

# **Transforming Society for the Betterment of the World: Teachings from the Bahá'í Faith**

Bahá'u'lláh states that “the purpose for which mortal men have, from utter nothingness, stepped into the realm of being, is that they may work for the betterment of the world and live together in concord and harmony.”...Building a society that consciously pursues this collective purpose is the work of not only this generation, but of many generations to come, and Bahá'u'lláh's followers welcome all who labour alongside them in this undertaking. It means learning how to raise up vibrant, outward- looking communities; it means those communities learning how to bring about spiritual and material progress; it means learning how to contribute to the discourses that influence the direction of that progress...And though the world society foreshadowed in His Revelation is of course far distant, communities that are earnestly learning to apply His teachings to their social reality abound.” (Letter, 2021: para.2)

## **What is social transformation?**

Social transformation is “A complex set of interactions between profound changes that have to occur within the individual and deliberate attempts at changing the structure of society. Moreover, the change of social structures is not understood as mere political change, it involves total change in all structures, mental, cultural, economic, and social, including a complete change in the very concept of political leadership and power.” (Arbab, 1987:10).

## **How does social transformation happen?**

- Disintegration and destruction of old systems of oppression and politics that act to divide humanity, We do not need to act to destroy these systems; they are already destroying themselves.
- Integration and construction is where we need to take action, actively searching for new solutions to human existence on this planet in all the economic, political, educational, cultural, and organizational realms that acts to unify people and see ourselves as one human family.

## **Who has a role in transforming society?**

- Individuals: Every individual is a member of the human family and makes a contribution to the life of society. The individual takes initiative, seizes opportunities, forms friendships and builds relationships, joins with others in common service, and acts on decisions.
- Institutions: Such places as schools, courts, artistic establishments, the media, and non-governmental organizations are required for society to function at a higher level than that of an assemblage of individuals. Institutions give structure to society's collective endeavours and can promote unity of vision that plays an important part in shaping community life.
- Communities: Human beings were not created to live alone but, rather to belong to communities. Collaboration with others is vital to our well-being and progress. In any given community, the culture it promotes, the attitudes it fosters, and the patterns of thought and behaviour it cultivates, are largely defined by its members' collective sense of purpose. When that purpose is to contribute to the betterment of society, the community becomes a setting in which powers are multiplied in unified action and a commitment to the common good.

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## What can you and I do?

**Participate** in the discourses of society in a way that builds on the principle of the oneness of humanity. Contribute insights and experiences that are relevant to the profound challenges facing humanity today. Adopt a posture of humility, engage in genuine conversation, learn with and from other like-minded individuals and groups.

**Strive** to transform ourselves by ridding ourselves of notions of “us and them” that see only the differences among peoples. The individual’s inner life shapes his or her social environment, and that environment, in turn, exerts a profound influence on one’s spiritual and psychological well-being.

**Make space** for others to be more involved in decision-making processes: identifying problems, devising solutions and approaches, enjoying benefits, and determining criteria for evaluation.

**Facilitate** the generation, application, and diffusion of knowledge at the local level. Rather than unquestioningly adopting “solutions” developed elsewhere, an emphasis on strengthening local capacity to generate, apply, and diffuse knowledge can help to put into place an ongoing process of action and reflection, one which encourages respect of the existing knowledge base of a community, raises the community’s confidence in its ability to devise, implement and assess solutions,

**Identify** the root causes of injustice such as prejudice and racism in order to empower populations to become agents of social transformation. Regardless of the advantages a population might enjoy, if it is unable to discern the drivers of social injustice and inequity, it will remain unable to rectify them.

### Additional Resources

Arbab, Farzam (1987). *The Process of Social Transformation*. In *Bahá'í Studies Publications*: Ottawa, ON. 9-20. Retrieved from [https://bahai-library.com/arbab\\_social\\_transformation](https://bahai-library.com/arbab_social_transformation)

Contributing to social transformation: Reflections on Bahá'í participation in discourses. (2018). Bahá'í World News Service. Retrieved from <https://news.bahai.org/story/1298/>

Empowerment as a Mechanism for Social Transformation (2012), Baha'i International Community presentation to Commission for Social Development. Retrieved from <https://www.bic.org/statements/empowerment-mechanism-social-transformation>

[Glimpses](#) - a video about how the Bahá'í community is putting this into practice

Letter from Universal House of Justice (30 December 2021). Retrieved from [https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20211230\\_001/20211230\\_001.xhtml](https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20211230_001/20211230_001.xhtml)

Transformation. Bahá'í quotes compiled by Susan Gammage. Retrieved 25 January 2022 from <http://bahaiquotes.com/subject/transformation>

Vreeland, Sonjel (2020). *The Three Protagonists of Social Change: The Individual, Institutions and the Community*. [blog] *Baha'i Life*. retrieved from <https://www.bahaiblog.net/2020/09/the-three-protagonists-of-social-change-the-individual-institutions-and-the-community/>