

The World We Want: Overcoming Barriers to Systematic Action

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Friends, the world we have is not the world we want. In the world we have, people are dying because of war - in Afghanistan, in the Congo, in the Middle East. There are 27 major armed conflicts in the world.^[1] People are dying in battle, they are dying when their homes are attacked. People are starving after they have fled their homes. This is not the world we want. In the world we have, people fear random violence - perpetrated by terrorists wielding machetes, or terrorists turning themselves and others into instruments of destruction, or terrorists spreading biological or chemical weapons. This is not the world we want. In the world we have, destitute families send children to do migrant labor in conditions little better than slavery, and women and children turn to prostitution to support themselves because they don't perceive any other means.^[2] We don't want this. The world we have is not the world we want. We want peace, and we want secure protection of human dignity, and we want justice. But how do we move from the world we have to the world we want?

This morning we are going to explore how we get to the world we want as a global community of human beings longing for a just and peaceful world order, and as a Bahá'í community seeking to create the means through which all humanity can be drawn towards Bahá'u'lláh. These two processes, humanity establishing the structures of peace and Bahá'ís establishing the structures of entry by troops, will move us from the world we have to the world we want. First, we are going to look at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements about how human institutions change. Then, we are going to examine how humanity is stuck, paralyzed, in the process of creating a peaceful world, and what is necessary for it to become unstuck. Finally, we'll apply our insights about humanity unleashing its capacity to create peace to our own challenge, in the Five Year Plan, of establishing a systematic process through which all of humanity can respond to Bahá'u'lláh. I have three goals for this talk. First, I want us to see the whole process, how we get from here, the world we have, to there, the world we want, how *The Promise of World Peace* explains how that will happen. Second, I want us to understand the transformation in human understanding of our capacity that this process involves, because it is our responsibility, as the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, to help human beings recognize the capacity it needs to make this change. Finally, I want us to be encouraged, because as we look at what this process is, and what it requires, we should recognize how thoroughly our endeavors in the Five Year Plan contribute to making the world we want.

In *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains the development of patterns of social order that are conducive to human well-being. He compares the growth of social institutions to the growth of human beings:
"The world of politics is like the world of man; he is seed at first, and then passes by degrees to the condition of embryo and foetus, acquiring a bone structure, being clothed

with flesh, taking on his own special form, ... the political world in the same way cannot instantaneously evolve from the nadir of defectiveness to the zenith of rightness and perfection. Rather, qualified individuals must strive by day and by night, using all those means which will conduce to progress, until the government and the people develop along every line from day to day and even from moment to moment."³

Change in society, like all change in the world of creation, is organic. It takes time. It unfolds, step by step, just as a human being begins with seed and egg, then gradually turns into an embryo and into a foetus and into a person. To grow up, for the human being, for the Bahá'í community, for the world, requires going through a series of successive stages of development.⁴

Organic growth is systematic. It happens according to a plan. The order that is inherent in each cell is recreated in the next cell. For the cell, systematic growth is inevitable, it is an inherent quality of the organism. But for human society, systematic growth is not automatic, because we have free will, that is what distinguishes us as human beings. Therefore, for us, systematic growth is an act of will. We can choose to grow in the way we organize human institutions, or we can choose not to grow. We can only move from the world we have to the world we want through a world-encompassing mobilization of human will, oriented to systematic change. This is the key, the understanding we must have to unlock our collective potential. To get the world we want, we have to comprehend the power of human will, and we have to systematically engage that power. This is one of the main ideas of this talk.

Another essential dimension of organic growth is that the whole organism is involved, it is all growing. There is not one part that withdraws while the rest is moving and changing. In the growth of human society, also, all the parts have to be involved. In the passage immediately following the one quoted above, 'Abdu'l-Bahá compares the wind, rain and sun that bring fertility in springtime to the forces in the development of society:

When, through the Divine bestowals, three things appear on earth, this world of dust will come alive, and stand forth wondrously adorned and full of grace. These are first, the fruitful winds of spring; second, the welling plenty of spring clouds; and third, the heat of the bright sun. When, out of the endless bounty of God, these three have been vouchsafed, then slowly, by His leave, dry trees and branches turn fresh and green again, and array themselves with many kinds of blossoms and fruits. It is the same when the pure intentions and the justice of the ruler, the wisdom and consummate skill and statecraft of the governing authorities, and the determination and unstinted efforts of the people, are all combined: then day by day the effects of the far-reaching reforms, of the pride and prosperity of government and people alike, will become clearly manifest."⁵

In 'Abdu'l-Bahá's analogy, the pure intentions and justice of rulers are like the wind that facilitates pollination, the wisdom and consummate skill and statecraft of governing authorities are like the rain that enables plants to germinate and expand, and

determination and unstinted efforts of people are like the sun that triggers photosynthesis. Growth requires all of them: it happens as a result of the interaction of the life-generating processes set in motion by each of these elements. We know how this happens in a Bahá'í context: the development of institutions stimulates individuals and communities, the spiritual awakening of individuals motivates communities and institutions, and all these interactions move the Faith forward. Each of us can think of experiences we have had which demonstrate these interactions.

We need this dynamic interaction, and we are lacking it, in the realm of humanity's progress towards peace. International relations and national affairs cannot be successfully carried out by rulers and elected officials and government administrators -- they are not enough. The determination and unstinted efforts of the people is also necessary, it is essential. And the part of people is not limited to choosing elected leaders and then affirming or protesting what leaders are doing. That we have lost an awareness of this capacity, that our practices of citizenship are limited to voting, being obedient (and, for some people, protesting and being disobedient) is one of the most profound barriers to getting the world we want.

The Universal House of Justice offers the Bahá'í community as a model in *The Promise of World Peace*, and I think one of the ways we are a model is in our understanding of politics, that is, the arena of engagement by participants in the shaping of the society they live in. What if our participation in the Bahá'í community consisted of voting for Assemblies once a year and then picketing their meetings or writing positive or negative letters to the newspaper? We would not have the vital, creative dynamic organism we have that is the Bahá'í community. People's actions, people's aspirations, their involvement in the construction of society make it what it is. Human societies, the world as a whole, is atrophied and incapable of action because our perceptions and practices of people's responsibility to society are so narrow and circumscribed. Changing these patterns will be critical to getting the world we want.

Let's look at the call to humanity made by the Universal House of Justice earlier this year, at the conclusion of the dedication of the Terraces on Mount Carmel. The House of Justice wrote, "Humanity's crying need will not be met by a struggle among competing ambitions or by protest against one or another of the countless wrong afflicting a desperate age. It calls, rather, for a fundamental change of consciousness, for a wholehearted embrace of Bahá'u'lláh's teaching that the time has come when each human being on earth must learn to accept responsibility for the welfare of the entire human family."^[6] Each human being on earth must learn to accept responsibility for the welfare of the entire human family. The House of Justice did not say, the most powerful nations on earth must learn to accept responsibility. It did not say, the wealthy, privileged people must learn to accept responsibility for the entire human family. Each human being on earth. If each human being on earth has to accept responsibility for the welfare of the entire human family, that means each human being on earth has the capacity to contribute to the welfare of the entire human family. What does this tell us about who has power in the world? How do we comprehend that power, and how do we release it? What will we be able to do when we have learned how to release it? The last passage

of *Secret of Divine Civilization* that I want us to look at in introducing the question of how societies develop is one that people who engaged in social and economic development use frequently, to remind ourselves of why development activities have to be an expression of a community's own aspirations. But when I consider the Universal House of Justice guidance about how we move out of a world that acquiesces in unbearable poverty and accommodates incessant armed conflict, I see another meaning here, another application of the truth of this statement.

Until the nerves and arteries of the nation stir into life, every measure that is attempted will prove vain; for the people are as the human body, and determination and the will to struggle are as the soul, and a soulless body does not move."^[7]

Determination and the will to struggle are the soul of the body of the world. Until that soul is aroused to exert its will towards justice and towards international relationships that are conducive to peace, nothing can happen, every measure will prove vain.

The Promise of World Peace, issued by the Universal House of Justice in 1985, is an assertion of human capacity for creating peace and an exploration of how that capacity is blocked in the present. According to the Universal House of Justice, what prevents humanity from achieving peace is "a paralysis of will" which "must be carefully examined and resolutely dealt with."^[8] Overcoming that paralysis and taking the necessary action is not just the responsibility of governments and rulers, "it is the choice before all who inhabit the earth."^[9]

In the analysis of the Universal House of Justice, the possibility of peace emerges out of a recognition that human beings have divinely-endowed capacity to transform circumstances and structures which appear fixed and intractable. Because we are who we are as human beings, peace is possible. Because we live inside structures we have created that cause us to forget who we are, a just and peaceful world order appears to be unattainable. We are caught in a trap of our delusions about ourselves, but we do not have to be. We'll look now at four of the habits of thought and patterns of action which keep us stuck in the world we have.

We're stuck in the way we understand the world. Our incapacity to truly accept responsibility for the whole human family rests on extremely well-developed habits of thought which divide the world into various categories of us and them. These divisions are fundamentally false, and we are responsible to God to transcend them, whether the us and them are black and white; traditional and modern; Moslem and Christian, Jew, or Hindu; rich and poor; indigenous and non-indigenous; urban and rural; developed and developing, or whatever else. Us and them thinking often has the effect of explaining away injustice. "They" don't have what we have because "they" don't know what we know, or "their" culture does not appreciate the moral values our culture appreciates, or "they" are naturally violent. But Bahá'u'lláh teaches us that there is no "they"; there is only us, all of us, the family of humanity. If there is no us and them, no one's suffering can be explained away and made inevitable. If we see that we have advantages other people do not have, we cannot assume they are natural, we have to ask where those

advantages and privileges came from. A recognition of the oneness of humankind is a recognition that the way that all of us have lived on this planet have created its problems and all of us are going to have to change the way we live to fix them. According to the House of Justice in *the Promise of World Peace*, "Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind."^[10] We're stuck in habits that don't work when we imagine that divisions among the people of the world make any kind of sense. The humble willingness to see the world differently than we now see it is an act of will.

We're also stuck because of our acquiescence in "the anarchy inherent in state sovereignty."^[11] Built on top of "us and them" thinking are structures which allow some peoples or groups a greater ability to assert themselves in world affairs than other peoples and groups. Imbalance among nations and peoples regarding who has the capacity to take actions and to be heard keeps the world in its current condition of instability. As long as decision-making power is not shared fairly, people are going to fight about it. The Universal House of Justice laid this out in a passage of *The Promise of World Peace* that has both predictive and prescriptive dimensions. It wrote, "Peoples are ingenious enough to invent yet other forms of warfare, and to use food, raw materials, finance, industrial power, ideology, and terrorism to subvert one another in an endless quest for supremacy and domination."^[12]

Think about how each of these forces have been used over the past twenty years, and who has used them, to subvert others and seek supremacy and domination. I'll read the whole paragraph.

"Banning nuclear weapons, prohibiting the use of poison gases, or outlawing germ warfare will not remove the root causes of war. However important such practical measures obviously are as elements of the peace process, they are in themselves too superficial to exert enduring influence. Peoples are ingenious enough to invent yet other forms of warfare, and to use food, raw materials, finance, industrial power, ideology, and terrorism to subvert one another in an endless quest for supremacy and dominion. Nor can the present massive dislocation in the affairs of humanity be resolved through the settlement of specific conflicts or disagreements among nations. A genuine universal framework must be adopted."^[13]

If we recognize all of these as mechanisms of domination, the problem looks different. The Universal House of Justice is showing us a whole lot of unruly actors, all seeking to dominate each other, using combinations of these means of warfare: food, raw materials (think oil), finance, industrial power, ideology, and terrorism. The asymmetrical nature of our current international conflict is not the essence of the problem, the essence of the problem is the endless quest for supremacy and domination, whatever the means that are being used.^[14] Now there is a theory in political science, the theory of the hegemon, that says the world works best when one player is more powerful than all the others. If one player is extremely strong and makes every other player do its bidding, that creates stability. That is not the best we can do. That is not the world we want. The resolution to an endless quest for supremacy and dominion is not for one

combatant to succeed in dominating all the others, it is for no one to seek to dominate anyone else. No domination. No seeking supremacy. No subversion of others. The solution to "the present massive dislocation in the affairs of humanity", is that "a genuine universal framework must be adopted." That is the world we want. To get there, the Universal House of Justice tells us, we will have to get over our reluctance to consider the possibility of sublimating national self-interests to the requirements of world order. We will have to muster the courage to face the far-reaching implications of establishing a united world authority.^[15] Moving beyond national sovereignty and establishing a united world authority won't just happen. Giving up the practice of domination of others won't just happen, these transitions require a massive act of will. Many people respond to the concept of a united world authority by saying it is impossible. It is not impossible, though. What would make it possible would be people wanting it. It is our destiny. It requires an act of will.

The profound imbalance regarding who has the ability to get their way in the world is connected to the profound imbalance between extreme wealth and extreme poverty that also characterizes our world. This is a third way we are stuck. In his statement to the Millennium Conference, Kofi Annan, the Secretary General of the United Nations, said "Extreme poverty is an affront to our common humanity. It also makes many other problems worse." I want us to think about what this phrase means. 20 percent of the people of the world have 86% of the wealth, which means 80 percent of the people have 14% of the wealth. Half of humanity lives on less than two dollars a day.^[16] What these extremes mean, in human terms, is that people who are farmers work harder, and they are hungrier. People who have educations and work at salaried jobs are losing their ability to sustain themselves with their work, and cannot find for their children the education they themselves received. This is true in Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Ghana, Kenya, some social strata in India. Living conditions and life possibilities for much of the world's population got worse during the long period of prosperity which we just experienced. And of course, that was true for many poor people in wealthy countries also.^[17]

In 1985 the Universal House of Justice wrote that "the inordinate disparity between rich and poor, a source of acute suffering, keeps the world in a state of instability, virtually on the brink of war."^[18] Extreme poverty is in itself violent, because it destroys and degrades peoples' lives, and it also causes violence. People experiencing desperate, apparently intractable poverty are susceptible to recruitment into armies that actually serve the interests of others. 'Abdu'l-Bahá' spoke about this in 1912, when he said that the beneficiaries of wars manipulated others to fight over imaginary divisions. He said the instigators of war "As a rule ... enjoyed luxuries in palaces, surrounded by conditions of ease and affluence, while armies of soldiers, civilians, and tillers of the soil fought and died at their command upon the field of battle, shedding their innocent blood for a delusion."^[19] In Rwanda, in Congo, in Sudan, in Sierra Leone, in Colombia, and elsewhere, some people benefit from violence carried out by people who get recruited to violence because they do not see any peaceful means of productive life. Racial hatred is easily cultivated in conditions of desperate poverty, and extreme poverty generates violence. To move beyond this dangerous situation, we human beings will

have to learn to think differently about productive economies, what their elements are, how they work, how we organize them. We do not have to live with destabilizing disparities between rich and poor. We could organize the world in such a way that everyone has enough. It could happen. What would make it happen is a lot of effort, the justice of rulers, the skill of governing authorities, and the determination and effort of people. What would make it happen is an act of will.

Finally, we are stuck in a world we do not want because the human race is acting in ignorance of human capacity. Because we "have succumbed to the view that aggression and conflict is intrinsic to human nature and therefore ineradicable" we accommodate ourselves to institutions that embody conflict and aggression.^[20] Our actions, and our failure to act, follow our ideas, and our ideas are tragically wrong. To get unstuck, we have to recognize that incorrigibly selfish and aggressive behavior is "a distortion of the human spirit".^[21]

In *The Promise of World Peace*, the Universal House of Justice traces out two causes of this stubborn ignorance of human reality. One is the failure of people committed to religion to comprehend true religion, and the other is abandonment of religion in favor of materialistic ideologies. To fathom the depths of humanity's ignorance in the present, I want to consider a concept which got some public attention after September 11 -- the so-called "clash of civilizations." This is the idea that a vibrant, enlightened, democratic Western civilization is in conflict with a traditional, backward, conservative and autocratic Islamic civilization. This is a false and harmful way of thinking. First of all, the world is a deeply coherent, integrated entity and all the parts are constantly interacting with all the other parts. So the static, traditional part and the vibrant, modern part have made each other, they are two connected parts of one whole. Furthermore, Islamic civilization at its peak was the closest humanity has yet come to a form of social organization that expresses the Will of God - this is the logic of Bahá'u'lláh's principle of Progressive Revelation. What I want to point out to you is that the clash of civilizations concept describes a clash of ignorances, a clash of alternative failures of human comprehension of reality. On the one hand is a form of extremism which is a perversion of Islam, on the other is a form of unbridled materialism which is a perversion of human capacity. Both are the result of turning away from true religion.

In *The Promise of World Peace*, the Universal House of Justice holds humanity, and especially religious leaders, accountable for our distortion and lack of comprehension of religion. "If, therefore, humanity has come to a point of paralyzing conflict it must look to itself, to its own negligence, to the siren voices to which it has listened, for the source of the misunderstandings and confusion perpetrated in the name of religion."^[22] Because we have failed to comprehend the true nature of religion, we have not benefitted from it. In 1985, the Universal House of Justice commented on the "dramatic" "resurgence of militant religious fanaticism", and gave us a way to understand it and speak about it, saying that each manifestation of religious extremism expresses the opposite of the spiritual victories of the religion it comes from. Since this is important, I am going to quote to you the whole paragraph:

"The resurgence of fanatical religious fervour occurring in many lands cannot be regarded as more than a dying convulsion. The very nature of the violent and disruptive phenomena associated with it testifies to the spiritual bankruptcy it represents. Indeed, one of the strangest and saddest features of the current outbreak of religious fanaticism is the extent to which, in each case, it is undermining not only the spiritual values which are conducive to the unity of mankind but also those unique moral victories won by the particular religion it purports to serve."^[23]

The crowning achievement of the religion of Jesus was love, but Christian extremists are defined by hate. The crowning achievement of the religion of Mohammed was tolerance, but Moslem extremists are defined by intolerance. This observation gives us a clear way to follow Shoghi Effendi's instructions to Bahá'ís in the West to defend Islam. To summarize: one aspect of the ignorance of human nature which impedes our capacity to move towards peace is our failure, even as followers of religions, to comprehend their true meaning.

The other source of our ignorance of human capacity is turning away from religion altogether. As the Universal House of Justice explains in *The Promise of World Peace*, "religion and religious institutions have, for many decades, been viewed by increasing numbers of people as irrelevant to the major concerns of the modern world. In its place they have turned either to the hedonistic pursuit of material satisfactions or the following of man-made ideologies." These ideologies, whatever their promises, have caused "the social and economic ills that blight every region of our world." They may claim to be uniquely powerful, but they all begin with a "glorification of material pursuits".^[24] According to Shoghi Effendi, the problem with capitalism (or its opposite, he adds between commas), is "the crass materialism, which lays excessive and ever-increasing emphasis on material well-being, forgetful of those things of the spirit on which alone a sure and stable foundation can be laid for human society."^[25] Excessive and increasing emphasis on material well-being makes us forgetful of those things of the spirit on which alone a sure and stable foundation can be laid for human society. It is important to recognize that the problem with our materialism is not just the effect on our own souls, that as individual souls we become distracted from our true nature. The problem is that our materialism causes us to fail to understand how to organize a coherent society, and we create social institutions which are embodiments of material desires, and we get further and further from what we are intended to be as individuals and as collections of individuals in societies. 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes this condition "For the helpless masses know nothing of the world, and while there is no doubt that they seek and long for their own happiness, yet ignorance like a heavy veil shuts them away from it."^[26]

In *The Promise of World Peace*, the Universal House of Justice identifies this lost, ignorant, disempowered condition as the most serious consequence of materialistic ideologies:

"Underlying all these outward afflictions is the spiritual damage reflected in the apathy that has gripped the mass of the peoples of all nations and by the extinction of hope in

the hearts of deprived and anguished millions."^[27]

We do not have to be shut out from our own happiness with a heavy veil of ignorance. We do not have to accept a false choice between ignorant, spiritually dead religious fanaticism and ignorant, spiritually dead materialism. We do not have to be deadened by materialism into believing our purpose in life is consumptions and our actions cannot make the world fundamentally better than it is. We could change. It would take time, it would take engagement on every level of society, it would take an act of will.

What do we do? We are stuck, holding onto concepts which divide humanity in a way that naturalizes inequality and injustice. We are stuck, committed to patterns of national sovereignty which embody grave imbalances in power and engender instability. We are stuck, embroiled in patterns of economic interaction which reproduce extremes of wealth and poverty and draw people towards conflict. We are stuck, paralyzed by our ignorance of the divine endowments of human reality.

The way forward for humanity, according to the Universal House of Justice, is a process of learning about our collective capacity through the instrumentality of consultation. The crowning stage, the peak of this process of learning, will be the convocation of the gathering called for by Bahá'u'lláh, who said: "The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace amongst men."^[28]

This gathering, which will mark the dawning of the maturity of the human race, will be characterized by consultation among the world's leaders. What I want to draw your attention to, however, is that consultation is also the means through which humanity mobilizes the will to want this gathering and to make it happen.

The Universal House of Justice explains *how* humanity arrives at this stage in a paragraph of *The Promise of World Peace* which discusses the necessity of mobilizing will, the power of consultation to cause that, and the spiritual energy that will be released by making the attempt.

The courage, the resolution, the pure motive, the selfless love of one people for another--all the spiritual and moral qualities required for effecting this momentous step towards peace are focused on the will to act." (PWP 3.10)

All the qualities required for this momentous step towards peace are focused on the will to act. According to the House of Justice, people can arouse the necessary volition for this process through consultation. Specifically, it says, And it is towards arousing the necessary volition that earnest consideration must be given to the reality of man, namely, his thought. To understand the relevance of this

potent reality is also to appreciate the social necessity of actualizing its unique value through candid, dispassionate and cordial consultation, and of acting upon the results of this process.^[29]

It points out that consultation "bestows greater awareness and transmutes conjecture into certitude."^[30] The will of peoples and nations to gather to create peace requires an awareness of human capacity, which consultation will develop. It requires a movement from conjecture -- that perhaps, maybe, it might be possible that we could stop being aggressive -- to certitude about our ability to create and live in a world characterized by peace. The Universal House of Justice then states that the *attempt* to achieve peace through the consultative action proposed by Bahá'u'lláh can release such a salutary, health-creating spirit among the peoples of the earth that no power could resist the final triumphal outcome. "The very attempt to achieve peace through the consultative action he proposed can release such a salutary spirit among the peoples of the earth that no power could resist the final, triumphal outcome."^[31] Humanity will achieve this through action, we will mobilize the will to act through candid, dispassionate, and cordial consultation, followed by action on the results of the consultation, and *humanity's effort to do this will release the spiritual force necessary for its accomplishment.*

To me, the assurance that making the attempt to create peace through consultative action will lead to peace explains why the responsibility rests with every person on the planet, and it explains why it is essential that each human being on earth must learn to accept responsibility for the welfare of the entire human family.

"Whether peace is to be reached only after unimaginable horrors precipitated by humanity's stubborn clinging to old patterns of behaviour, or is to be embraced now by an act of consultative will, is the choice before all who inhabit the earth."^[32]

All human beings are responsible for engaging in consultation that leads to a growing awareness of humanity's capacity to create peace, for engaging in consultation that mobilizes the will of more and more people to long for and ask for a gathering of rulers to set the terms of world order. Let's keep in mind that each of the ways that humanity is stuck involves a failure of our comprehension of ourselves: the paralysis of our collective will emerges from our collective lack of understanding of human capacity, which is held in place by the materialistic ideologies and structures that surround us. "It is here that the ground must be cleared for the building of a new world fit for our descendants."^[33] Our inability to let go of a destructive attachment to national sovereignty is partly a result of "the incapacity of largely ignorant and subjugated masses to articulate their desire for a new order in which they can live in peace, harmony and prosperity with all humanity."^[34] When people participate in a consultative process of learning, we reverse the spiritual damage caused by materialism that has resulted in apathy, and "the extinction of hope in the hearts of deprived and anguished millions."^[35] Through systematic learning and consultation, we, the human race, can overcome our ignorance, and our subjugation to materialism and oppression, and learn to articulate our desire for a new order.

We will get from where we are, which is stuck, to that place, which is energized and cured of the illnesses the sick body of the world now has, through a process that has the characteristics of growth identified by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It will happen gradually, through a process that grows more complex in stages. It will require the pure intentions and justice of rulers, the consummate skill and statecraft of governing authorities, and the determination and unstinted efforts of the people. We are already in the middle of this process, actually. A will to world order enabled the nations to create the League of Nations and then the United Nations. UN agencies have developed habits and patterns of cooperative international action. In the year 2000, the world's heads of state, and also representatives of over 1,000 non-governmental organizations and other civil society organizations gathered "to build a common vision" and to reiterate a commitment to create just and peaceful world.^[36] The process is unfolding, even though more has to happen.

Our responsibility is the determination and unstinted effort of the people part. This is the task of all of humanity, it is not the specific responsibility of the Bahá'í community, although Bahá'í communities are clearly able to facilitate it. In 1987, writing through its Secretariat, the Universal House of Justice explained that Bahá'í communities contribute to the transitions envisioned in *The Promise of World Peace* by "engaging people from all walks of life in discussions on peace" which imbue populations with hope and a sense of personal commitment.^[37] To get to the world we want, humanity has to overcome its ignorance of human reality, and its stubborn clinging to old patterns. We do this through consultation, which bestows awareness and mobilizes our will to change. The process is profound, the consequences are momentous, but the steps are simple. Getting the world we want requires the determination of the people. It requires an act of will.

Now, in conclusion, let us consider the process of creating systematic structures which enable the Bahá'í community to draw all of humanity into interaction with Bahá'u'lláh. The goal of the Five Year Plan is advancing the process of entry by troops.^[38] Where Bahá'í communities are sufficiently developed, this will involve programs that build the capacity of individuals, institutions, and communities, to promote sustainable growth. The result of our efforts should be that more and more people are attracted to the Faith, embrace it, and become involved in carrying the work forward. "Vast numbers among the peoples of the world are ready, indeed yearn, for the bounties that Bahá'u'lláh alone can bestow upon them once they have committed themselves to building the new society He has envisioned."^[39]

What kinds of barriers might we face in these endeavors? It is possible that we will encounter the barrier of being attached to habits of Bahá'í community life that are older and more haphazard. Just as people may find, as they contemplate the forms of a world authority, that national sovereignty is completely beloved to them, we may find ourselves quite, quite attached to the way we have always done things in the past. We may not be convinced of the value of process, the necessity of planning and the virtue of systematic action.^[40] Or, we may believe in them, but find them too new and too difficult to carry out.

We may also face the barrier of not believing we have the capacity to successfully develop a process that leads to entry by troops. We may be quite convinced that we don't have the capacity to create structures that step by step, region by region, "usher to the banquet table of the Lord of Hosts the souls of all that hunger after truth."^[41] We may like it as a concept, the way many people approve a world peace as a concept, but not recognize in ourselves any capacity to make it happen.

What can we do to overcome these barriers? I think we need to understand the organic character of this process. It has many, many stages, and we will be developing skills along the way. We do not need to be concerned that some future task will overwhelm us, because we are not there yet. Because this is an organic growth process, being involved is critical for our own spiritual health, and for the health of others. Every part is contributing to every other part. We may not perceive the value of our own contributions, but others will depend upon it. Since these are human institutions that are developing, not cells, they come into being through our intention, through an act of will.

Also, we need to recognize and pay attention to the power of thought, to the consequences of consultation. When we consult, we will develop awareness. Our understanding will mature. Our capacity will be refined. A powerful new feature of the Five Year Plan is the call by the Universal House of Justice that the friends in a region consult on the progress of the plan every few months. These consultations will be a shining light which, in a dark world, leads the way and guides.^[42] Through consultation, we will become aware of our capacity to create the patterns of action and habits of thought that will make large-scale, systematic growth a reality.

This is the way we move from the world we have to the world we want. It will not just unfold because it is a good idea, it will happen because we deliberately, systematically, develop our capacities and our structures that develop capacities. Through study circles, through children's classes, through our devotional meetings. Do you see how every effort we make towards the goal of the Five Year Plan is also advancing the process through which humanity mobilizes the will to create peace? Study circles create awareness of human reality, they develop the skills of articulate understanding that humanity needs. So do children's classes. Devotional gatherings offered to whole communities are a way of rehabilitating people's understanding of the true nature of religion.

The Bahá'í communities' confidence in humanities capacity to create peace, and our vision of how it will happen, will help to strengthen the vision, understanding, commitment of people in the towns and cities we live in. Knowing who we are, knowing what God wants for us, knowing how to draw people into the endeavour of fulfilling Bahá'u'lláh's intentions, allows us to take the actions that make the world we have into the world we want. The new world order that will soon be spread out, is not a carpet, that the Hand of God rolls out. It is a complex, tightly woven pattern of human interactions, and we are the material that new world order, that knots it together. We

make it happen through our pure intentions, through our efforts, through our will.

I want to end by returning to the *Promise of World Peace* instructions for how humanity can achieve its destiny by calling a meeting of the rulers of the world to establish peace. The Universal House of Justice wrote, "the courage, the resolution, the pure motive, the selfless love of one people for another -- all the spiritual and moral qualities required for effecting this momentous step towards peace are focused on the will to act. The same thing is true for the Five Year Plan: the courage, the resolution, the pure motive, the selfless love of one people for another -- all are focused on our will to act.

Notes:

- [1] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. A major armed conflict is one in which 1,000 people have died in one year.
- [2] "Child labour rooted in Africa's poverty: Campaigns launched against traffickers and abusive work", *Africa Recovery*: October 2001, 14.
- [3] Abdu'l-Bahá *Secret of Divine Civilization*, pp. 107-108.
- [4] In the Bahá'í community, we take note of our acquisition of new skills and capacities in our transition from one epoch to the next. In the establishment of peace, also, "requires several stages in the adjustment of national political attitudes, which now verge on anarchy in the absence of clearly defined laws or universally accepted and enforceable principles regulating the relationships between nations." (3.6)
- [5] *Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 108.
- [6] The Universal House of Justice, 24 May 2001, To the Believers Gathered for the Events Marking the Completion of the Projects on Mount Carmel.
- [7] Abdu'l Bahá, *Secret of Divine Civilization*, 111-112.
- [8] The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, Section 2, paragraph 2. All citations to this document indicate section followed by paragraph number within the section.
- [9] *Promise*, Intro:2.
- [10] *Promise*, 3:3.
- [11] *Promise*, 4.2.
- [12] *Promise*, 2:1.
- [13] Ibid.
- [14] "Asymmetrical conflict" means that parties to a conflict are not fighting in the same way -- some have massive amounts of military hardware, and other parties do not, so they use other means.
- [15] *Promise*, 2:2.
- [16] Kofi Annan, "We, the Peoples: Statement for the Millennium Forum", paragraph 53, www.un.org.
- [17] For example, as an economy booms and some people's high wages push up costs like rent, people working at low wages in the service economy have drastically less expendable income, because their rents become a much higher proportion of their income. The wave of other people's prosperity made the poor

poorer, in real terms.

[18] *Promise*, 2:6.

[19] *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 354.

[20] *Promise*, Intro:6.

[21] *Promise*, Intro:8.

[22] *Promise*, 1:4.

[23] *Promise*, 1:7.

[24] *Promise*, 1:8. 1:9, 1:11.

[25] Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, 124.

[26] Abdu'l Bahá, *Secret of Divine Civilization* 11.

[27] *Promise*, 1:9.

[28] *Promise*, 3:9.

[29] *Promise*, 3:10.

[30] Furthermore, "Bahá'u'lláh insistently drew attention to the virtues and indispensability of consultation for ordering human affairs." *Promise*, 3:10.

[31] Ibid.

[32] *Promise*, Intro:2.

[33] *Promise*, 1:11.

[34] *Promise*, 2:2.

[35] *Promise*, 1:9.

[36] "we the peoples...Millennium Forum, 22-26 May 2000, Declaration and Agenda for Action : Strengthening the United Nations for the 21st Century. (UN:New York, 2000).

[37] Universal House of Justice, through its Secretariat, 17 June 1987, seen at <http://bahai-library.com/uwj/peace.activities.html>.

[38] Universal House of Justice to the Counsellors, 9/1/2001, paragraph 3.

[39] Universal House of Justice, 9/1/2001, paragraph 18.

[40] Universal House of Justice, to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 2001, paragraph 1.

[41] Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2001, paragraph 12

[42] Universal House of Justice, 9/1/2001, paragraphs 14,15,17.

https://bahai-library.com/hanson_world_we_want