

Entertainment, Children and the Light of Justice

Quddús George, Aug 2022 v1.0.2

All things organic have their stage of maturity. In the life of a tree the stage of maturity is the time of its giving fruit. In the collective life of humanity our maturity is the realization of the oneness of mankind and a global divine civilization.

The life of the individual also has its time of maturity and its period of fruit giving and harvest. That maturity is the period of youth and adulthood, when the inner and outer powers of a person are perfected and can benefit mankind.

To understand the maturity of the individual can best be done in the light of a particular vision for the nature of the individual. No doubt the most stunning and potent vision that we have access to is the one revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. This vision is indeed so dazzling that our appreciation for it can only grow over time.

Also we can consider maturity in light of our time in history and the forces now operating in society. At this special time in history, when the divine bounties have poured forth with unmatched generosity, and human knowledge has expanded remarkably, the responsibilities associated with maturity are greater than during any previous age.

We know that the future advancement of the training institute, itself a potent means for building a united and just society¹, is the sacred charge of youth.² We have seen how each generation has a unique opportunity to contribute its share to the fortunes of mankind.³ Fundamental to our view of these responsibilities is the conviction that, “All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.”⁴ The main concern of the mature individual we are considering must be to “rescue the fallen from the slough of impending extinction”.⁵

Consider these delicate and weighty responsibilities. Think also of the widespread tumult that is increasing daily in its intensity. We see everywhere that, “...the world is becoming increasingly ungovernable...”⁶, community ties are weakening, groups of people are becoming extremely polarized, extremes of wealth and poverty persist, racial divisions have become more subtle and intractable, wars continue, political corruption is commonplace and the Universal House of Justice observed that, “There is a mounting realization on the part of the world’s people that the decades ahead are set to bring with them challenges among the most daunting that the human family has ever had to face.”⁷

Now, considering these things: Could it be said that the habits and patterns of the past ages are sufficient to the position the individual is now called to and the circumstance in which he is found? Could it be said that any amount of passivity and repose would meet the pressing demands necessarily laid on those who must be engaged in the rescue of the fallen? Would trained self interest, long extended childhood, the lens competition and seeking to assert oneself over others, or anything less than a trained mind, a firm character manifesting clearly the signs of God stand up to the challenge of the day?

As the light of religion has been dying out in every land⁸ materialism takes a firm hold on the people of the world. Materialism finds its way into every culture, and over time even those with the highest ideals are liable to unwittingly adopt its way of seeing things. The House points out that children absorb these norms even when very young.⁹

Every day, all around us entertainment and amusement is sought out with intense appetite.¹⁰ At the same time, here we are in these most difficult times and our neighbors are suffering intensely. Those close to our own door and those a few doors down! There seems to be a relationship between the two, it is in the constant indulgence in entertainment that the space for indifference to the suffering of others can grow. The urgent desire to act that is both a much needed response and characteristic of maturity is quelled. Will a child whose main occupation is their own amusement somehow suddenly, upon reaching a certain age, become able to make their primary concern the rescue of their fallen neighbors from the slough of extinction?

We know that play and games are useful and essential parts of the education of children. They create an opportunity to practice those ways and attitudes which must later distinguish them in adulthood, a trained mind, high endeavor, a desire to solve problems. There must then be a correspondence between that play and the realities of maturity. The games and play of childhood cannot demand entirely different attitudes, priorities, thoughts, and hopes to the requirements of maturity. In this area too it is important to recognize that children “derive great joy from the serious pursuit of understanding.”¹¹ We must not trivialize their time or foster habits of mind that disservice them as they continue to grow.

The Manifestations of God, guide humanity and protect those who are receptive recipients from becoming the playthings of the ignorant. Meanwhile with both astounding and increasing efficiency passivity is being fostered by current social forces. From the very earliest years the appetite for entertainment is being cultivated. This giving rise to, the House tells us, entire “generations willing to be led by whoever proves skilful at appealing to superficial emotions.”¹²

Meanwhile vast segments of the economy and many industries eagerly pose themselves to lead young people and invest heavy resources to that end.

Calling us to excellence, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has said, “rest ye not, seek ye no composure, attach not yourselves to the luxuries of this ephemeral world, free yourselves from every attachment, and strive with heart and soul to become fully established in the Kingdom of God. Gain ye the heavenly treasures. Day by day become ye more illumined. Draw ye nearer and nearer unto the threshold of oneness. Become ye the manifestors of spiritual favors and the dawning-places of infinite lights!”¹³ Hasten, hasten we are told again and again, be enkindled, uplift the downtrodden, step into the field of sacrifice, think not of ourselves. In the midst of enervating materialism, by clinging firmly to the loving guidance of Gods Messengers we can find a means for protecting the harvest, and the realization of the full powers of the maturity of the children. And we all long for it.

To do so we will need the faculty of Justice, we must illumine our affairs with the light of truth, and be fair minded. We must continually weigh our ways of seeing the world against God's Revelation with a rational and scientific mind, and not the measure and practices common amongst our people.

There was a practice where the feet of women were broken and bound tightly to be very small. This was of course tremendously painful, and caused a great hinderance to walking as well as lifelong handicaps. However, the practice not only persisted for a great many centuries, but also grew to tremendous prominence so that at one point half of all women in the country had their feet bound from childhood. The activity is said to have become a source of pride to the whole family including the women who suffered so greatly. Now any fair minded observer would readily recognize the great harm and damage inherent in this custom. What attachments prevented family after family, individual after individual from shunning such hurtful practices? Was it to the norms of society? Nostalgia felt for tradition? Unwittingly being swept up by social forces? Most importantly, when it comes to our own habits and practices how can we go about examining them with the light of justice, the same light of justice that would free a people from foot binding, and not allow ourselves to become so attached that we are blinded to reality.

If indeed mankind is one, are we not binding our children, so to speak, and hindering their journey down a path of service when we teach them the ways of competition? If they have practiced so frequently asserting themselves over others how much will they struggle to create an environment of unity, or to participate humbly in the collective investigation of truth in consultation?

Are we not, in a way, binding their feet to be easily captured, when we, in the name of entertainment or fun, invite them into a norm of games and play which center around the elements of gambling and psychological conditioning?

Are we not binding their feet when we welcome them in to a culture of consumption and self indulgence that will prevent the appropriate urgency and compassion from springing up in their hearts at the suffering of others? When we invite them to consider continually their own wants?

Are we not still binding their feet, when we engage with them only at the surface level, when we trivialize our interactions, oversimplifying our both language and the importance of the subjects at the heart of our conversations. When we fail to accompany them to dig the roots of their understanding deeply and widely into the soil of reality so that they are not swept away by the winds and storms that are everywhere raging and will surely intensify in the coming years?

What is meant is that we should weigh our interactions with children, and strive with detachment from norms, comfort and traditions, to remove those elements which interfere with their development toward maturity, and their being of benefit to mankind. We should look at our practices fairly, weigh them based on their qualities and elements.

Fellowship and association, love and joy must bind the hearts together. Just about every person has experienced the tremendous happiness that radiates to those around when the heart of a child is delighted. But we must also forsake imitation. Our interactions blossom if endowed with meaning, and purpose, and when they are distinguished by a clear and compassionate understanding of the conditions and ordeals facing humanity and our neighbors. They must be illumined by the light of divine teachings, heavenly standards, the guiding lights of truth, knowledge, and Justice.

In this way when the rain comes in great storms these most precious trees, far from being weak and uprooted, will become fresh and verdant, and we will see the harvest and witness the evidences and gifts of the kingdom. Baha'u'llah tells us in such moving Words: "Would that ye had the power to perceive the things your Lord, the All-Merciful, doth see—things that attest the excellence of your rank, that bear witness to the greatness of your worth, that proclaim the sublimity of your station! God grant that your desires and unmortified passions may not hinder you from that which hath been ordained for you."¹⁴

¹ In short, the institute is a potent means for the society-building power of the Faith to find release.

(30 December 2021 – To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

www.bahai.org/r/758524499

² “Institutes know well that releasing the potential possessed by young people is, for them, a sacred charge; we now ask that Bahá’í youth view the future development of the institute in the very same light”

(30 December 2021 – To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

www.bahai.org/r/758524501

³ Thus began a pattern in which every generation of youth, drawing inspiration from the same divine impulse to cast the world anew, has seized the opportunity to contribute to the latest stage in the unfolding process that is to transform the life of humankind. It is a pattern that has suffered no interruption from the time of the Báb to this present hour.

(1 July 2013 – To the participants in the forthcoming 114 youth conferences throughout the world)

www.bahai.org/r/400573548

⁴ (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh)

www.bahai.org/r/994085186

⁵ (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh)

www.bahai.org/r/741461337

⁶ (28 December 2010 – To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

www.bahai.org/r/032125161

⁷ (25 November 2020 – To the Bahá’ís of the World)

www.bahai.org/r/300076434

“The face of the world,” Bahá’u’lláh laments, “hath altered. The way of God and the religion of God have ceased to be of any worth in the eyes of men.” “The vitality of men’s belief in God,” He also has written, “is dying out in every land.... The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society.” “Religion,” He affirms, “is verily the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world, and of tranquility amongst its peoples.... The greater the decline of religion, the more grievous the waywardness of the ungodly. This cannot but lead in the end to chaos and confusion.”

(The Promised Day Is Come)

www.bahai.org/r/703829286

⁹The forces of materialism promote a quite contrary line of thinking: that happiness comes from constant acquisition, that the more one has the better, that worry for the environment is for another day. These seductive messages fuel an increasingly entrenched sense of personal entitlement, which uses the language of justice and rights to disguise self-interest. Indifference to the hardship experienced by others becomes commonplace while entertainment and distracting amusements are voraciously consumed. The enervating influence of materialism seeps into every culture, and all Bahá'ís recognize that, unless they strive to remain conscious of its effects, they may to one degree or another unwittingly adopt its ways of seeing the world. Parents must be acutely aware that, even when very young, children absorb the norms of their surroundings....

(1 March 2017 – To the Bahá'ís of the World)

www.bahai.org/r/963073955

¹⁰ *ibid.*

Abbreviation of *ibidem*, in the same place. Indicates a reference to the same source as the previous one.

¹¹ Education is a vast field, and educational theories abound. Surely many have considerable merit, but it should be remembered that none is free of assumptions about the nature of the human being and society. An educational process should, for example, create in a child awareness of his or her potentialities, but the glorification of self has to be scrupulously avoided. So often in the name of building confidence the ego is bolstered. Similarly, play has its place in the education of the young. Children and junior youth, however, have proven time and again their capacity to engage in discussions on abstract subjects, undertaken at a level appropriate to their age, and derive great joy from the serious pursuit of understanding. An educational process that dilutes content in a mesmerizing sea of entertainment does them no service.

(Social Action)

www.bahai.org/r/860544643

¹² A desire to be entertained is nurtured from childhood, with increasing efficiency, cultivating generations willing to be led by whoever proves skilful at appealing to superficial emotions. Even in many educational systems students are treated as though they were receptacles designed to receive information.

(Riḍván 2010 – To the Bahá'ís of the World)

www.bahai.org/r/432258610

¹³ (Tablets of the Divine Plan)

www.bahai.org/r/672337715

¹⁴ (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh)

www.bahai.org/r/741461337