



What Does the “Oneness of Mankind” Really Mean?

Badi Shams

The views expressed in our content reflect individual perspectives and do not represent the official views of the Baha'i Faith.

I have always thought that I understood the significance of the oneness of humanity as our ultimate goal, since to me the world's survival depends on it.

Moreover, as a Baha'i, I grew up hearing about that central Baha'i principle all the time, so the concept was imprinted on my psyche early in life.

Since I was interested and thought that I had learned the meaning and implication of the oneness of humanity, I began to read more and more of the writers, poets, philosophers and great thinkers who talked about this concept. I slowly realized, though, that their ideas often took the hollow form of a slogan or a cliché. They said and wrote very inspiring things about global unity, no doubt, but lacked any practical suggestion or plan for how to achieve it.

Recently, as I was reading about the nature of man and his purpose in the Baha'i writings, I realized there is more to this concept that I had imagined. After those spiritual readings, I began to understand that the Creator made our Earth for human beings, and thus gave us our ultimate destiny—to achieve the unity of humankind, establishing the kingdom of God on Earth. We are meant to live a life that God has desired us to live—to nurture our spiritual nature and live as spiritual beings, united in the way He intended us to ultimately live:

The successive Founders of all past Religions Who, from time immemorial, have shed, with ever-increasing intensity, the splendor of one common Revelation at the various stages which have marked the advance of mankind towards maturity may thus, in a sense, be regarded as preliminary Manifestations, anticipating and paving the way for the advent of that Day of Days when the whole earth will have fructified, and the tree of humanity will have yielded its destined fruit. – Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 166.

Can you believe that from the inception of the universe, all these billions of years, this goal has driven our destiny?

After that realization, I tried to examine with new insight the implications of this discovery, and have attempted to understand what I missed all these years, and need to relearn. I came across this quotation from the Baha'i teachings that enabled me to look at the details of God's plan. It clearly pinpoints the areas that we have to work on to get to our ultimate goal:

Let there be no mistake. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind—the pivot round which all the teachings of Baha'u'llah revolve—is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations. Its implications are deeper, its claims greater than any which the Prophets of old were allowed to advance. Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. It does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence. It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced ... It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world—a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units. – Ibid., pp. 42-43.

There is no doubt in my mind that the unity of humankind is inevitable, but the question of how and where the changes have to happen to achieve it has yet to be answered. To create a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life there must be a fundamental transformation in all areas of human life.

You may ask how it can be done. I have simplified the whole concept for me, and as I understand it the practical way of doing—or at least the first step in its achievement—is to introduce spirituality and humanity into every aspect of life. For me there are two ways of working towards this goal: first, internally, which means working to learn more, meditate more, purifying my life and becoming more spiritual each day. Second, externally, which means offering whatever I have learned or gained to contribute in all my life's activities to the advancement of civilization. In this small, individual way I try to play my part.

We all have a part to play.

Our present economic system, as just one example, is sick and is dying. It cannot meet the needs of humanity. The gap between rich and poor grows wider and wider, which has increased the suffering of the masses. It is time to re-examine the fundamental assumptions that this system was built on and replace them with humane, moral and spiritual ones. A shift in thinking is needed. By introducing spirituality into our economic activities, we can take steps to lay the foundation for a better economic future. We have the solutions and the technology to build a new system; all we need is the resolve and the will. Everyone has an inherent power—and responsibility—to contribute.

By introducing more spiritual qualities in our lives, we lay the foundation for a new society and economic system. Some of those goals may seem idealistic, but Baha'is are idealists, dreaming of a better world and then actively working to make it happen. No great achievement can take place without a goal or dream. Without those aspirations, civilization would not have progressed from the Stone Age to where we are now.

We are all privileged to live in a time when the oneness of humankind grows nearer, even though we have to deal with the chaos and confusions related to the disintegration of the old order it is destined to replace. We have all the tools and the blueprint for the unity of humankind, and as people come closer in physical connection and the degree of the separation of humanity shrinks, the challenge now is to bring the hearts and minds of the people closer through spirituality.