

Arts

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THE ARTS

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I. From the Writings of Baha'u'llah

1. [1] Blessed are those who have fixed their gaze on the realm of glory and have followed the commandments of the Lord of Names. Blessed is he who in the days of God will engage in handicrafts. This is a bounty from God, for in this Most Great Dispensation it is acceptable in the sight of God for man to occupy himself in a trade which relieveth him of depending upon charity. The craft of every craftsman is regarded as worship.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

2. One of the names of God is the Fashioner. He loveth craftsmanship. Therefore any of His servants who manifesteth this attribute is acceptable in the sight of this Wronged One. Craftsmanship is a book among the books of divine sciences, and a treasure among the treasures of His heavenly wisdom. This is a knowledge with meaning, for some of the sciences are brought forth by words and come to an end with words.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

3. God grant that thou wilt exert thine utmost to acquire perfections, as well as proficiency in a craft.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

4. The one true God, exalted be He, loveth to witness handiworks of high craftsmanship produced by His loved ones. Blessed art thou, for what thy skill hath produced hath reached the presence of thy Lord, the Exiled, the Wronged. Please God every one of His friends may be enabled to acquire one of the crafts, and be confirmed in adhering to what hath been ordained in the Book of God, the All- Glorious, the All-Wise.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian and Arabic)

5. Teach ye your children so that they may peruse the divine verses every morn and eve. God hath prescribed unto every father to educate his [2] children, both boys and girls, in the sciences and in morals, and in crafts and professions....

(From a Tablet—translated from the Arabic)

6. It is incumbent upon the children to exert themselves to the utmost in acquiring the art of reading and writing.... Writing skills that will provide for urgent needs will be enough for some; and then it is better and more fitting that they should spend their time in studying those branches of knowledge which are of use.

As for what the Supreme Pen hath previously set down, the reason is that in

every art and skill, God loveth the highest perfection.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

7. The fifth Taraz concerneth the protection and preservation of the stations of God's servants. One should not ignore the truth of any matter, rather should one give expression to that which is right and true. The people of Baha should not deny any soul the reward due to him, should treat craftsmen with deference, and, unlike the people aforesaid, should not defile their tongues with abuse.

In this Day the sun of craftsmanship shineth above the horizon of the occident and the river of arts is flowing out of the sea of that region. One must speak with fairness and appreciate such bounty....

("Tablets of Baha'u'llah Revealed After the Kitab-i-Aqdas"

[rev. ed.], (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1978) pp. 38-39)

8. The third Tajalli is concerning arts, crafts and sciences. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words. Great indeed is the claim of scientists and craftsmen on the peoples of the world. Unto this beareth witness the Mother Book on the day of His return....

("Tablets of Baha'u'llah Revealed After the Kitab-i-Aqdas",

pp. 51-52)

9. At the outset of every endeavour, it is incumbent to look to the end of it. Of all the arts and sciences, set the children to studying those which will result in advantage to man, will ensure his progress and elevate his [3] rank. Thus the noisome odours of lawlessness will be dispelled, and thus through the high endeavours of the nation's leaders, all will live cradled, secure and in peace.

The Great Being saith: The learned of the day must direct the people to acquire those branches of knowledge which are of use, that both the learned themselves and the generality of mankind may derive benefits therefrom....

("Tablets of Baha'u'llah Revealed After the Kitab-i-Aqdas",

pp. 16 & 69)

10. The purpose of learning should be the promotion of the welfare of the people, and this can be achieved through crafts. It hath been revealed and is now repeated that the true worth of artists and craftsmen should be appreciated, for they advance the affairs of mankind. Just as the foundations of religion are made firm through the Law of God, the means of livelihood depend upon those who are engaged in arts and crafts. True learning is that which is conducive to the well-being of the world, not to pride and self-conceit, or to tyranny, violence and pillage.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

II. From the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Baha

11. Every person must have an occupation, a trade or a craft, so that he may

carry other people's burdens, and not himself be a burden to others.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

12. Thou hast written regarding thy meeting with... He hath written that he desireth to teach thee one of the crafts and show thee affection and consideration. We beseech God that this purpose may be attained, and thou wilt learn such a skill, for according to the divine ordinances, every person must acquire a craft.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

13. He must study every day from morning till noon, so that he may learn how to read and write. From noon till about sunset he should acquire a craft. The children must both learn to read and acquire an art or skill.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

14. [4] It is necessary for all to learn a craft, through which the people may earn their living. This commandment is universal.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

15. It is the commandment of the Blessed Beauty, may my life be a sacrifice at His Threshold, that whosoever engageth in a craft, should endeavour to acquire in it utmost proficiency. Should he do so, that craft becometh a form of worship.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

16. Another friend asked, "In the Tablets it is stated that we must be severed and detached. In another place it is stated that we must learn a trade or profession. Do not these two statements contradict each other?" 'Abdu'l-Baha replied, "In the Cause of Baha'u'llah, it is incumbent upon every soul to acquire a trade and an occupation. For example, I know how to weave or make a mat, and you know some other trade. This, in itself is an act of worship, provided that it is conducted on the basis of utmost honesty and faithfulness.

And this is the cause of prosperity. Yet, in spite of being so occupied, if the heart is not chained and tied to this world, and is not troubled by current events, neither hindered by wealth from rendering service to mankind, nor grieved because of poverty,—then this is human perfection. Otherwise in a state of poverty, to manifest generosity and in a state of weakness to claim justice—this can easily be said, but it is not a proof of man's attainments and alertness."

(From an article written by Dr. Z. Baghdadi entitled "'Abdu'l-Baha in America", published in "Star of the West", Vol. 19, No. 7, p. 219)

17. And further, according to the Divine commandments, every child must learn reading and writing, and acquire such branches of knowledge as are useful and necessary, as well as learning an art or skill. The utmost care must be devoted to these matters; any neglect of them, any failure to act on them, is not permissible.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

18. Among the greatest of all great services is the education of children, [5]

and promotion of the various sciences, crafts and arts. Praised be God, ye are now exerting strenuous efforts toward this end. The more ye persevere in this most important task, the more will ye witness the confirmations of God, to such a degree that ye yourselves will be astonished.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

19. O ye recipients of the favours of God! In this new and wondrous Age, the unshakable foundation is the teaching of sciences and arts. According to explicit Holy Texts, every child must be taught crafts and arts, to the degree that is needful. Wherefore, in every city and village, schools must be established and every child in that city or village is to engage in study to the necessary degree.

It followeth that whatever soul shall offer his aid to bring this about will assuredly be accepted at the Heavenly Threshold, and extolled by the Company on High.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha" [rev. ed.]
(Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1982), Sec. 109, pp. 134-35.)

20. Thy letter was received. Praise be to God it imparted the good news of thy health and safety and indicated that thou art ready to enter an agricultural school. This is highly suitable. Strive as much as possible to become proficient in the science of agriculture, for in accordance with the divine teachings the acquisition of sciences and the perfection of arts are considered acts of worship. If a man engageth with all his power in the acquisition of a science or in the perfection of an art, it is as if he has been worshipping God in churches and temples. Thus as thou enterest a school of agriculture and strivest in the acquisition of that science thou art day and night engaged in acts of worship—acts that are accepted at the threshold of the Almighty. What bounty greater than this that science should be considered as an act of worship and art as service to the Kingdom of God.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha", 126, pp. 144-45)

21. O thou servant of the One true God! In this universal dispensation man's wondrous craftsmanship is reckoned as worship of the Resplendent Beauty. [6]

Consider what a bounty and blessing it is that craftsmanship is regarded as worship. In former times, it was believed that such skills were tantamount to ignorance, if not a misfortune, hindering man from drawing nigh unto God. Now consider how His infinite bestowals and abundant favours have changed hell-fire into blissful paradise, and a heap of dark dust into a luminous garden.

It behoveth the craftsmen of the world at each moment to offer a thousand tokens of gratitude at the Sacred Threshold, and to exert their highest endeavour and diligently pursue their professions so that their efforts may produce that which will manifest the greatest beauty and perfection before the eyes of all men.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha" 127, p. 145)

22. Make every effort to acquire the advanced knowledge of the day, and strain

every nerve to carry forward the divine civilization. Establish schools that are well organized, and promote the fundamentals of instruction in the various branches of knowledge through teachers who are pure and sanctified, distinguished for their high standards of conduct and general excellence, and strong in faith; scholars and educators with a thorough knowledge of sciences and arts.

Included must be promotion of the arts, the discovery of new wonders, the expansion of trade, and the development of industry. The methods of civilization and the beautification of the country must also be encouraged...
(From a Tablet- translated from the Persian)

23. While the children are yet in their infancy feed them from the breast of heavenly grace, foster them in the cradle of all excellence, rear them in the embrace of bounty. Give them the advantage of every useful kind of knowledge. Let them share in every new and rare and wondrous craft and art. Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship. Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha", 102, p. 129)

III. From letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to individual believers unless otherwise cited

24. [7] In connection with your dear husband, Shoghi Effendi would consider it in full and happy accord with the expressed desire of the Master that every man should have some permanent work. Much as he desires to see you both devote your entire energies to a well thought out, progressive and attractive presentation of the Cause—a thing he feels we lack lamentably- he would be very pleased to see your husband follow what the Master often repeated even to His own immediate family, namely the necessity of a profession. Of course you know that He always said His had been mat-making.

(20 September 1929)

25. He sincerely hopes that as the Cause grows and talented persons come under its banner, they will begin to produce in art the divine spirit that animates their soul. Every religion has brought with it some form of art—let us see what wonders this Cause is going to bring along. Such a glorious spirit should also give vent to a glorious art. The Temple with all its beauty is only the first ray of an early dawn; even more wondrous things are to be achieved in the future.

(11 December 1931)

26. Shoghi Effendi was very much interested to learn of the success of the "Pageant of the Nations" you produced. He sincerely hopes that all those who attended it were inspired by the same spirit that animated you while arranging it.

It is through such presentations that we can arouse the interest of the greatest number of people in the spirit of the Cause. The day will come when

the Cause will spread like wildfire when its spirit and teachings will be presented on the stage or in art and literature as a whole. Art can better awaken such noble sentiments than cold rationalizing, especially among the mass of the people.

We have to wait only a few years to see how the spirit breathed by Baha'u'llah will find expression in the work of the artists. What you and some other Baha'is are attempting are only faint rays that precede the effulgent light of a glorious morn. We cannot yet value the part the Cause is destined to play in the life of society. We have to give it time. The [8] material this spirit has to mould is too crude and unworthy, but it will at last give way and the Cause of Baha'u'llah will reveal itself in its full splendour.

(10 October 1932, cited in "Baha'i News", 73 (May 1933) p. 7)

27. Although now is only the very beginning of Baha'i art, yet the friends who feel they are gifted in such matters should endeavour to develop and cultivate their gifts and through their works to reflect, however inadequately, the Divine Spirit which Baha'u'llah has breathed into the world.

(4 November 1937)

28. As regards producing a book of Baha'i songs, your understanding that there is no cultural expression which could be called Baha'i at this time (distinctive music, literature, art, architecture, etc., being the flower of the civilization and not coming at the beginning of a new Revelation), is correct. However, that does not mean that we haven't Baha'i songs, in other words, songs written by Baha'is on Baha'i subjects. There is no objection to getting out a compilation of these, but he does not think money should be spent in printing it, in view of the state of the National Fund, and the much more important work in the teaching field which needs to be undertaken this year. If you can get out such a book in a mimeographed form, he feels this would be sufficient to meet the needs at this time.

(21 September 1957 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States)