

# 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-  
 by  
 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

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 in

exhibited by the believers in the earliest

days of the Cause in Persia, the

land of its birth; to the intrepid spirit

worldwide

of the pioneers from East and West, who spread the Faith's teachings to

trying the farthest corners of the globe; to

united the exuberant community-building efforts

we witness in this very day. the

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

sacrifice.

Bahá'u'lláh asserts that His Revelation Bahá'í

is established upon an unassailable foundation that the storms of human

strife are powerless to undermine, and oppression,

whose structure the fanciful theories fo-

of human beings cannot succeed in

sure us, will also enable human

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of civilization-building? The lives

the Twin Manifestations of God for this age, the life of the Center of

Covenant, and of the beloved Guardian, comprise sources of

for us all. The spirit of

demonstrated by the early believers

both the East and the West are also

valuable in this regard. We witness

spirit in over 5,000 clusters

and the efforts of many individuals and groups of Bahá'ís who are

to contribute to a more just and

society. Through

we are learning how to translate

teachings of the Faith into reality, a process which requires individual

collective acts of service and

A review of the history of the

community of Iran where, over the past 175 years, the believers have

subjected to injustice and

can also prove instructive. I will

focus on this review, but first we

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

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without denying their faith. Therefore, the community made informal arrangements to use the volunteer

ment. 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, strenuous efforts to explore possible solutions with Muslim officials proved fruitless. By the late 1980s, it had become obvious that Bahá'ís would not be allowed to enroll in Iranian

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 Yárán<sup>2</sup> 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 of Bahá'ís, and ask the detainees not to explain their philosophies during interrogation. On one occasion, one

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

of these interrogators—who did not with the Bahá'í community. It began thousands of Bahá'í employees being expelled from all government-related offices and entities. Following this complete debarment from government or government-related employment, "Respond to my questions without any explanation: answer me with a yes or no." The Bahá'í authorities turned their attention to the private sector, resorting to various methods aimed at severely limiting the economic activities of Bahá'ís business owners and entrepreneurs. In recent years, many Bahá'ís have faced a new problem: When they close their shops in observance of a Bahá'í Holy Day, the authorities seal off their business permits. Efforts to bring this economic apartheid to an end have been ongoing since the onset of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The Bahá'í said that the answer to both questions was "no." The interrogator, who was surprised, asked, "How come?" The Bahá'í answered, "So you want me to explain," and went on to say, "To be a true Bahá'í is the desire of my heart. All my life I have been striving to be a Bahá'í. But in facing this persecution with a spirit of constructive resilience, the Bahá'u'lláh, I will succeed. But I do not consider myself worthy of being called a Bahá'í. As for far from resorting to common disruptive responses, creatively find ways to continue earning a livelihood. For example, an automobile mechanic whose shop was sealed because he closed it for a Bahá'í holy day, began repairing his customers' cars at a lower cost on the street in front of his shop. Naturally, his business boomed. A few

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

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. 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, he did say "I am a Bahá'í, and we 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, "What has happened to you?" He 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  
pains tak-

Bahá'í principles with Muslim people  
to gov-

and conducting activities related to  
levels,

the institute process and communi-  
influence in

ty-building.<sup>4</sup> 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 solutions at home. Their aim is to live contributing members of their society and to fulfill their spiritual obligations. Furthermore, they pursue these paths 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 of Justice. They respectfully asked Bahá'ís of the world to refrain from praying for the Yárán's release. Why? Because they could see with eyes that doors were being opened for the progress of the Faith as a result 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 estab-  
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 have 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. Through 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 daily necessities of life, survive  
op- many Iranian people toward the Faith pression, and exhibit courage in the  
and the Bahá'ís. face of hatred. Their unwavering  
de-

The spiritual energies released by termination to seek justice with quiet  
so great a number of sacrifices offered fortitude demonstrates the will and  
in the path of God, as well as the ef- the discipline required to live a  
pur-  
forts of both Bahá'ís and members of poseful life. Ultimately, the  
Bahá'ís of  
the larger community elsewhere in the Iran have learned to experience the  
world to arise to defend their rights, deep joy and comfort that arises  
from  
have no doubt significantly contrib- service to others and to God. Are  
not  
uted to the realization of these signal all of these among the very  
capacities  
accomplishments. The Bahá'ís of Iran and abilities that, in our  
prayers, we  
often say that they owe this success to beseech God to help us develop?  
Constructive Resilience 19

Moving from the spirit of con- No matter where we live, nurtur-  
structive resilience demonstrated by ing spiritual capacities,  
approaches,  
the Bahá'ís of Iran, let us look at the and habits of thought is  
necessary  
larger global context. The rest of hu- to strengthening our own spirit of  
manity is also being battered by forc- constructive resilience. As we  
strive  
es of oppression, whether generated for the betterment of the world,  
the  
from the depths of religious, racial, messages of the House of Justice  
ad-  
and gender-based intolerance, or from dressed to the Bahá'ís of Iran  
over  
the onslaught of rampant materialism. the past few years identify some  
such  
"What 'oppression' is more grievous," capacities. We live at a time when  
the  
Bahá'u'lláh asks, "than that a soul seek- vision of Bahá'u'lláh  
challenges many  
ing the truth, and wishing to attain of the assumptions that shape  
contem-  
unto the knowledge of God, should porary discourse. In a letter  
addressed

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 has without its own tests for the Bahá'ís. the '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

most selfish desires, while encouraging 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

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

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)

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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 House of Justice expresses confidence that such developments in the world will cause the believers in every land 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 to further strengthen ourselves to remain unaffected by the negative of society and to avoid the to give into pressures to adopt the prevailing materialistic assumptions. Guided by the House of Justice, must develop a deeper understanding of the Bahá'í approach to the ills of humanity, firmly adhere Bahá'í principles, and resist the impulse to defend prevailing ideas are popular in the wider society because it seems expedient in the ment. We must further consolidate capacity to realize that only sacrificial efforts and with like-minded people can world chaos and confusion be remedied and rebalanced. Bahá'u'lláh's advice one of the believers is profoundly relevant in this respect: "Sharp must thy sight, O Dhabíh, and adamant soul and brass-like thy feet, if wishest to be unshaken by the

assaults

of the present order, will reinforce in of the selfish desires that whisper in

them the conviction that material and men's breasts. This is the firm injunc-

spiritual civilization must be advanced tion which the Pen of the Most Great

together, and will remind Bahá'ís that Name hath, by virtue of the Will of

Constructive Resilience 21

the Ancient King, been moved to re- on us and our success or failure. veal" (Gleanings 115:13). All humanity is disturbed and

suffering and confused; we cannot expect to not be disturbed and

'Abdu'l-Bahá likewise says:

not to suffer—but we don't have to be confused. On the contrary, The beloved of the Lord must confidence and assurance, hope stand fixed as the mountains, firm and optimism are our prerogative.

as impregnable walls. Unmoved must they remain by even the dir- The successful carrying out of est adversities, ungrieved by the our various Plans is the greatest worst of disasters. Let them cling sign we can give of our faith and to the hem of Almighty God, inner assurance, and the best way and put their faith in the Beauty we can help our fellow-men out of their confusion and difficulties (Unfolding Destiny 225).

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) Publishing, 1989

And, finally, Shoghi Effendi gives us 2006.

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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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