

# The Oneness and Wholeness of Human Relationships

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The Baha'i Faith upholds the unity of God, recognizes the unity of His Prophets, and inculcates the principle of the oneness and wholeness of the entire human race.<sup>1</sup>

The mission of Baha'u'llah is to bring about the "organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations."<sup>2</sup> This process will not occur without a great deal of social adjustment. Baha'u'llah Himself warned that His Revelation would "upset the world's equilibrium."<sup>3</sup> This phrase, said Shoghi Effendi, implies "an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced."<sup>4</sup>

One part of this organic change in the structure of society is the establishment of what Shoghi Effendi called the oneness and wholeness of human relationships. These relations are erected not only by the workings of government, through laws, treaties, declarations and covenants, but also by ordinary people restoring the primary and universal social institutions of marriage and family, and working to strengthen the ties of community life and reinforce the bonds of friendship. Too, they cannot be established independently of the consciousness of the oneness of humanity, for they are the outer social embodiment of this inner unifying consciousness.

Shoghi Effendi asserted that if the goal of world unity is to be reached humanity must "recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once and for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of life."<sup>5</sup> Since the Lesser Peace is to come before the end of this century, these relations must be established at this time in humanity's social evolution.

For the Baha'is of Japan, establishing the oneness and wholeness of human relationships is particularly important. The Universal House of Justice's 1986 Ridvan Message to Japan states that the Baha'is of Japan should be "in the forefront in paving the way to that oneness and wholeness of human relationships that will produce the conditions for peace." It may be surprising to hear that this task was given to Japan, which has a history of exclusionism, and still struggles with the assimilation of outsiders.

However we should not forget 'Abdu'l-Baha's promise that: "Japan, with...(another country)...will take the lead in the spiritual reawakening of the peoples and nations that the world will soon witness."<sup>6</sup> He also spoke of "the great international importance" of Japan and of the destined "vast service to mankind"<sup>7</sup> it would provide.

The Baha'i writings single out Japan to be a leader in global social transformation. This is a signal honor. However the leader needs to be lead. The leader for Japan could be its Baha'i community. I say this because while the rest of Japan struggles with the implications of making Japan a truly international society, the Baha'i community has been doing it for decades. The ideals which animate this community and the practical experience its members have acquired in managing cross-cultural dynamics in Feasts, LSA meetings, committees and teaching projects, gives them a distinct advantage over many other groups in this work. This community can, I feel, play a pivotal role in the social transformation of Japan.

I want to divide the following discussion into two parts. The first part will present a general theory of what the oneness and wholeness of human relationships looks like. The second part will discuss what the Baha'is of Japan can do to begin to transform traditional Japanese relations into a oneness and wholeness of human relationships.

Shoghi Effendi called the oneness and wholeness of human relationships "a fundamental principle of life." Hence they are something that both incarnate our species-being and allow us to express our true humanity. The oneness of human relationships, arising out of the urge of human beings to form groups, unifies individuals into a purposeful on-going tradition of collective social experience. The wholeness of human relations, stemming from the need to diversify to bring about the expression of the full range of human potentialities, allows full play to humanity's creative drive, humankind's sole hope of meeting novel situations successfully. We see these twin processes at work developing the world-wide Baha'i community.

Besides growth in the formal institutions of the Baha'i Administrative Order, a number of experiments in social organization, such as Social and Economic Development projects, are occurring on the local, national and international levels, within the global Baha'i community. Yet this diverse growth occurs within what the Universal House of Justice called "a single social organism, representative of the diversity of the human family, conducting its affairs through a system of commonly accepted consultative principles."<sup>8</sup> As I remarked, diversifying by experimenting within a social structure is one aspect of oneness and wholeness anywhere, on any level, at any time. The Baha'i community is but one example of this process. But there is more to the concept than this.

Historically, creating the oneness and wholeness of human relations marks the end of separate societies evolving more or less independently of each other, and the beginning of a global society advancing as one unit. The oneness and wholeness of human relations means that all human beings will be incorporated within a single set of social relationships, yet expression of the diversity of cultural influences will not be lost within this unity. This has not occurred before, since there has never before been a true world civilization. This aspect of the oneness and wholeness of human relationships means that as "human" relations the primary identity of every individual will be as a member of the human race and that all cultural, national, ethnic and racial identities will be subordinated to and derive their meaning from this. Only Baha'i institutions, being both world-wide and the same everywhere, exemplify at this time this aspect of the oneness and wholeness of human relationships. Accordingly, the Universal House of Justice writes of the Baha'i Feast:

The third and most important aspect of these relations is conspicuous by its absence in culture everywhere. Lack of oneness and wholeness in human relations is not just lack of unity within families and groups or between races, tribes, genders, and cultures locally or world-wide. Disunity exists because social relations do not include spiritual reality in the organization of society. Relations without spiritual reality can not nurture the whole human being. The wholeness of human relations must mean that the three worlds that people live in—the inner spiritual world of individual potentials and capacities; the collective human world of social interaction; and the natural world of the earth and body—are found in the relations themselves.<sup>9</sup>

The Baha'i Feast with its devotional, administrative and social parts fulfills these requirements, and the Local Spiritual Assembly's concern for the spiritual, social and material well-being of the members of its community likewise demonstrates this principle. Thus the Universal House of Justice wrote:

The World Order of Baha'u'llah encompasses all units of human society; integrates the spiritual, administrative and social processes of life; and canalizes human expression in its varied forms towards the construction of a new civilization.<sup>10</sup>

The Universal House of Justice also described the Local Spiritual Assembly as a "divinely ordained institution" that "operates at the first levels of human society and is the basic administrative unit of Baha'u'llah's World Order. It is concerned with individuals and families whom it must constantly encourage to unite in a distinctive Baha'i society..."<sup>11</sup>

Since the relationship between the individual and society is a reciprocal one, then entering into social institutions that embrace the spiritual, social and material worlds of human existence promises an enlargement of individual social responsibilities. That is, each individual must be concerned with his whole being and the whole being of others since his institutions embody the whole of human life. This ethical progress upsets the equilibrium of every existing society, for no society today gives the individual so much responsibility. Thus the Feast, the Universal House of Justice writes:

links the individual to the collective processes by which a society is built or restored....the Feast is an arena of democracy at the very root of society, where the Local Spiritual Assembly and the members of the community meet on common ground, where individuals are free to offer their gifts of thought, whether as new ideas or constructive criticism, to the building processes of an advancing civilization. Thus it can be seen that aside from its spiritual significance, the common institution of the people combines an array of elemental social disciplines which educate its participants in the essentials of responsible citizenship.<sup>12</sup>

Creating a oneness and wholeness of human relationships can not imply, therefore, that humanity should effect any simple modification of existing social structures. It means nothing less than that a new kind and totality of social relationships be created, a qualitative change that embodies a truly organic and universal structure of social life. It is a new form of community, at once both a renewal and a reconstruction of real civic society, that will revolutionize the whole of organized human life.

I want to note here, to summarize till now, that the three aspects of these relations described—diversifying through experimentation, establishing global social unity, and connecting the three worlds of human existence—though separate, are inseparable and interactive. The process is one of experimenting with spiritual principles to create stronger social unity.

So far, I've described the oneness and wholeness of human relationships and discussed Baha'i institutions as the pattern of them. Given that the Baha'i Order is the pattern and nucleus of the larger world order,<sup>13</sup> Baha'is should be moving all their social relations toward this structure. I want to look

next at the Baha'is of Japan, individually and collectively, as social change agents with a mandate to pave the way to the oneness and wholeness of human relationships.

The majority of Japanese are bound by history, culture and language within a web of mutual obligations that link every individual to every other. But this lattice of relationships has no meaning outside of Japan. All the elements—racial, linguistic, geographic and those of culture and social structure—that went into making what many Japanese mistakenly call a homogeneous society,<sup>14</sup> are exactly the same elements that ill-equip its people to be at ease in an international setting. These elements exclude foreigners, as is well-known. These same elements exclude minority groups within Japan from full participation within the culture. One might say that Japanese society maintains a oneness of social relations, but at the sacrifice of their wholeness. They are only for Japanese, but not all Japanese equally.

An illustration of this point is provided in the January 27, 1992 issue of *Time Magazine*. There a Japanese government official is quoted as stating that one of Japan's main problems is that its people "are not sensitive enough to the necessity of co-existing with other ethnic groups."<sup>15</sup>

This statement is true enough, but its real meaning lies in what is not said, namely, that ethnic groups, like the Ainu and Okinawans,<sup>16</sup> exist within Japan as second-class citizens mainly because of their ethnicity. It says that the only problem of relations is between Japanese and non-Japanese ethnic groups living inside or outside Japan, and completely neglects to mention problems such as the outcast status of the Burakumin people.<sup>17</sup> Either groups like the Okinawans, the Ainu and the Burakumin are not Japanese, in which case they should not have the civil rights that they do, or, if they are Japanese then the answer to the question, Who is a Japanese? includes a greater diversity of human types than traditional thinking admits.

The truth is, these minority groups are Japanese for some purposes, but not for others: Japanese in the abstract, but not so in the concrete: Japanese in relation to non-Japanese, but not Japanese to the majority. In this strange, shifting Alice-in-Wonderland world the existence of minority people is made to appear and disappear depending upon different official purposes and emotional contexts.

This is done by manipulating feelings of identity. For most Japanese, personal identity comes from physical and emotional identification with some group such as family, school, company, and the like. This creates a visceral feeling of homogeneity. But the homogeneity of all Japanese people and Japanese culture is a myth. All Japanese are not the same, whatever official thinking may say and attempt to create. Yet most Japanese believe this, or want to. This averaging mentality blurs the actual contours of the culture and, unwittingly, calls attention to the very differences it seeks to erase. Hence laws are enacted, starting with the Emancipation Edict 120<sup>18</sup> years ago, to eliminate all social differences, yet "integration education"<sup>19</sup> programs are set up which by definition must acknowledge differences and keep them alive.

Discrimination becomes both illegal and unavoidable, and is thus driven underground. Having defined some Japanese as outsiders in the culture, they cannot be accepted as real Japanese. They cannot be really assimilated except by broadening the definition of Japaneseness. But this would destroy the traditional identity built on homogeneity. Thus, on the one hand, the causes of the discrimination are left unexamined and unattended because they are rendered invisible and made unreal, and, on the other, a persistent negative emotional image of these same minority people remains because their very visibility makes everyone feel that they are not quite Japanese in some important way.

The lower levels of Ainu education and standard of living; the paternalism expressed toward Okinawans as a sub-culture within Japan that is perceived as not really Japanese; and the continuing cruel discrimination against the Burakumin are all perverse products of this crude style of thought that both defines minorities and defines them away. Likewise other festering problems, such as discrimination against Koreans, prejudice against immigrant laborers and day-workers, the second class status of women, the neglect of the homeless, the lack of sympathy for AIDS victims, continue because common thought and feeling cannot respond in a positive way to the special circumstances of these groups, circumstances that the culture's unwholesome desire for homogeneity itself produces.

Neither is the majority culture unaffected. Indeed, the demand to conform to uniformity creates an authoritarian pecking order among the majority which controls unrest by defining all protest as wrong and selfish. For example, wives are expected to give up self and family for the sake of husband's career or children's education and future job opportunities. Mothers send children off to examination hell, to study too much information and too little of self, thereby denying their children a proper exploration and expression of their individuality, which they could use to resist this soul-cramping anxiety to conform to the expected. Some sorry results of this bending of individuality to fit an artificial standard for thought, appearance, feeling and action, are that bullying is again on a steep rise, students are dropping out of school in droves, and drug use, alcohol consumption, suicide and divorce are increasing every year.

Minority groups are outsiders in the culture. Those among the majority denied a voice to vent their displeasure and initiate change are told to silently endure for the sake of harmony. These conditions will remain so long as the spiritual cause of social inequity has not been addressed, namely, the lack of a consciousness of the oneness of humanity, and so long as an irrational "blame the victim" mentality continues to place the responsibility for eliminating discrimination on the backs of the discriminated against. What can Baha'is do?

In my opinion Baha'is can do a great many things. The chief aim of our efforts must be to create a wholeness in Japanese culture. Hence, in relation to minority groups, Baha'is can forthrightly acknowledge all the influences that have shaped Japanese culture. They should know, too, the causes of inequality and steadfastly fight to right past wrongs. In the case of Ainu and Okinawans, Baha'is should acknowledge their traditions and ways of life as a real part of Japanese culture, and in the case of Burakumin, the Baha'is must admit that a terrible prejudice exists in many members of the dominant culture which is the responsibility of the holders of that prejudice to root out of themselves. Baha'is should speak out against prejudice when it is uttered in their presence.

Within Baha'i families and communities, fathers can give less of their lives to the company and give more to their families. Baha'is may promote real equality of opportunity and pay for women in their workplace, require schools to provide spiritual education for children, and provide it themselves. Families can show hospitality to outsiders, such as exchange students. Baha'is can bring a new spirit to voluntary organizations, and give a new direction and energy to the intermediate institutions, such as school and neighborhood groups, that shape so much of daily social life.

Baha'is should champion the idea that the sole remedy for social inequality is a compensating program of reverse discrimination. This principle is part of Baha'i community life. For example, Shoghi Effendi stated that in any Baha'i election where a tie exists between a member of a minority and a member

of the majority the position automatically goes to the minority.<sup>20</sup> The principle is deliberate and remedial, and makes a positive recognition of minority status. The principle assures that a variety of viewpoints are represented in consultation.

The purpose of these activities is to make differences visible and conscious, and thus to accelerate and direct the process of change toward more open and inclusive human relations. Differences should never be obliterated in the name of harmony. Understanding not eliminating differences is the first step toward harmonizing them.

Above all we must spread the transforming Word of God. For upon whatever level it is focused, the process of social change through spiritual action always follows the same course. This course was stated by the Universal House of Justice: "Souls must be transformed, communities thereby consolidated, new models of life thus attained. Transformation is the essential purpose of the Cause of Baha'u'llah."<sup>21</sup> Every Baha'i can work for the spiritualization of society by bringing spiritual reality into the organization of his personal and family life, through daily prayer, reading of the Holy Word, meditating on its meanings, and participating in Baha'i community life.

For the majority of Japanese to meet this crucial challenge to traditional Japanese identity will require that they rid themselves of those accumulated patterns of thought and feeling that reinforce ideals of homogeneity to which they have become habituated. But casting off these mental shackles is but the first step toward freeing new energies and latent qualities. Baha'is must lead the way.

In the July 4, 1988 issue of *Time Magazine* a Japanese diplomat is quoted as lamenting: "There must be some ideal that we have that would appeal to mankind."<sup>22</sup> The oneness and wholeness of human relationships could be the ideal he is looking for. Through the Baha'is modeling the oneness and wholeness of human relationships they will prove the efficacy of Baha'i principles; they will play an essential role in changing the organic structure of human society; and they will help produce the conditions for world peace.

- <sup>1</sup> Shoghi Effendi from his statement prepared for presentation to the United Nations Special Palestine Committee in 1947—quoted in The Baha'i World, 1992-1993, Baha'i World Center, Haifa. 1993. p. 294
- <sup>2</sup> Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, (Wilmette, Ill: Baha'i Publishing Trust. 1955.) p. 163
- <sup>3</sup> Gleanings from the Writing of Baha'u'llah, trans. by Shoghi Effendi. (Wilmette, Ill: Baha'i Publishing Trust 1976. 2nd rev. edition.) p. 136
- <sup>4</sup> Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah. p. 43
- <sup>5</sup> Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah. p. 202
- <sup>6</sup> Japan Will Turn Ablaze. Compiled by Barbara Sims. Tokyo: Baha'i Publishing Trust. Revised Edition. 1992. p. 73
- <sup>7</sup> Japan Will Turn Ablaze. p. 51
- <sup>8</sup> The Promise of World Peace: A Baha'i Statement on Peace by The Universal House of Justice. Wilmette, Ill: Baha'i Publishing Trust. 1985. p. 36
- <sup>9</sup> The Nineteen Day Feast: A Compilation of Extracts from the Baha'i Writings. Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice. London: Baha'i Publishing Trust. 1989. p. vi
- <sup>10</sup> The Nineteen Day Feast. p. v

- <sup>11</sup> Message from The Universal House of Justice to the Baha'is of the World, Naw-Ruz 1974, paragraph 13
- <sup>12</sup> The Nineteen Day Feast. p. vi
- <sup>13</sup> Shoghi Effendi claims that the Baha'i Administrative Order will "as its component parts, its organic institutions, begin to function with efficiency and vigor, assert its claim and demonstrate its capacity to be regarded not only as the nucleus but the very pattern of the New World Order destined to embrace in the fullness of time the whole of mankind." The World Order of Baha'u'llah. p. 144
- <sup>14</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a diplomatic report in the summer of 1985, "congratulated the nation on its economic successes and attributed them to its "racial homogeneity.... In a 1980 government report to the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations, Japan denied the existence of minorities in its society." Karel van Wolferen, The Enigma of Japanese Power, (London: Macmillan. 1989. p. 267-68)
- <sup>15</sup> The quote is from Nishihara, Masashi, Time Magazine, January 27. 1992. p. 15
- <sup>16</sup> Ainu are the indigenous people of the nation of Japan. They are of a different racial stock and cultural tradition than the majority "Yamato" Japanese. Native Okinawans are of Polynesian descent. Their kingdom was destroyed by Japanese invaders and Okinawa was made part of Japan in 1874.
- <sup>17</sup> Burakumin people are traditionally the lowest class of Japanese. Though of the same race, linguistic background, and culture as ordinary Japanese, they have suffered persecution for centuries because of their status derived originally from working with meat which made them ritually unclean. Though legally granted the full range of rights as other Japanese, social discrimination against them on the basis of status remains.
- <sup>18</sup> The Emancipation Edict formally abolished all discrimination but informally it remains.
- <sup>19</sup> In Japanese called *Doa Kyoiku*
- <sup>20</sup> "If any discrimination is at all to be tolerated, it should be discrimination not against, but rather in favor of the minority, be it racial or otherwise.... So great and vital is this principle that in such circumstances, as when an equal number of ballots have been cast in an election, or where qualifications for any office are balanced as between the various races, faiths and nationalities within the community, priority should unhesitatingly be accorded the party representing the minority, and this for no other reason except to stimulate and encourage it, and afford it an opportunity to further the interests of the community." Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice. (Wilmette, Ill: Baha'i Publishing Trust. 1971). p. 29-30
- <sup>21</sup> Promoting Entry by Troops: A Statement and Compilation prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice. (Australia: Baha'i Publications, 1994). p. 44
- <sup>22</sup> Time Magazine p. 7