



see this as part of their education. In an increasingly interconnected world, the capacity of any one individual to do good or evil increases exponentially. As such, we must consider that every child is potentially the light of the world or its darkness. What thoughts, then, what skills and attributes can help a child to develop the former capacity, rather than the latter?

I would begin by helping them to understand the idea of connectedness – connectedness to their family, their community, their environment, and the world. Over the last century, our lived experiences coupled with scientific and social advances have gradually stripped away the barriers by means of which we compartmentalized our world and its people. We know that girls and women have the same rights as boys and men and that the oppression of girls and women contributes to the breakdown of communities. We know that, despite sinister notions of racial superiority, we are part of one human race. We know that our commercial activity has direct and negative impacts on our environment and our health.

In other words, there is no “us” and “them,” there is only “us.” This is what I want to teach my children.

The paradigm of interconnectedness also raises the question of justice and responsibility. How can we impart in our children the sense of responsibility for making their community and their world a better place? How can we teach them about justice when we see so little of it in the world?

We can begin at home by cultivating the child’s capacity for compassion – an awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve it. We can encourage children to help at home or in the community. On a larger scale, we must also make them aware of the challenges in the world and help them to feel compassion even for those they may never meet. Even children as young as three years old are capable of sharing, refraining from hitting when angry, and are beginning to develop a sense of right and wrong about how people should be treated.

In the midst of our chaotic and beleaguered world, we can strive to impart hope to our children. Notwithstanding present day human suffering, by many accounts the number of wars and conflicts is steadily decreasing. Awareness and intolerance of injustice and inequality are steadily building momentum. More and more children are in schools. The voice of women is increasingly heard in their communities, nations and the world. The degradation of our environment has finally captured the attention of the world. The rapidly growing networks of civil society are helping to bring the voice of the governed to bear on laws and policy that impact them. We are not simply repeating history. We are slowly, sometimes painfully so, but surely erecting the foundation for a better world.

As I consider these questions, I am drawn to the Writings of the Bahá’í Faith. “God has given us eyes, that we may look about us at the world, and lay hold of whatsoever will further civilization and the arts of living,” wrote Abdu’l-Baha, son of the Founder of the Bahá’í Faith. “Senses and

faculties have been bestowed upon us, to be devoted to the service of the general good; so that we, distinguished above all other forms of life for perceptiveness and reason, should labor at all times and along all lines, ...until all mankind are safely gathered into the impregnable stronghold of knowledge.”

Let's give our children the vision and the tools to further our civilization and to perfect the art of living.

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