

# Some thoughts on Ecology: Warwick Leaflet

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The Bahá'í approach is one of wholeness and oneness - in other words it is a holistic religion. Bahá'ís see life as they see religions and people - as a whole:

"... even as the human body in this world, which is outwardly composed of different limbs and organs, is in reality a closely integrated, coherent identity, similarly the structure of the physical world is like unto a single being whose limbs and members are inseparably linked together."

## Respect for the Earth

Bahá'ís have an attitude of reverence for the earth and all its creatures:

"Every man of discernment, when walking upon the earth, feeleth indeed abashed, inasmuch as he is fully aware that the thing which is the source of his prosperity, his wealth, his might, his exaltation, his advancement and power is, as ordained by God, the very earth which is trodden beneath the feet of all men."

"Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator ... Nature is God's Will and is its expression ..."

## Respect for All Creatures

Kindness to animals is given great importance in the Bahá'í Scriptures:

"It is essential that ye show forth the utmost consideration to the animal ..."

"Train your children from their earliest days to be infinitely tender and loving to animals."

## Balance and Harmony

"We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic and with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions."

Mankind has a faculty which plants and animals do not have, the power to discover the secrets of nature. We therefore have the responsibility to use this power only in a positive way, to ensure that balance is maintained in the

world. Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, warned more than a hundred years ago that there are things in the earth which, "are capable of changing the whole atmosphere of the earth", and from which "contamination would prove lethal".

### The Preservation of Life

Change is natural and continual in all life but disruptive and powerful change caused by human greed and thoughtlessness does not give nature time to adapt. "...civilization... will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men ...If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness ..."

We must learn to live in harmony with our planet. This requires a more spiritual, less selfish attitude than that which is too often found today.

We need to preserve the diversity of life forms not only for their own sakes, but for ours too. For example, a variety of plants are required to maintain a healthy diet, and for medicinal purposes too. Bahá'u'lláh advised that we should use manufactured compound medicines only until the natural remedy is discovered.

### The Importance of Agriculture

The Bahá'í writings state that agriculture is the world's most important industry - an obvious fact which often tends to be overlooked.

At present, much of human food production is wasteful. Numerous researchers have shown that rearing animals for food uses more land than growing vegetable crops. Moreover, large parts of the earth's surface are becoming degraded through overgrazing by herds of domestic animals.

According to the Bahá'í Writings:

"The food of the future will be fruits and grains. The time will come when meat will no longer be eaten ... our natural food is that which grows out of the ground."

All too often the present economic system decrees that poorer countries produce cash crops to sell to the richer ones. This is frequently done at the expense of the ecology and the lifestyle of the local people. A fairer economic system, based on a world currency, would remove this problem.

### Restoring the Forests

The most well-known Bahá'í environmentalist was probably Richard St. Barbe

Baker, who founded the organisation "Men of the Trees" more than 60 years ago. He saw the need to plant millions of trees to stop the desert spreading, and he understood how trees actually encourage rainfall in dry areas. With active help from the people in parts of Africa, he laboured for years, seeing his ideas put into practice.

In 1986, the Bahá'ís were invited to become part of the Network on Conservation and Religion begun by the World Wide Fund for Nature. In this network WWF is working with seven of the worlds religions to help preserve the environment. More recently, the Bahá'ís have begun planning a world-wide tree-planting initiative and have reconvened the World Forestry Charter Gathering.

### World Co-operation

The restoration of a suitable environment for all living things is a global problem. We talk of global warming and global crisis, but rarely of global solutions. The Bahá'ís would argue that there must be a form of global government. At present, any one country is generally regarded as being within its rights to pursue its own course, without regard for the effect this has on others. The harmful effect of this attitude are now obvious. The world government must have the right to actively discourage any one country from taking any harmful action. It must be able to manage the resources of the earth for the good of all, rather than for the short-sighted materialistic gain of a few.

For humanity to survive, the human habitat, like that of any other species, must be sustainable. This will not happen if war is allowed to continue. In its place must be an ordered society in which the diversity and richness of the parts must be preserved and nourished. This attitude will be carried forward to the environment in general. Bahá'ís often express their goal for the future as "Unity in Diversity".

### Local Initiative

Although Bahá'ís believe that the world should be organised as if it were one country, they recognise that excessive centralisation is a danger to be avoided. The structure of any world administration must, in the Bahá'í view, allow for local initiatives which will add to the global picture. Each piece of the planet's surface is held in trust by the local inhabitants as well as by mankind as a whole. The inter-relationship of the whole and the part runs throughout the Bahá'í teachings and indeed is one of the features of creation itself. The need for local initiative to be guided by a world-embracing vision was emphasised by Bahá'u'lláh when He said that the members of each Local Bahá'í Assembly should: "Regard themselves as the guardians appointed of God for all who dwell on earth."

Mankind generally is waking up to what people with insight, and those most directly suffering, have known for years: that we are rapidly destroying our natural environment. There are many causes for this, including lack of unity amongst mankind, lack of a common philosophy of life, lack of political maturity, the existence of poverty and exploitation, the division of the world into rival countries, an unjust world economic system, and many more. The Bahá'í Faith has teachings in directly environmental questions, but also many teachings dealing with the life of the individual and the running of human affairs. It is obvious to any concerned person that if we solved the problems listed above - in other words created fairer and more rational systems of economics, administration and justice - the destruction of the environment could be halted and be rapidly thrown into reverse.

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