

EDUCATION

Every child is potentially the light of the world -- and at the same time its darkness; wherefore must the question of education be accounted as of primary importance. From his infancy, the child must be nursed at the breast of God's love, and nurtured in the embrace of His knowledge, that he may radiate light, grow in spirituality, be filled with wisdom and learning, and take on the characteristics of the angelic host.

Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 130

104. O loved ones of God and handmaids of the Merciful! A large body of scholars is of the opinion that variations among minds and differing degrees of perception are due to differences in education, training and culture. That is, they believe that minds are equal to begin with, but that training and education will result in mental variations and differing levels of intelligence, and that such variations are not an inherent component of the individuality but are the result of education: that no one hath any inborn superiority over another....

The Manifestations of God are likewise in agreement with the view that education exerteth the strongest possible influence on humankind. They affirm, however, that differences in the level of intelligence are innate; and this fact is obvious, and not worth debating. For we see that children of the same age, the same country, the same race, indeed of the same family, and trained by the same individual, still are different as to the degree of their comprehension and intelligence. One will make rapid progress, one will receive instruction only gradually, one will remain at the lowest stage of all. For no matter how much you may polish a shell, it will not turn into a gleaming pearl, nor can you change a dull pebble into a gem whose pure rays will light the world. Never, through training and cultivation, will the colocynth and the bitter tree [1] change into the Tree of Blessedness.[2] That is to say, education cannot alter the inner essence of a man, but it doth exert tremendous influence, and with this power it can bring forth from the individual whatever perfections and capacities are deposited within him. A grain of wheat, when cultivated by the farmer, will yield a whole harvest, and a seed, through the gardener's care, will grow into a great tree. Thanks to a teacher's loving efforts, the children of the primary school may reach the highest levels of achievement; indeed, his benefactions may lift some child of small account to an exalted throne. Thus is it clearly demonstrated that by their essential nature, minds vary as to their capacity, while education also playeth a great role and exerteth a powerful effect

Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 131

Man undeveloped by education is savage animalistic, brutal. Laws and regulations, schools, colleges and universities have for their purpose the training of man and his uplift from the dark border-land of the animal kingdom. What is the difference between the people of America and the inhabitants of Central

Africa?

All are human beings . . . The difference and distinction between them is the degree of education . . .

Balyuzi, Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 277

For the inner reality of man is a demarcation line between the shadow and the light, a place where the two seas meet;[1] it is the lowest point on the arc of descent,[2] and therefore is it capable of gaining all the grades above. With education it can achieve all excellence; devoid of education it will stay on, at the lowest point of imperfection.

[1 Qur'an 25:55, 35:13, 55:19-25. See also Marriage Prayer revealed by Abdu'l-Baha beginning 'He is God! O peerless Lord! In Thine almighty wisdom Thou hast enjoined marriage upon the peoples...']

[2 See Some Answered Questions, pp. 328-9 for Abdu'l-Baha's comments on the arc of descent and ascent.]

Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 130

114. O ye loving mothers, know ye that in God's sight, the best of all ways to worship Him is to educate the children and train them in all the perfections of humankind; and no nobler deed than this can be imagined.

Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 139

And among the teachings of Baha'u'llah is that religion is a mighty bulwark. If the edifice of religion shakes and totters, commotion and chaos will ensue and the order of things will be utterly upset, for in the world of mankind there are two safeguards that protect man from wrongdoing. One is the law which punishes the criminal; but the law prevents only the manifest crime and not the concealed sin; whereas the ideal safeguard, namely, the religion of God, prevents both the manifest and the concealed crime, trains man, educates morals, compels the adoption of virtues and is the all-inclusive power which guarantees the felicity of the world of mankind. But by religion is meant that which is ascertained by investigation and not that which is based on mere imitation, the foundations of Divine Religions and not human imitations.

Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 302

But education is of three kinds: material, human and spiritual. Material education is concerned with the progress and development of the body, through gaining its sustenance, its material comfort and ease. This education is common to animals and man.

Human education signifies civilization and progress -- that is to say, government, administration, charitable works, trades, arts and handicrafts, sciences, great inventions and discoveries and elaborate institutions, which are the activities essential to man as distinguished from the animal.

Divine education is that of the Kingdom of God: it consists in acquiring divine perfections, and this is true education; for in this state man becomes the focus of divine

blessings, the manifestation of the words, "Let Us make man in Our image, and after Our likeness." [1] This is the goal of the world of humanity.

Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 8

He must also impart spiritual education, so that intelligence and comprehension may penetrate the metaphysical world, and may receive benefit from the sanctifying breeze of the Holy Spirit, and may enter into relationship with the Supreme Concourse. He must so educate the human reality that it may become the center of the divine appearance, to such a degree that the attributes and the names of God shall be resplendent in the mirror of the reality of man, and the holy verse "We will make man in Our image and likeness" shall be realized.

Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 9

But this is not so, for capacity is of two kinds: natural capacity and acquired capacity. The first, which is the creation of God, is purely good -- in the creation of God there is no evil; but the acquired capacity has become the cause of the appearance of evil. For example, God has created all men in such a manner and has given them such a constitution and such capacities that they are benefited by sugar and honey and harmed and destroyed by poison. This nature and constitution is innate, and God has given it equally to all mankind. But man begins little by little to accustom himself to poison by taking a small quantity each day, and gradually increasing it, until he reaches such a point that he cannot live without a gram of opium every day. The natural capacities are thus completely perverted. Observe how much the natural capacity and constitution can be changed, until by different habits and training they become entirely perverted. One does not criticize vicious people because of their innate capacities and nature, but rather for their acquired capacities and nature.

Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 214

In creation there is no evil; all is good. Certain qualities and natures innate in some men and apparently blameworthy are not so in reality. For example, from the beginning of his life you can see in a nursing child the signs of greed, of anger and of temper. Then, it may be said, good and evil are innate in the reality of man, and this is contrary to the pure goodness of nature and creation. The answer to this is that greed, which is to ask for something more, is a praiseworthy quality provided that it is used suitably. So if a man is greedy to acquire science and knowledge, or to become compassionate, generous and just, it is most praiseworthy. If he exercises his anger and wrath against the bloodthirsty tyrants who are like ferocious beasts, it is very praiseworthy; but if he does not use these qualities in a right way, they are blameworthy.

Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 215

deeper knowledge will be tended by one who traineth them to love. May they all, throughout the reaches of the spirit, learn well of the hidden mysteries; so well that in the Kingdom of the All-Glorious, each one of them, even as a nightingale endowed with speech, will cry out the secrets of the Heavenly Realm, and like unto a longing lover pour forth his sore need and utter want of the Beloved.

Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 134

As to the difference between that material civilization now prevailing, and the divine civilization which will be one of the benefits to derive from the House of Justice, it is this: material civilization, through the power of punitive and retaliatory laws, restraineth the people from criminal acts; and notwithstanding this, while laws to retaliate against and punish a man are continually proliferating, as ye can see, no laws exist to reward him. In all the cities of Europe and America, vast buildings have been erected to serve as jails for the criminals.

Divine civilization, however, so traineth every member of society that no one, with the exception of a negligible few, will undertake to commit a crime. There is thus a great difference between the prevention of crime through measures that are violent and retaliatory, and so training the people, and enlightening them, and spiritualizing them, that without any fear of punishment or vengeance to come, they will shun all criminal acts. They will, indeed, look upon the very commission of a crime as a great disgrace and in itself the harshest of punishments. They will become enamoured of human perfections, and will consecrate their lives to whatever will bring light to the world and will further those qualities which are acceptable at the Holy Threshold of God.

Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 132

It is extremely difficult to teach the individual and refine his character once puberty is passed. By then, as experience hath shown, even if every effort be exerted to modify some tendency of his, it all availeth nothing. He may, perhaps, improve somewhat today; but let a few days pass and he forgetteth, and turneth backward to his habitual condition and accustomed ways. Therefore it is in early childhood that a firm foundation must be laid. While the branch is green and tender it can easily be made straight.

Our meaning is that qualities of the spirit are the basic and divine foundation, and adorn the true essence of man; and knowledge is the cause of human progress. The beloved of God must attach great importance to this matter, and carry it forward with enthusiasm and zeal.

Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 137

Question. -- How many kinds of character has man, and what is the cause of the differences and varieties in men?

Answer. -- He has the innate character, the inherited character, and the acquired character which is gained by education.

With regard to the innate character, although the divine creation is purely good, yet the varieties of natural qualities in man come from the difference of degree; all are excellent, but they are more or less so, according to the degree. So all mankind possess intelligence and capacities, but the intelligence, the capacity and the worthiness of men differ. This is evident.

For example, take a number of children of one family, of one place, of one school, instructed by one teacher, reared on the same food, in the same climate, with the same clothing, and studying the same lessons -- it is certain that among these children some will be clever in the sciences, some will be of average ability, and some dull. Hence it is clear that in the original nature there exists a difference of degree and varieties of worthiness and capacity. This difference does not imply good or evil but is simply a difference of degree. One has the highest degree, another the medium degree, and another the lowest degree. So man exists; the animal, the plant and the mineral exist also -- but the degrees of these four existences vary. What a difference between the existence of man and of the animal! Yet both are existences. It is evident that in existence there are differences of degrees.

Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 212

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