to serve their Lord
and do all in their power to scat-
ter His breathings of holiness far
Writ-
and wide. Let them be a mighty
Bahá'í
fortress to defend His Faith, an
impregnable citadel for the hosts
Writings
of the Ancient Beauty. Let them
Pub-
faithfully guard the edifice of
the Cause of God from every side; let
Bahá'í
them become the bright stars of
His luminous skies. (Selections 10)
Hosts. US Bahá'í Publishing,
And, finally, Shoghi Effendi gives us

of the selfish desires that whisper
men's breasts. This is the firm
tion which the Pen of the Most
Name hath, by virtue of the Will
21

on us and our success or failure.
All humanity is disturbed and
expect to not be disturbed and
to be confused. On the contrary,
confidence and assurance, hope
and optimism are our prerogative.
The successful carrying out of
our various Plans is the greatest
sign we can give of our faith and
inner assurance, and the best way
we can help our fellow-men out
of their confusion and difficulties
(Unfolding Destiny 225).

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this insight into how to respond to the confusions of today's world: Religious Community." Bahá'í We must expect these things: It is becoming evident that the world is not yet through with its labor, the New Age not yet fully born, real Peace not yet right around the corner. We must have no illusions about how much depends

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