



Practical Suggestions for Community Service

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As responsible citizens, we are often struggling to balance our time among our efforts at spiritual growth, our family life, our work, and render a service to the community. No thanks to technological advancement with so many gadgets that enable us to multi-task more and more, we have been transformed from human beings to human doings. Added to that is also the rampant spread of materialism that is consuming our spiritual growth and draining our energy. How can we have time for one more thing- one more social action, one more commitment? Though providing a service may sound like one more commitment to fit into our already busy lives, in reality, service does not necessarily need to become a big project. Any look, gesture, word or action that helps others is an act of service.

To serve humanity is one of the essential duties of the Baha'is. They have been asked to devote their time and energy to provide a service to make the world better for its citizens.

“It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action.... That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth. In another passage He hath proclaimed: It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.” -Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 249.

“... all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship, if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity. This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer. A physician ministering to the sick, gently, tenderly, free from prejudice and believing in the solidarity of the human race, he is giving praise.” -Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks, p. 176.

The concept of service has been part of all societies throughout human history and has helped it in its path. Serving others is nothing new to the people of all religions:

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” – Christianity, Mark 10:45.

“And do not forget to do good to one another.” – Islam, Quran 2:238.

“That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race.” – Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 250.

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” – Mahatma Gandhi

“Service to humanity is service to God.” – Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 8.

How else can our world become united if, as citizens, we don't try to help each other? How else can the sufferings of the world be reduced? The ordinary people of the world like you and me will ultimately make a difference, and make this earth a better and more peaceful place if we take one more extra step to help our fellow human beings.

Serving others has the added benefit of solving one's problems and can give peace and contentment to our souls. It helps us to deal with our problems and tests, which can destroy or undermine our happiness.

“Be not the slave of your moods, but their master. But if you are so angry, so depressed and so sore that your spirit cannot find deliverance and peace even in prayer, then quickly go and give some pleasure to someone lowly or sorrowful, or to a guilty or innocent sufferer! Sacrifice yourself, your talent, your time, your rest to another, to one who has to bear a heavier load than you — and your unhappy mood will dissolve into a blessed, contented submission to God.” -Abdu'l-Baha, Star of the West.

Most of us want to do some service but do not know where to start. So perhaps it is a good idea to revisit this concept, and with the help of the list below, look at the possibilities of service open to us. There are countless ways that we can serve, and you can explore many other ways to serve your fellow human beings. If you approach the opportunity to serve others with a radiant countenance and the pure motivation of kindness and love, you'll find that the gifts you give will come back to you a thousandfold.

Below are some practical suggestions for you to find out if they match your passion and expertise:

- **Doing one's job the best way possible** is not only excellent service but an act of worship. We are blessed to know that doing our job to the best of our abilities is like saying prayers.
- **Offer a kind gesture, a kind word, a kind act.** A smile can sometimes convey more than many words. It does not cost anything, and yet it is a fantastic way of creating a loving atmosphere.
- **Random acts of kindness**, e.g. paying for someone's coffee, paying for someone in front of you in line, giving your place in line for someone in a rush, presenting a stranger with flowers, mowing the neighbour's lawn. Your imagination is the limit.
- **Paying for the education of poor children.** Baha'u'llah has instructed us to educate the children and has stated that those who do help to educate a child, it is as if they have educated His children.

- **Paying for medicine.** The cost of medication is increasing, and at the same time, the rate of poverty is rising, which leaves millions of sick people who cannot pay for their medicine. This is an opportunity to help the poor.
- **Visiting in senior facilities.** Not many realize how lonely some of the old people are. Some have lost their family members or children or families neglect to visit them. A short visit makes a significant difference in the quality of their lives.
- **Visiting the sick in hospitals.** Experiencing pain and being confined to a hospital bed often leads to frustration and discouraging thoughts. A visit is a great diversion and helps to uplift their souls and aids in their healing.
- **Volunteering to serve residents in group homes.** Having had the opportunity to work in a group home for people with disabilities, I have learned that it is not just a kind act. Still, rather it is an acknowledgement of acceptance, and that helps them in their integration into society.
- **Driving people to appointments.** When people are sick, they are overwhelmed by their difficulties and their attempts to look after themselves. They may, therefore, be unable to drive themselves safely. Driving them to appointments not only keeps them safe but also makes them feel cared for, which helps the healing process.
- **Shopping for your neighbours in need.** Every person will go through some problems such as sickness or an accident. Being there in the time of need and helping with some of the chores will make them feel appreciated and loved.
- **Cleaning homes** of people who cannot do it themselves. This reminds me of stories of great souls who did that and cared for the sick.
- **Volunteering in women's centres.** These centres provide help and support to the victims of domestic violence and other issues, and there may be volunteer opportunities to assist in that work.
- **Volunteering for the Red Cross/ Red Crescent.** This organization provides a variety of services, one of which is collecting blood, and for that, they need volunteers to donate blood and also to care for those donating.
- **Volunteering in treatment facilities and similar organizations.** These centres are very specialized, and training may be needed to help out, but there is always a need for caring helpers in this field.
- **Cleaning roads and highways or cleaning garbage in your neighbourhood or on trails.** Many religious and other organizations have adopted this activity, but there is always a need to clean up our environment.

- **Teaching: Dance / Music / Painting / any other forms of the arts.** These activities create a passion in life. To be able to teach these arts is like opening the door to a new life.
- **Coaching sports.** Like teaching art, sport is a passionate endeavour. It is also is a bridge which can bring people together.
- **Picking fruit.** In many places, there is a lot of fruit, and people do not have the time or the energy to pick it, so it goes to waste even though there are hungry people. By picking it and donating it to food banks or other charitable organizations, one can feed the poor.
- **Calling or visiting those in need or offering companionship to lonely people** Tragedy strikes all of us, and when that happens, a visit or a simple phone call can make the difference for those who are feeling sad. Loneliness can cause depression and visiting or calling may interrupt this process.
- **Connecting with Baha'is outside of meetings.** Our relationship with Baha'i friends may be limited just to our meetings. Being in touch with Baha'is outside of the meetings either in their homes or out in the community creates closeness of hearts.
- **Offering services to literacy agencies.** Every town or city has an organization that provides educational services to newcomers to the country and those who require tutoring in reading, writing and computer literacy. They rely heavily on volunteers.
- **Volunteering at homeless shelters and halfway houses.** The number of homeless people is on the rise. Besides providing shelter, there are other needs to be met, and every little contribution helps.
- **Manning school crossings.** By helping in this way, children and their parents will feel safe.
- **Teaching yoga /Tai Chi/ martial arts/ any other exercise classes/coaching sports.** This is another way of helping.
- **Self-help classes.** Dealing with our personal and emotional issues is very important for our spiritual development. Teaching these classes empowers others to have a sense of control in their lives.
- **Teaching product-making classes like soap or candle-making.** In some underdeveloped countries, these skills are the only way people can make a living. In the absence of banks from which to borrow money or government institutions to help, this knowledge provides skills and empowers the poor.

- **Teaching gardening, farming classes.** Gardening is a therapeutic activity. Abdul'-Baha loved it. It creates a sense of achievement, and the added benefit can be fresh and organic food that enhances our health.
- **Teaching woodwork classes.** This skill can change lives by empowering people to build and repair.
- **Providing classes** for jewellery making, beadwork, home decoration, food preserving and others. All these enrich people's lives.
- **Providing driving lessons.** Being able to drive encourages independence and self-reliance for many people. For those who cannot afford the cost of driving lessons, this service is a great gift.
- **Providing foreign language lessons.** For immigrants, to learn the language of the new country is not a luxury but a necessity.
- **Teaching house repairs, appliance repair, car repairs.** Acquiring these skills can help individuals save a considerable amount of money.
- **Teaching computer classes.** Computers are the gateway to knowledge in this age. Many people do not know how to use this miracle of technology, and without it, they can feel quite lost. What a bounty to open up this new world to them!
- **Helping refugees and newcomers by volunteering with the welcome wagon or other like-minded organizations.** When people come to a new country or a new city, they need some orientation. The newcomers much appreciate any help in this regard.
- **Teaching adult education.** Not every adult is educated. It is not easy for adults who were unable to get an education in their childhood. To succeed in getting an education when they are adults, they need help and encouragement.
- **Picking up medicine, providing food, cooking, cutting the grass or doing landscaping for the sick.** These are other ways we can care for those who are ill or unable to do this work for themselves, which creates an opportunity for providing a service.
- **Translating written materials or interpreting.** Most newcomers in the country will take time to learn the language, and if they are older, it may take them much longer, so they have to rely on people to translate for them.
- **Babysitting.** Babysitting for those who cannot afford to pay for it and yet desperately need a break at times, is liberating for those parents so that they have a little time with each other and can charge their batteries for facing the constant challenges of their lives.

- **Doing taxes.** Doing income tax is challenging and confusing for most of us, but for those who are new to it is an almost impossible job. Many can't afford to pay someone to do it. Doing taxes is one of those gifts that not many can give to others, and that makes it very special.
- **Giving financial advice.** Sound advice on finances can change the direction of one's life. Not many know to manage finances properly. Some people have learned this skill and can impart it to those who are badly in need of it.
- **Offering to counsel those who need it.** It is such a blessing to help someone who is struggling in life with mental or emotional or physical challenges. It is highly rewarding.
- **Providing medical services.** This, like counselling, is a specialized field, but it does not mean that ordinary people like you and me cannot volunteer to provide first-aid, for example, if we have the training.
- **Providing legal services.** Though legal aid is a very affordable service, some people do not know how to access it. We can be the liaison to connect them.
- **Doing makeup or making the costumes for plays.** This is a unique service with its own rewards.
- **Volunteering in community gardens.** There is always some work in these gardens to help people who do not have land to grow their vegetables. Young people are always welcome to offer their manual services.
- **Connecting with volunteer organizations for possibilities.** In every town or city, there are many varieties of organizations that are trying to provide service to people. They rely on volunteers to help them. By connecting and consulting with these organizations and agencies, we can find many opportunities for service in the community that we live in.
- **Volunteering with food programs in schools.** Many schools have a food programme whose goal is to make sure no student goes to class hungry. They depend on the donations of stores and the services of volunteers to run them.
- **Providing accommodation for the sick and needy.** Most of the sick people in rural areas have to travel to bigger cities to get treatment and naturally have to stay in hotels and motels. Besides being expensive, these accommodations are not welcoming and do not provide an ideal environment for getting healthy. To open our homes and heart to help the sick was Abdul'-Baha's way and His wish for us to emulate.

- **Remembering in your prayers** and supporting those who are going through difficult times. Even if we don't have time to offer a service for our communities, we can always rely on the power of prayers that can have more beneficial effects than our physical efforts.