

such
a belief.

We know that the fundamental Bahá'í teachings have a moral, spiritual and ethical character. In other words, the purpose of the Bahá'í revelation has been to perfect the life of the spirit, extol spiritual realities, enhance manners and morals, and reinforce the power of conscience. It has come for the reformation of humanity and, as stated by Bahá'u'lláh, for the advancement of the world and the elevation of humankind. All of the tenets, teachings and principles which have been laid down are all based on this foundation, so that the world, through the strengthening of morals, reinforcement of the conscience and exaltation of moral virtues, may attain to such advancement and such an elevation.

Any approach other than this is considered temporary, unsuitable, or unreliable.

In other words, we are confident that unless man receives spiritual education and training, strengthens the power of his conscience, harkens to the call of the spirit and ultimately achieves his highest spiritual station, he will not find true happiness. Any and all other efforts to reach such a goal, while not necessarily detrimental, will only have a temporary, superficial, and tranquilizing effect. Even so, such other approaches will only focus on a single physical aspect and thus will not be complete, accurate, and reliable. As such, it would be impossible to construct a healthy, strong, content, forbearing and free society of individuals who are morally ambivalent, ethically unstable and spiritually bankrupt and uncaring persons. Therefore the focus and the actions of the people of Baha concern the spiritual, ethical and moral aspects of humankind; because of this, piety emerges as the mighty pillar of Bahá'í life.

Before all else an individual Bahá'í must be pious, must have belief in God, must be God-loving and God-fearing. Of course this fear stems from love. The fear of God for a Bahá'í may be likened to the fear of a lover at committing an act that would break his beloved's heart. It is in this manner that we say that a Bahá'í should fear God, which means he must be pious and his piety is more important to him than anything else. Without it, nothing else in the world would matter.

What
is important for us is piety, sustaining piety and strengthening piety.

Therefore
any factor which may prove to be in conflict with a holy life is shunned by a Bahá'í, and whatever may assist in its strengthening and reinforcement is embraced
by a Bahá'í.

Should a day come when the entire population of the world or of any nation become Bahá'ís and yet fail to adhere to the principle of a holy and righteous life, not only would we not have succeeded in our duty, but in fact we would have pushed that world or that country backward and have achieved exactly the opposite of what we had intended to achieve. Thus for us the main principle is piety.

There is an expression: Piety ends where politics begins. Thus we have no choice but to lay politics aside so that we may be able to safeguard our piety. Of course this does not constitute a disadvantage for the world of politics. In fact, lack of such a religious principle in politics not only does not have a detrimental effect; it may very well be the cause of its success.

Before I explain further, let me quote a saying from Ali, (son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad). The Arabs faulted Ali for not being a politician. They claimed that he lacked the acumen, the shrewdness and cunning that are the necessary tools of a statesman, and that because of this he was incapable of adopting the necessary expedients to defeat his rivals. Ali heard of this and said: "If piety did not exist, I would have been the most excellent of statesmen." He meant that it is not that I am ignorant and incapable, but that inasmuch as I wish to safeguard my righteousness, remain a just and honest man, and be true to my Faith, therefore I stay clear of politics.

And so, this issue is not unique to the people of Baha in this period of time, as it is a general religious principle and a matter of conscience that whenever the leaders of religions wished to emphasize the safeguarding of piety, they said that whatever politics requires in order for it to succeed is incompatible with the requirements of a pious life.

Success, in politics, is a critical requirement; in order to succeed, one must compete with opponents or adversaries. It is not possible for one to enter politics without having to deal with opponents. In such a competition for power, bargains must be struck, compromise and conspiracy come into play, empty promises are made, lies and half-truths become routine declarations, and publicity stunts, chaos and commotions abound; if we choose to abstain we will be defeated, since our opponents will not pull any punches.

What, then, is the purpose of any involvement in politics where if we try to remain faithful to our beliefs we have to accept defeat? Yet if we decide to entrap and overpower our opponents, stab adversaries in the back, lie and sensationalize in order to succeed, then we will have abandoned piety and nothing is left of our devotion and obligation to a spiritual and ethical life. In effect, participation in politics, insofar as our spiritual life is concerned, degrades and demeans us. If our spiritual and ethical beliefs are thus undermined, nothing would then be left of our Bahá'í life.

Politicians have an axiom: "The end justifies the means." In other words, it implies that we will adopt whatever available means necessary, regardless of their nature, in order to realize the desired end. The idea is that since the good end is of principal importance, adoption of even bad means which will guide us to that good end is acceptable and justifiable. Every politician has no choice but to accept this attitude, since if he rejects it, he will not taste the glory of victory. If he becomes unwilling to consider all available means, and from among such options chooses the one which is in line with moral principles, he will experience the pain of defeat, as his opponents will have no qualms about seizing the opportunity to embrace the most effective means regardless of their ethical value. Obviously, should one persist in adhering to his principles and continue to accept defeat, he in effect is no longer a participant in politics. However if he chooses to participate and adopts whatever means necessary to achieve the end which he considers as good and desirable, such an end after its realization becomes tainted and distorted, since those who have accepted corruption as a means cannot ultimately achieve a good end. A good end, once in the hands of a corrupt individual, will become tarnished and discredited, and because of this we do

not
accept this axiom.

In order to reach a good end which is in line with the principles of the Faith,
a
Bahá'í does not resort to bribery. He will not bribe someone so that he may
serve
the Faith. Why? Because while he considers the goal as good, the mere act of
bribery has despoiled that goodness – thus what is there that remains of the
Bahá'í Faith which he may wish to serve? Since the basic belief in the Faith
is
piety, then our aim is piety, and such devotion to a righteous life becomes
inconsistent with any participation in political affairs.

Another issue to consider is the involvement in political affairs by a single
individual who wishes to take it upon himself to advance a certain political
ideal. Such a situation, in our current world, is not viable. Participation in
politics then requires belonging to a particular party that has an established
constitution with particular attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, if a Bahá'í
chooses to belong to, for example, the Democratic Party, the Socialist party,
the
Communist party, the Republican Party, etc., he must of necessity adopt their
principles and beliefs, some of which may have direct implications with respect
to
such concepts as God, the next world, the purpose of life, etc. Thus a Bahá'í
on
the one hand must adhere to the principles of the Bahá'í teachings and
consider
them as true, but on the other would have to accept the basic tenets of a
political party and regard them as true. Of course it is obvious that these
cannot be compatible. If in fact a Bahá'í accepts a party which in all
aspects is
in line with Bahá'í ideals, in effect he has not abandoned his Faith; he has
not
joined a different party. However should he decide to belong to another party,
he
has in effect dissociated himself from the Bahá'í Faith.

In fact the Bahá'í Faith in a way could be considered to be a party, and has
been
referred to by Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá as the "Party of God" (the term
has
since been adopted by other political entities which bear no relationship or
resemblance to the Bahá'í Faith-Translator). The members of such a party in
whichever country they may reside are obedient to the governments of those
countries.

The Party of God [not in the sense of a normal political party, based on human
ideas, but in the sense of a group of the proponents of God's laws] is a party

with its own teachings, with its own commandments, principles and social teachings, among which is, for the present time, avoidance of involvement in political affairs. So anyone who is a member of this "party" is a member of the Bahá'í community. A Bahá'í would compare the idea of simultaneously belonging to the Bahá'í Faith and a political party as being similar to being a Bahá'í and an atheist at the same time; or an individual who is both a Moslem and a Buddhist; or a Muslim who may also be a Christian. Thus while one cannot confess to belief in all these religions, as each is an independent Faith (unless we regard their fundamental principles which is a different discussion), by the same token an individual cannot be a Bahá'í and belong to any political entity. This is an impossibility. In other words it is a logical contradiction.

This of course does not imply that the people of Baha should not be educated regarding the organization and management of worldly affairs, the correct approach in serving one's country, providing guidance and service to the people or the duties of government officials. Such disregard of current world affairs might imply that the Bahá'í Faith was an isolationist or socially disconnected organization. On the contrary, the Bahá'í Faith offers progressive economic and social teachings; while it expresses belief in a spiritual world, it also has principles that govern their mode of operation. The difference is that it does not adopt political means to achieve its avowed fundamental goal – the unity of the human race.

There have been a number of non-religious ideologies which have adopted a worldly perspective in their teachings, and had focused on the unity of humankind. Yet once they entered the arena of political enterprise to advance their cause they were confronted with competing ideologies which they had to defeat in order to gain the ascendancy. Such an approach resulted in the exact opposite of their aim – eventually they fell back into the arena of imperialism and exploitation, goals which they had initially intended to avoid. This is an indication which highlights the fact that should the means adopted be incompatible with the intended end, the means will eventually undermine the end and render it ineffective and unproductive.

The Bahá'í Faith does not wish to follow this path. What this Faith intends is to bring love to hearts, to create friendship between individuals, to encourage and

strengthen ethical conscientiousness, to refine morality and expand spiritual teachings among all people. The achievement of these goals will consequently supply such building blocks as are necessary to confidently and solidly build the fortress of human happiness. Likewise, should one wish to build a magnificent structure, but uses substandard and shoddy materials which are incompatible with the design of the building, then such a project is destined to fail, and such a structure is obviously doomed to destruction. Even if it reaches a state of completion, it will eventually collapse.

A Cause which has among its goals the unity of the human race, the promotion of love and affection among peoples and the exaltation of moral values, surely cannot afford devotees who may be corrupted by worldly competition, who bargain to achieve a certain goal, and who plot and intrigue to gain their political aims.

In this case, the structure which such a Cause is raising and the goal toward which it is working will never be realized. Ultimately it will join the other ideologies which failed to achieve the end they had originally adopted.

An inquiry was sent to the Bahá'í World Center asking the following question: "How should worldly political affairs be regarded by the friends? Political issues are unavoidable. Therefore, in what light should participation in worldly political affairs be seen?" The World Center referred the friends to the relevant writing of the beloved Guardian [the Head of the Bahá'í Faith from 1921 to 1957], which was written as an explanation of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings regarding this issue.

The Guardian wrote that there are two simultaneous movements taking place in the world: one is natural, imperceptible yet essential evolution and another is the deliberate and purposeful organizational and teaching activities of the friends that is performed in the path of service to humanity. In other words, the movement of the world Bahá'í community is directed towards the diffusion of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh in order to achieve the goal of unity of the human race.

On the other hand, another movement, which is natural and innate and is based on the essential relationship between the realities of things, is also moving forward. In other words the world and all that is in it is, by the force of nature, moving towards this destination, of which the people of Baha are well aware and in which they believe. Their aims are the same except that one moves

naturally and the other deliberately through the teaching efforts of the Bahá'í community. In the first, political affairs, naturally and essentially, find a role to play and do so without any impulsion.

On the other hand, the people of Baha exclude politics in their efforts to teach the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. Thus, the meaning of non-involvement in politics is this: we who teach Bahá'í principles make every effort to bring hearts and souls together, we strive to expand the cause of world unity in accordance with Bahá'í teachings, but we do not include political matters in our approach. Since our individual lives are lived in the service of community life, if we were corrupted we would weaken the efforts that have been put forward by the community to reach its goal. Thus we put aside any thought of participation in political affairs in our individual lives, so that we may remain protected and safeguarded from the moral decay that would threaten the sacred and holy lives to which we have dedicated ourselves.

Let us now pass from our theoretical discussion and consider the effects of actions which highlight the benefits that non-involvement in politics has gained for the Bahá'í community and the Faith itself. If the Bahá'í friends, who in this hundred and thirty five years (now 165 – translator) have passed through dozens of events and stages and have also gone through many ups and downs in their individual lives were to involve themselves in political affairs – in other words join various parties and ideologies which have emerged in this period and actively participated in realization of their goals today no sign of the true Bahá'í Faith would have remained. Why? Because each would have gone his own way, and along with his fellow comrades would have trodden the path of decline and eventual extinction. This would have caused such a diversity of thoughts that even if a group which identified itself as Bahá'í was to endure, it would remain as a sect, a faction or a cult, of which history can give many examples. All that would have remained would have been a name and an inchoate feeling of attachment. The independent nature of the Faith, the true devotion of its adherents, its organization, teachings and goals would have passed from memory.

Consider the emergence of the Faith at its initial stage. After the manifestation of Bahá'u'lláh, a group of Babis rejected him and became violators of the covenant of the Bab. The followers of Azal subsequently became active in political affairs [for example, they were active in the Iranian constitutional movement in the early 20th century - translator]; over time, as Babis or Azalis, they disappeared from history, and today those who still belongs to such a persuasion usually hide their identity so that people do not consider them to be different from the majority of the nation. This is a good experience in lessons learned. In other words, their involvement in politics was their death knell as a religious community. Obviously there is no reason to think that had the friends followed the same path they would not have arrived at the same ending.

In this period there emerged many ideologies and political sects. Since most of the friends were educated and capable, they could have easily joined these groups and became active in advancing their agendas. Yet the result would have been the complete breakdown of the community, as each group would have been in conflict with the others, and which ultimately would have led to the downfall and extinction of all. How, then, could one have imagined a day like today, in which we have Local Spiritual Assemblies in the far corners of the globe, and Bahá'í centers in thousands of locations around the world?

Those who oppose us (we don't know them as enemies, as we do not consider anyone our enemy) have always waited patiently to find a political justification, so that they could accuse the friends of wrongdoing. This is because they were unable to denounce the Bahá'ís for any faults due to religious beliefs as these were openly known to all and none of them conflict with any divinely ordained laws. It is astonishing that on the one hand they degrade the friends for not participating in political activities, and on the other hand accuse the community of meddling in political affairs, and classify the Faith as a political organization at its core.

It is unclear whether one should laugh or cry at this logical conundrum. What is crystal clear to us and to others and what is agreed by all is that we do not participate in political activities. What they have is an empty accusation – at no time over these hundred and thirty five years have they ever been able to present a single document which could serve as valid evidence to demonstrate our involvement in politics. Of course it is possible that one of the people of Baha may have had some participation in politics or given his consent to achieve a political end. However, the Bahá'í community has always separated itself from such individuals (loss of administrative rights) so that the community would remain protected.

If in fact they had been able to find any evidence of our involvement in politics, then you would have discovered what they would have done with us. How many times have they put a stop to our administrative activities? How often have they closed the doors of our Bahá'í properties? They took over, searched and never found an iota of evidence. If they had found such a document then you would have known of what charges the friends would have stood accused. Thus it is nothing but true that non-involvement in politics is our amulet.

In fact during the Persian constitutional revolution, `Abdu'l-Bahá's strict instructions regarding the non-involvement of the friends in the political upheaval not only safeguarded believers (otherwise it was not clear what would have happened to the friends and the Faith itself) but also, as stated by a Bahá'í scholar, preserved the Iranian constitution. Why? Because the opponents of the constitutional government could not find an excuse to accuse the Bahá'ís of being the main thrust behind the proponent's movement in order to proclaim them as unbelievers in Islam and thus infidels. This was a mystery which assisted the natural evolutionary process of events that led to the establishment of the constitutional government, and also protected the friends and the Cause through the deliberate guidance of `Abdu'l-Bahá.

In one of his writings, the Guardian tells a relevant story. Some years ago the people of Baha were accused by the authorities of a neighboring country of belonging to a mystical religious sect which was banned in that country. They were brought to trial, their activities were investigated, all their papers in Bahá'í centers and from their Local Assemblies were confiscated and a

thorough examination of all Bahá'í materials took place. The Guardian asked us to consider what would have happened to the Bahá'í community and the Faith itself had they found any shred of evidence, written or otherwise, of the involvement of the believers in politics.

The very reference that the Guardian made to this particular event is an example for us. It is a lesson for us to remember and keep in mind that regardless of the time and place of our residence, the nature of the issues, the conditions under which we live, we leave all participation in and management of all political affairs to those who are not Bahá'ís. If they ask why we abstain, our answer is clear. What we do is we transform the hearts, we bring about refinement of conduct and strengthening of ethical and moral behavior.

Whether this understanding and approach is necessary, whether it is good or bad or whether it is advantageous or not, for us it is clear. Others will not take on this responsibility, so we have assumed it. Others, then, can assume the political duties. The matter is very clear. If in fact the spiritual duty of safeguarding moral uprightness and rectitude of conduct, bringing together hearts and souls of members of the human family estranged from each other is essential and beneficial, then it is only fitting that those who have focused all their attention to such a service should be allowed to carry on their work, and that others should take up the work from which Bahá'ís abstain.

Of course they set tempting bait for young people in order to attract, entice and encourage them to involve themselves in political affairs. However, Bahá'í youth are aware, attentive and vigilant. They know that in such activities, the words that flow from the tongue are different from the purpose that is hidden in the heart. Usually, they argue in this way: "How can one be so apathetic to the destiny of his homeland and still claim to be a patriot?" In other words, if one loves his country, how can he remain indifferent to its destiny?

The answer is very clear. We are not indifferent to the destiny of our country. We do not detach ourselves from working for our homeland. We accept with heart and mind educational tasks that are among the most critical requirements of any country. Activities related to the economic growth of the country we consider important, and we participate with honesty and uprightness. Any activity that would lead to the development and progress of the nation we consider as acts of service, and we do not eschew them. The attempt to acquire wealth in accordance

with applicable laws and without avoiding the full payment of associated taxes to the government is in accordance with the tenets of the Bahá'í Faith. Moreover, although the Bahá'í Faith is the religion of peace, yet in the times of war the people of Baha accept being drafted into the armed forces in accordance with the laws of the land. However, they prefer that as conscientious objectors they should not be required to be a part of any attacking force where killing would be inevitable. However, in all other services they fully participate.

Therefore who can say a Bahá'í is apathetic about the destiny of his homeland?

The Universal House of Justice has said that the friends should not suppose that the principle of non-involvement in the political affairs of their country provides any justification for them to remain aloof from working for the welfare and wellbeing of their fellow countrymen, and in so doing remain idle and fruitless. Of course rendering service does not have to be only through politics.

If service were to mean strictly through politics, a Bahá'í would not take up such a service, but you must admit that the road to service does not necessarily have to go through politics. This service with its associated characteristics of ambition, and satisfying of a sense of self-glorification and accruing many benefits and privileges, we freely give up to others. Let those services that require self-sacrifice, detachment, giving of oneself, hard work and earning an honest and honorable living be our lot. We do a good job at this – and we should.

Bahá'ís do not disregard the interest of their country. Especially in the case of

Iran, it must be said that the Bahá'ís, albeit unknown and unacknowledged, are

among the leading promoters of Iran, its culture, its race, its name, its traditions, and its interests in the world. People of this land love Iran as their homeland, but the Bahá'ís are of a more distinguished rank – they revere

Iran as the birthplace of the Bahá'í Faith, as the place of sacrifice of Bahá'í

martyrs, as the soil on which the blood of the most beloved members of the Faith

flowed, as the soil which was made crimson with the blood of the Bab, the soil that was sanctified by the steps of Bahá'u'lláh. We are speaking of

sanctification, and not of devotion; of worship and not just love; we are speaking of prostration and placing of one's forehead on the ground; we are talking of circumambulation and diffusion of this love around the world.

Today for hundreds of different races and nations and tribes across the globe, for millions of souls in dozens of countries, and in thousands of cities and villages, the name of Iran, the culture of Iran, the tradition of Iran, Shiraz and Tehran of Iran is revered and idolized. They are not few – those who from across the globe have come to Iran so that they could place their foreheads on the soil of Shiraz where the Bab arose, and to Tabriz, to shed a tear where His blood stained the earth. Yet this pilgrimage that has been the goal of their lives, so that they could come and kiss the land of Iran and return, come to worship Shiraz and glorify Tehran and take a handful of soil from Tabriz in remembrance – if this is considered inappropriate by the Iranian people or government, then such a pilgrimage would no longer take place, since not only are they acting in accordance with their own rules, but also because they accept and obey the decision of their people or government.

Thus, how can such a group of people be considered apathetic towards the destiny of their country!? How can they be regarded as indifferent to rendering service to their homeland? This act of pure tyranny has been inflicted on the people of Baha!

Another concept they choose in order to lure young people into their trap is to insist that involvement in politics is the road for the establishment of justice in the world – therefore how can a group of people remain uninterested in such a profound goal? Of course we know that this is only the mere surface appearance of the issue. Involvement in politics is simply in order to replace of one group by another; to put one individual in place of another, one position in place of another, etc. Whenever there is a political contest there is an attempt to combat the ongoing avarice and self-indulgence of the system; however if we look closely we see that the election itself has provided the opportunity for the same self indulgence, wealth and rank for the another candidate who, not possessing such benefits and privileges, pined for the opportunity to possess them. Therefore

the
friends, who stay aloof, simply do not wish to be the instrument, or the ladder
to
success of any such groups or individuals.

The people of Baha know well that serving the cause of justice is only possible
through service to the cause of humanity, achievement of the unity of the human
family, the establishment of world peace, abandonment of all forms of
prejudice,
strengthening of the power of conscience and awakening of the hearts to
spiritual
realities. Justice cannot be established in the world in any other way. Of
course we are not pessimistic or cynical regarding other human activities and
aspirations; however, we consider these as part and parcel of the same natural
movement or development that is essential, deliberate and inherent in the world
of
existence, which must of necessity lead the world to that same ultimate and
cardinal goal.

We, however, do not focus our efforts in that direction. We work towards the
diffusion of the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith; we focus on expanding the
influence of Bahá'u'lláh's principles, which consist of nothing but the unity
of
humankind, nothing but the improvement of the morals of nations, and nothing
but
the elevation of the contingent world to the height of the virtues and
attributes
of the Abha Kingdom.

And as long as we are who we are, we employ these instruments to reach our
goal.

We keep ourselves and our goal unalloyed, unpolluted and uncorrupted in our
effort

to reach that goal, even if its full realization may only be in the far future.

This is because we don't strive to achieve a personal goal; we strive that the
human race may reach its true destiny, which we may or may not witness. What is
certain is that for this purpose we will not back down; we will not compromise
our

principles in order to take any shortcuts. We will not try to reach our target
in

haste, and by so doing undermine the pristine quality of the goal, nor will we
alter the very purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation due to our deficiency in
properly understanding His aim.

Our involvement in politics, in effect, would make of the Faith what we in fact
strive to prevent. Because of this not only will we never participate – we
pray
that the people of Baha will forever remain aloof from this danger, as they
have

been so far – and this has been their amulet of safeguarding and protection.

METADATA

Views9791 views since posted 2010-09-18; last edit 2024-04-12 02:34 UTC;

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