

THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION FROM THE BAHÁ'Í POINT OF VIEW

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Introduction

The Baha'i faith is a new, independent, universal religion. (Zaerpoor, 1981, p.12). Baha'i faith believes that God has revealed himself to humanity through different messengers to educate and teach humanity and uplift the soul of man and for the progress of the world and its people as a society. Messengers of God include Abraham, Krishna, Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Mohammad and Bahauallah, who were all teachers and all came from the same source, being different chapters of one religion. Baha'is also believes that Bahauallah is the latest of these messengers. The origin of the Baha'i faith is in Iran (Perkins & Hainsworth, 1980, p.12). Bahauallah, "Glory of God", the messenger of Baha'i faith was born in 1817 in Tehran, the capital of Iran. He proclaimed his message from Iran to the entire world. It was during Bahauallah's life time that his faith spread out to Ottoman Empire, Caucasus, Turkistan, India, Burma, Egypt, And Sudan (Hartz, 2009. p 13).

As we know India is a developing country and changing and growing very fast in different aspects of life, socially, economically and in culture and accordingly must adopt itself with changing circumstances. Education is an important factor that can basically move forward the society towards the new world order and a new civilization. Then, it is essential to refocus on education in each and every country that wants to develop, and play an important role in the new world.

On the other hand, the whole world is under the pressure of war, dissension, prejudice etc. It shows that the old system of education was not successful to settle down all this crisis and the world is in need of a new world system of education. The role of education is not just reacting to trends. Education has to be in lead and play a major role in societal events of the future. Education must be future oriented and not only as a medium for the transmission of the past but to create the future.

If on one hand we believe that all things start from education and education can and must create the future and on the other hand we agree that the world is not in a good situation these days, we reach to the point that the old system of education is not qualified and should be changed or modified for the new situation of the world and adopt itself with new needs of the world, a world that from one side is local and from the other side is global.

Education in Baha'i Faith

From Baha'i point of view education plays a great role in changing the world because it is believed that changing the world is due to changing the man and the man without education is

like a fruitless tree. The man is like a mine full of valuable stones that education alone can reveal all this priceless stones. Education in Baha'i point of view is more than just a medium for the transmission of the past but it has such a power to make the future, human being and society in such a way that has never existed before, based on the capacities that have not been revealed in human beings yet.

Then, education is an important means of shaping the socio-economic and cultural forces and determining the direction of growth based on the exigencies and requirements of the world. One role of education is to adopt the person with the needs of the outside world and on the other hand, it determines the actual needs of the children based on the capacities within each one of them and the future oriented ideal society emerging from these educated children. So it is very important to know what kind of future society a particular type of education shapes and what desirable characteristic of the individual will contribute to an ideal society.

Abdul-Baha (1990a, p. 213) says that civilization is the consequence of education and without it all nations remain savage. With education one nation can progress and become blissful and happy and absence of it leads to deterioration and fall.

Abdul-Baha (Abdu'l-Baha, 1957, p. 110) gives an example and compares China with Japan. He says that Today [1875] from the standpoint of population the greatest nation in the world is China. Their population should be the cause of their power but because of lack of education they are among the weak nations. On the other hand, Japan at first was under the protection of China, and now for some years has opened its eyes and adopted the techniques of contemporary progress and civilization and paid attention to science and industries which is of use to the public. As a result, the government got power and although its population is about one-tenth of China, they recently challenged the government of China.

In one perspective we can classify the role of education in two categories. While education is an ongoing process of improving knowledge and skills, it is also an exceptional means of building relationships among individuals, groups and nations and bringing about true civilizations. So education is effective in both individual and societal aspect of life as well. For example, in individual aspect, according to Bahauallah, knowledge when applied can largely eliminate fear. (Bahauallah et al, 1991 vol. I, p. 249) and in social aspect of life, Abdul-Baha says that true education will decrease the amount of crime (Bahauallah et al, 1991 vol. I, p. 262).

People without education don't have freedom. They are under the chains of prejudice and ignorance that limit their actions. (Bahauallah et al., 1997, p. 616) Independence from the other people or nations just comes from education. How can a nation be independent when its people are ignorant and blind? If you are blind you need someone to lead you and in this way you are dependent on him and you cannot investigate truth independently and must obey him otherwise he or she will not help you and put force on you. But when you are educated and skillful you have your own options, to be obedient or not, and you can think, feel and act freely and individually. Abdul-Baha (1957, P.111) says:

Observe carefully how education and the arts of civilization bring honor, prosperity, independence and freedom to a government and its people.

In another statement he (Abdul-Baha, 1978, p.129) also says:

Education is the indispensable foundation of all human excellence and alloweth man to work his way to the heights of abiding glory.

Abdul-Baha (1957, p.109) believes that prosperity and success is only achieved by education which is the main reason for the decline and fall of people. Abdul-Baha (1957, p.18) also believes that justice can be achieved when people are educated otherwise they don't know their rights and they cannot appeal for it. For example, if people see that the conduct of the local government is against their rights, they can take their case to higher courts. According to Universal House of Justice ignorance is the main reason for the fall and decline of peoples and perpetuation of prejudice. Nations can achieve success only if education is bestowed all its citizens (Bahauallah et al., 1997, p. 616).

From the above statements we conclude that democracy is possible wherever the people are educated. Democracy is not something from top to down but is from down to top. If people are educated they demand their rights and they can supervise their government. When people are educated they know what is wrong and right and how to apply it and they can demand it, but when they are ignorant and uneducated they cannot be a change maker but easily accept the government procedure and the community law. If the governments are thirsty of power and looking for their lusts and are making war, people and specially mothers that are educated have such a power to put pressure on them and proclaim that they want peace and not war. Bahauallah (1976, pp. 26-27) believes that education is a genuine treasure for man and the fundamental cause of joy, exaltation and happiness unto him.

Bahauallah also says that education can give the individual with a kind of wide knowledge and awareness which will result in wisdom. He says knowledge is like the eyes. The role of eyes in a body is to determine the routes. To be educated is like to have eyes that give you direction. As a person needs the eyes to find his or her way, in the same way the world needs wise and knowledgeable people. (Bahauallah et al., 1991 vol. I, p. 250)

Shoghi Effendi says that if the children are educated both spiritually and materially, in future when the spiritual values predominate in the world, those youths who are educated spiritually and materially will be true leaders of the future. (Bahauallah et al., 1991vol II, p. 438) but we should know that a future leader is different from the current politicians as the individual one who is educated spiritually tries to guide people on the basis of cooperation and love and not competition and dominance.

Although teaching the faith in Baha'i religion has a great status but when it reaches to the education of children, the second one has a priority. Shoghi Effendi in response to a person asking about priority of teaching the faith or education of children says, that, no matter how urgent and substantial the needs of the teaching the faith may be you should not neglect in any condition the education of your children, as your obligation towards them is not less sacred than towards the cause (Bahauallah et al., 1991, vol. I, p. 301).

Although it is said that education of children has a priority to teaching of the faith but from the other statements we come to know that from Baha'i point of view they are not considered as two different items. Education of children and teaching the faith are two sides of one coin because both have the same goal of developing the potential capacities of human being. In Baha'i point of view, if we educate the children, actually we are teaching the faith as Bahauallah (Bahauallah et

al.,1991vol. I, p. 262) says that education of children is considered as a safeguard of the faith. In another statement Bahauallah (Bahauallah et al., 1991vol. I, p. 246) says that the goal of every religion is to promote the status of the human being and education is the means to achieve this goal.

Bahauallah (Bahauallah et al., 1991vol. I, p. 276) says that one of the most important services that someone can undertake, and is considered as worship of God, is education of children and the more you persevere in this important duty, the more you will get the support of God. Abdul-Baha (Bahauallah et al., 1997, p.144-211) clearly says that education of children is a spiritual duty and it is seen as a service to blessed perfection. You cannot differentiate between serving the faith or Bahauallah and to serve the human being in the form of education of children and he considers it as inescapable commandments of the God. Education of children is also perceived not only as the worship of God but also the best way of it.

From the above statement we understand that education of children is a spiritual duty and due to that must be in harmony with religion. Both have the same goals and both lead to reality. Whenever they are in contrast to each other, it means that one of them is not on track. In Baha'i point of view, science and knowledge not only should be in harmony with religion but also they both serve to deepen understanding of the faith. (Bahauallah et al, 1991 vol. I, p. 299). Abdul-Baha (1978, p.110) believes that promotion of knowledge helps the promotion of the faith because both lead to reality and cannot be in contrast. By true knowledge people comprehend the true faith.

Abdul-Baha (1978, p.126) says that use of mind, learning, the expansion of consciousness, and insight into the realities of the universe and the hidden mysteries of Almighty God are as pillars for the support of the faith of God. The education of children is the best way of worshipping God. (Abdul-Baha,1978, p.126). Thus in Baha'i point of view, the religion and science are in full harmony with each other and whoever is expanding the borders of knowledge actually is consolidating the faith.

According to Shoghi Effendi view, education is more important than pilgrimage of the holy land. In response to an individual believer asking to take a trip to the holy land or pay the expense of a young man for education Shoghi Effendi believes that it is more important to keep helping the young man (Bahauallah et al.,1997, p. 505).

Another role of education is discovering the potentiality of human being. In Baha'i literature there are different metaphors to show the role of education in discovering the hidden capacity of man. Abdul-Baha (Bahauallah et al., 1991 vol. I, p. 247) considers man as steel whose lack of education will corrode him and compares him to a fruitless tree. In another metaphor Abdul-Baha (Bahauallah et al., 1991 vol. I, p. 247) says that the goal of the tree is having the fruit, the goal of the human is to reveal his potentialities as much as he can. If a child is not fruitful, it is better to be dead than alive. From the Baha'i perspective the goal of every individual, for living in this world, is to perfect material and spiritual aspect of his life. This can be attained by education.

Abdul-Baha says:

For the inner reality of man is a demarcation line between the shadow and the light, a place where the two seas meet; it is the lowest point on the arc of descent, and therefore it is

capable of gaining all the grades above. With education it can achieve all excellence; devoid of education it will stay on, at the lowest point of imperfection (Bahauallah et al., 1991 vol. I, p. 270).

It is believed that education determines the destiny of a child and as a result the destiny of a community depends on the education of every individual child. A particular type of children based on particular type of education will shape a particular kind of society. Education is as a means for development and progress of societies. According to Abdul-Baha, the main element to reach to a progressed civilization, which is based on unity of mankind, is spiritual virtues, and, ignorance is the root cause of wrongdoing. So without education there are no spiritual virtues and without virtues there is no progressed civilization (Bahauallah et al., 1991 vol. I. p. 263).

Abdul-Baha says that every child is potentially the light of the world and at the same times he can be the cause of its darkness and it depends on education (Bahauallah et al., 1991 vol. I., p. 271).

The other important feature of education is its influence in shaping personality of the individual. Education has its utmost influence in infancy and childhood. When the child gets older it is hard to change his habits. Abdul-Baha (Bahauallah et al., 1991 vol. I., p. 247) believes in critical period in every child's life, if it is lost, it is not changeable. Shoghi Effendi (Bahauallah et al., 1991 vol. I., p.298) says that whatever children learn in their early stage of life, it will leave its traces upon the whole life and becomes a part of their nature.

Summary

According to Baha'i faith education is the most important element for the betterment of the world. It is only through education which word can reach to its next stage development.

In short it can be said that:

1. Education is among the most important of acts.
2. Education is to worship God.
3. Education is more important than teaching the faith and pilgrimage of holy land.
4. Education is a safeguard of the faith.
5. Education bestows wisdom.
6. Education is the foundation of all excellence and development.
7. A man without education is like a fruitless tree.
8. Through education all capacities of human being are revealed.
9. Education is a means for making societies.
10. Education is the fundamental element of freedom and justice.
11. Education is fundamental cause of honor, prosperity, joy and happiness.

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