



Baha'i Faith Statement on the Environment

This statement was issued by the Baha'i Office of the Environment on behalf of the Baha'i International Community.

In this age of transition toward a world society, protection of the environment and conservation of the earth's resources represent an enormously complex challenge. The rapid progress in science and technology that has united the world physically has also greatly accelerated destruction of the biological diversity and rich natural heritage with which the planet has been endowed. Material civilization, driven by the dogmas of consumerism and aggressive individualism and disoriented by the weakening of moral standards and spiritual values, has been carried to excess.

Only a comprehensive vision of a global society, supported by universal values and principles, can inspire individuals to take responsibility for the long-term care and protection of the natural environment. Baha'is find such a world-embracing vision and system of values in the teachings of Baha'u'llah, which herald an era of planetary justice, prosperity, and unity.

Baha'i Teachings on Conservation and Sustainable Development

Baha'u'llah enjoins His followers to develop a sense of world citizenship and a commitment to stewardship of the earth. His writings are imbued with a deep respect for the natural world and for the interconnectedness of all things. They emphasize that the fruits of God's love and obedience to His commandments are dignity, nobility, and a sense of worth. From these attributes emerge the natural inclination to treat one another with love and compassion, and the willingness to sacrifice for the betterment of society.

Baha'u'llah also teaches moderation, a commitment to justice, and detachment from the things of this world—spiritual disciplines, which enable individuals to contribute to the establishment of a prosperous and united world civilization. The broad pattern for such a civilization and the principles on which it should be based are set forth in Baha'u'llah's Revelation, a revelation that offers hope to a

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dispirited humanity and the promise that it is truly possible both to meet the needs of present and future generations on a sound foundation for social and economic development. The inspiration and the vision for this is found in Baha'u'llah's words: "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."

The Principles

Among the principles guiding the Baha'i approach to conservation and sustainable development, the following are of particular importance:

- Nature reflects the qualities and attributes of God and should, therefore, be greatly respected and cherished.
- All things are interconnected and flourish according to the law of reciprocity.
- The oneness of humanity is the fundamental spiritual and social truth shaping our age.
- Nature reflects the qualities and attributes of God.



Baha'i scriptures describe nature as an emanation of God's will:

Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator. His manifestations are in His diversity and in this diversity there are signs for men of discernment. Nature is God's Will and is its expression in the natural world. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise.

Understanding nature as a reflection of the majesty and an expression of the purpose of God in the natural world:

"Whatever I behold I readily discover that it maketh Thee known unto me, and it remindeth me of Thy testimonies. By Thy glory! Every time I lift up mine eyes unto Thy heaven, I call to mind Thy Thine incomparable glory and greatness; and every time I turn my gaze to Thine earth, I am made Thy power and the tokens of Thy bounty. And when I behold the sea, I find that it speaketh to me of Thy potency of Thy might, and of Thy sovereignty and Thy grandeur. And at whatever time I contemplate I discover the ensigns of Thy victory and the standards of Thine Omnipotence.

Respect

This attitude of respect is further reinforced by copious metaphorical references to the natural world in the scriptures. However, while nature is greatly valued and respected, it is not to be worshipped or adopted.

Rather it is to serve the purpose given by God to the human race: to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The Baha'i faith promotes a worldview that is neither biocentric nor, strictly speaking, anthropocentric, but with the Revelations of God at its center. Humankind, as it strives to carry out the Divine Will in this, the physical world, is the steward of nature.

Animals

Responsible stewardship of the natural world logically extends to the humane treatment of animals:

It is not only their fellow human beings that the beloved of God must treat with mercy and compassion, rather must they show forth the utmost loving-kindness to every living creature.

Train your children from the earliest days to be infinitely tender and loving to animals. All things are interconnected and flourish according to the law of reciprocity. The principles of interconnectedness and reciprocity underlie the Baha'i understanding of both the operations of the universe and the responsibilities of humankind.

For every part of the universe is connected with every other part by ties that are very powerful and admit of no imbalance, nor any slackening whatever.... Cooperation and reciprocity are essential properties that are inherent in the unified system of the world of existence, and without which the entire creation would be reduced to naught.

Were one to observe with an eye that discovereth the realities of all things, it would become clear that that bindeth the world of being together lieth in the range of created things themselves, and that cooperation and reciprocity are essential characteristics in the unified body of the world of being, inasmuch as all created things are interconnected and each is influenced by the other or deriveth benefit there from, either directly or indirectly. Evolution is affirmed in Baha'i scriptures:

All beings, whether large or small, were created perfect and complete from the first, but their perfections are in different degrees. The organization of God is one; the evolution of existence is one; the divine system is one; the universal system, you see that there is not one of the beings which at its coming into existence has its perfection. No, they gradually grow and develop, and then attain the degree of perfection.

Biodiversity

The blessings of biodiversity are also highlighted:

Diversity is the essence of perfection and the cause of the appearance of the bestowals of the Most Gracious. This difference is like the naturally created dissimilarity and variety of the limbs and organs of the human body which have contributed to the beauty, efficiency and perfection of the whole ...

How unpleasing to the eye if all the flowers and plants, the leaves and blossoms, the fruits, the birds and animals in the garden were all of the same shape and color! Diversity of hues, form and shape, enriched and adorned the effect thereof ...

The spiritual and material planes are interconnected and act upon each other: *We cannot segregate the inner life from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man's inner life molds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other, and the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.*



Science

Given the fundamental unity of science and religion—the interconnectedness of the material and spiritual realms—it is not surprising that scientific pursuits are highly praised:

The faculty of intellectual investigation into the secrets of creation ... is the most praiseworthy power of man, for through its employment and exercise the betterment of the human race is accomplished, the development of the virtues of mankind is made possible ... However, the exercise of the faculty of investigation must be guided by spiritual principles, especially moderation and humility:

Any agency whatever, though it be the instrument of mankind's greatest good, is capable of misuse.



Civilization

If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when in moderation.

Every man of discernment, while walking upon the earth, feeleth indeed abashed, inasmuch as he perceiveth that which is the source of his prosperity, his wealth, his might, his exaltation, his advancement and power, is trodden upon the very earth which is trodden beneath the feet of all men. There can be no doubt that whoever is cognate with the earth and sanctified from all pride, arrogance, and vainglory ...

In light of the interdependence and reciprocity of all parts of nature, the evolutionary perfection of all diversity “to the beauty, efficiency and perfection of the whole,” it is dear to Baha'is that, in the orchard of life, the effort should be made to preserve as much as possible the earth's biodiversity and natural order.

Nevertheless, in the process of extending social and economic justice to the entire human family, irreversible decisions may have to be taken. Such decisions, Baha'is believe, should be made with the consent of those affected and taking into account the impact of any resulting policies, programs, and actions on subsequent generations.

For Baha'is, Baha'u'llah's promise that civilization will exist on this planet for a minimum of a thousand years is unconscionable to ignore the long-term impact of decisions made today. The world community must use the earth's natural resources, both renewable and nonrenewable, in a manner that ensures sustainability over time. This does not, however, mean that Baha'is advocate a “hands-off, back to the woods” policy. The civilization that Baha'is believe will eventually emerge will be animated by a deep religious faith and science and technology will serve humanity and help it to live in harmony with nature.

The oneness of humanity is, for Baha'is, the fundamental spiritual and social truth shaping principle and ultimate goal of humankind's collective life on the planet. It is applicable not only to the relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family

The oneness of mankind ... implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change yet experienced ... It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units.

It represents the consummation of human evolution ... and ... carries with it no more and no less than a solemn assertion that attainment to this final stage in this stupendous evolution is not only necessary but inevitable, that its realization is fast approaching, and that nothing short of a power that is born of God can succeed in establishing it.

Baha'i scriptures maintain that adherence to the principle of the oneness of humanity will have a direct and enduring impact on man's spiritual, social, and physical environments. Universal acceptance of this principle will entail a major restructuring of the world's educational, social, agricultural, industrial, economic, legal, and political systems. This restructuring will facilitate the emergence of a sustainable, just, and prosperous world civilization. Ultimately only a spiritually based civilization—in which science and religion work in harmony—will be able to preserve the earth, foster stability in human population, and advance both the material and the spiritual well-being of all people.



In conclusion

Baha'i scriptures teach that, as trustees of the planet's vast resources and biological diversity, humans should "cherish and protect the heritage [of] future generations"; see in nature a reflection of the divine; approach the earth, the soil, and the atmosphere with humility; temper its actions with moderation; and be guided by the fundamental spiritual truth of our faith. The speed and facility with which we establish a sustainable pattern of life will depend, in the final analysis, on how willing we are to be transformed, through the love of God and obedience to His Laws, into constructors of an ever-advancing civilization.

This was printed, along with Statements from ten other faiths, in [Faith in Conservation](#) by Martin Barrow, published by the World Bank in 2003.

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