

## **Huqúqu'lláh and Social Justice**

In the Most Holy Book Bahá'u'lláh stressed Huqúqu'lláh ranks, "in importance, immediately after the two great obligations of recognition of God and steadfastness in His Cause ..." <sup>1</sup> And 'Abdu'l-Baha explained that such teachings in the Most Holy Book are, "the remedy for a sick and suffering world, and a healing balm for the sores on the body of mankind." <sup>2</sup>

A wise storytelling slave authored the fable known today as the 'Race Between the Tortoise and the Hare': A tortoise challenged a boastful hare to a long-distance race. The hare laughed pompously, accepted what he considered an easy challenge, and sprinted full speed ahead. The tortoise remained calm, determined, and never gave up. Meanwhile, the over-confident hare took a nap halfway through the race. When the hare woke up, he discovered to his chagrin that the tortoise passed him while he was sleeping and beat him to the finish line!

Today we find ourselves in another long-distance race. But this one is real – not against a hare, but against social injustice. We have a similar choice regarding how to win this race. We can sprint ahead

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<sup>1</sup> Research Dept, The Universal House of Justice, The Development of the Institution for the Huqúqu'lláh, Mar 1987

<sup>2</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 61

like the hare, or travel with the steady focus and perseverance of the tortoise, slow at times, but with no less determination.

From prison 'Abdu'l-Bahá reminded us to "remain firm and constant", "not disturbed by ordeals", but to remain devoted to "spreading the light of guidance" with "perseverance."<sup>3</sup> He cautioned us to, "Speak thou no word of politics ... Rather, confine thine utterance to spreading the blissful tidings of the Kingdom of God ..."<sup>4</sup>

Shoghi Effendi likewise stressed, "We must build up our own Bahá'í system, and leave the faulty systems of the world to go their way. We cannot change them through becoming involved in them; on the contrary, they will destroy us."<sup>5</sup>

The Guardian told us to "assign no blame" ... and The Universal House of Justice clarified, "It is not for a Bahá'í, in offering social commentary, to vilify specific individuals, organizations, or governments or to make attacks on them."<sup>6</sup>

The Universal House of Justice clarified that even peaceful demonstrations "are not ... the most effective" means to bringing

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<sup>3</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas pp. 147-148

<sup>4</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 92

<sup>5</sup> Shoghi Effendi, Directives from the Guardian, p. 56

<sup>6</sup> From a Letter Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an Individual, 27 April 2017

about a better world..." ...but stressed that the "Plan's activities for sustained growth and community building lie at the heart of a broad scheme for social transformation."

More broadly, Bahá'u'lláh instructed us not to even "gaze" on past, let alone present ordeals, and warned that "expositions and discourses in explanation of such things cause the spirits to be chilled." Rather, He instructed us to, "magnify that which hath appeared ..." and to "speak forth in such wise as to set the hearts of true believers ablaze and cause their bodies to soar."<sup>7</sup>

More specific to the problem of racial prejudice, a letter written on behalf of The Universal House of Justice to an individual affirmed that, "Even if such a community were to focus the entirety of its resources on the problem of racial prejudice ... in the face of such a monumental social challenge the impact would be inconsequential."<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, that was not a call to defeatism. The Universal House of Justice continued that we must, "in neighborhoods and clusters, contribute ... to the process of learning and systematization which, as their numbers, knowledge, and influence grow, will transform their lives, families, and communities."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 142

<sup>8</sup> From a Letter Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an Individual, 10 April 2011

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

From the above can be inferred that the way forward is to focus on the new, not the old, and to build a new world order without expending our limited resources on the old-world, that is in decay.

In order to help spread the Bahá'í remedy for our own ills and the ills of the world, material resources are providentially required. Baha'u'llah wrote, "... He Who is the Eternal Truth - exalted be His glory - hath made the fulfillment of every undertaking on earth dependent on material means."

But Huqúq is not merely a source of funds. It ultimately benefits us individually, while fundamentally improving our world. 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote that Huqúqu'lláh causes us to "become firm and steadfast" and "draweth Divine increase" upon us.<sup>10</sup> The Universal House of Justice wrote that Huqúq provides the, "material resources essential for the advancement of the human race." ... that will "give rise to a transformation of society far beyond our present capacity to comprehend." ... and "will also contribute toward the solution of economic problems."<sup>11</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote that, "... the Huqúq offering is but a test applied by Him unto His servants and maidservants. Thus every true and

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<sup>10</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Huqúqu'lláh, Compilation, August 2009

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

sincere believer will offer Huqúq to be expended for the relief of the poor, the disabled, the needy, and the orphans, and for other vital needs of the Cause of God ..."<sup>12</sup>

Regarding Huqúqu'lláh in the Most Holy Book, Bahá'u'lláh forewarned, "Take heed, O people, lest ye deprive yourselves of so great a bounty."<sup>13</sup> Bahá'u'lláh wrote that not only are we individually blessed by observing Huqúqu'lláh, but even our offspring benefit: "There can be no doubt that whatsoever hath been revealed from the All-Glorious Pen, be it ordinances or prohibitions, conferreth benefits upon the believers themselves. For example, among the commandments is that of the Huqúqu'lláh. If the people attain the privilege of paying the Huqúq, the one true God—exalted be His glory—will of a certainty confer blessing upon them. Moreover, such payment will enable them and their offspring to benefit from their possessions."<sup>14</sup>

Huqúq is not for just the wealthy, but for every Bahá'í, rich or poor, formally educated or not, professionally accomplished or not. Unlike man-made efforts to temper wealth inequalities via taxes and other means, Huqúq is a deeply personal and spiritual offering – and is not a charity. In fact, it is not our money to give – it is literally the "Right of God".

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, 1992 Edition, p. 55

<sup>14</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, Huqúqu'lláh, Compilation, August 2009

The substance of `Abdu'l-Bahá's explanation in an interview on how to pay Huqúqu'lláh was simple: "After one has paid all his necessary expenses 19% of what is left is then taken by him and given as Huqúq."<sup>15</sup> Then it is finished, and not payable again unless you are blessed with increases above that sum. And if you have no funds to offer, you are still able to "observe" the law to the same spiritual degree as anyone with even great excesses of wealth. As Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "... if a person be graciously favoured to offer a pennyworth—nay, even less ... this would in His sight be preferable and superior to all the treasures of the earth."<sup>16</sup>

The following story underscores Huqúqu'lláh's spiritual significance regardless of amount. One time when Trustee of Huqúqu'lláh, Haji Amin, brought collected Huqúq offerings to `Abdu'l-Bahá in Acca from Persia, the Master said that something was missing. Though painstakingly honest, this deeply saddened Haji Amin. He thought maybe he spent too much of the sacred Huqúq on food during his long periodic journey from Persia (although he always ate the bare minimum to sustain himself). In tears, he went to his room and knelt down to pray forgiveness. As he knelt against the hard floor, something pressed against his knee. Reaching down under his coat that draped his knee, Haji Amin found one small coin trapped inside

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<sup>15</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, Huqúqu'lláh, Compilation, August 2009

<sup>16</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, Huqúqu'lláh, Compilation, August 2009

the coat's lining. Just prior to this journey to Acca, a very poor woman devotedly gave that single coin to Haji Amin as her Huqúq offering. But during the long trek, it slipped through a hole in the lining. Haji Amin hurried back to present the woman's coin to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The Master smiled warmly, kissed the coin, and said it was worth more than all the other donations because it had been given with the greatest sacrifice.<sup>17</sup> That unnamed woman may now be regarded as one of the early pioneers of social justice.

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<sup>17</sup> Faizi, Gloria, *Stories about Bahá'í Funds*, pp. 47-4