

Justice: The Organizing Principle of All Commerce

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The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes. – Baha’u’llah, *The Hidden Words*, pp. 3-4.

In a previous article I spoke of the importance of trust in building social capital or brand equity, the trusting relationship between business partners, customers and suppliers. This trust is one of the most important assets of any business.

Justice is essential to building trust. Economies that do well economically are characterized by a rule of law that people can generally trust. For example: when you buy a piece of property, or equity in a company, you can trust that you actually own it, and that you can sell it in the future. In many countries you cannot trust this simple principle of ownership. This one aspect of justice is absolutely essential to commerce and the development of wealth rather than poverty.

Zoom with Us: Intro to the Baha’i Faith

The International Baha’i Community, in their message on the Prosperity of Humankind, refers to justice as “that faculty of the human soul that enables each person to distinguish truth from falsehood:”

It calls for fair-mindedness in one’s judgments, for equity in one’s treatment of others, and is thus a constant if demanding companion in the daily occasions of life... At the group level, a concern for justice is the indispensable compass in collective decision-making, because it is the only means by which unity of thought and action can be achieved.

Governments must establish and enforce rules as the basis of trust and justice. Much like the rules governing a sport, and the referees who enforce the rules, the equitable

administration of justice enables the healthy competition of commerce rather than the corruption of commerce.

Some who are unfamiliar with the business world hold the belief that business executives would prefer an unbound, unfettered approach to any regulation or rules. Only the most extreme ideologues hold this view. Most business executives, like most athletes on the playing field, simply want understandable rules enforced equitably. If anyone believes that the absence of justice or rules is advantageous for commerce, they should examine those societies where the rule of law does not exist. In those societies poverty, not prosperity, becomes the norm. With the rule of law in place, resolution can happen:

...in the case of differences that arise between two individuals with regard to particular rights, a third party, namely the government, is needed to resolve the dispute...

How can one see one's fellow men hungry, destitute and deprived, and yet live in peace and comfort in one's splendid mansion? – Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, newly revised edition, p. 319.

The economic system throughout most of human history has been one in which the powerful and wealthy perceive legitimacy in their accumulation of increasing wealth, wealth they could in no way use, while the poor whom they employed suffered close to starvation and without any form of health care or security in their elder years. In the minds of the wealthy they perceived this to be just, because they believed they earned their wealth through their greater intelligence, if not an act of God's bestowal. While we have not yet completely escaped this perverse logic, we have made progress through the imposition of laws of progressive taxation, social security and government sponsored health care. We are moving toward a more just society.

What is "just" compensation? What is just taxation? What is justice in the provision of services by a government? We do not know the precise answers to any of these questions. What we do know is that justice is a spiritual sensibility, a "quality of the soul" that we all recognize, exercise and gradually develop. Every manager and every owner of a business has the responsibility to seek not only personal gain, but to seek the establishment of a just system that enhances the prosperity of all:

Justice is the one power that can translate the dawning consciousness of humanity's oneness into a collective will through which the necessary structures of global community life can be confidently erected. An age that sees the people of the world increasingly gaining access to information of every kind and to a diversity of ideas will find justice asserting itself as the ruling principle of successful social organization. – Baha'i International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*.