

Does a Rising Tide Lift All Boats?

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The saying, “a rising tide lifts all boats” could not be further from the truth. In fact, if you have a boat that leaks, a rising tide will sink it.

Describing the generation and distribution of wealth in our present day world, a recent Oxfam report on the growing disparities between the wealthy and the poor says: “Far from trickling down, income and wealth are instead being sucked upwards at an alarming rate.”

The report also points to a “global spider’s web” of tax havens that ensures wealth stays out of the reach of ordinary citizens and governments. A recent estimate puts the figure at \$7.6 trillion in private individual wealth held in offshore accounts. That figure is greater than the combined economies of the United Kingdom and Germany.

Just when I was thinking that maybe I was above this problem, I am clearly reminded that human nature is in great need of refinement. Apparently the majority of people would choose to avoid taxes by using tax havens or other similar strategies: A poll of some 12,000 taken in November 2017 showed that 77% of us would not hesitate to avoid paying taxes if we could. It would seem, moreover, that many of the very rich are entrapped by and addicted to their wealth.

The Baha’i teachings point out that these extremes of wealth and poverty reveal the existence of tyranny:

A financier with colossal wealth should not exist whilst near him is a poor man in dire necessity. When we see poverty allowed to reach a condition of starvation it is a sure sign that somewhere we shall find tyranny. Men must bestir themselves in this matter, and no longer delay in altering conditions which bring the misery of grinding poverty to a very large number of the people. The rich must give of their abundance, they must soften their hearts and cultivate a compassionate intelligence, taking thought for those sad ones who are suffering from lack of the very necessities of life. – Abdu’l-Baha, *Paris Talks*, p. 154.

Jyrki Raina, general secretary of IndustriALL Global Union, which represents 50 million workers in 140 countries in the mining, energy and manufacturing sectors, says “Inequality is one of the biggest threats to economic well-being and it needs to be addressed.”

Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree!

In case you are getting the impression that wealth is intrinsically a bad thing you might consider the following clarification from Abdu’l-Bahá who has stated that “*wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if (a) it is acquired by an individual’s own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, crafts and industry*”, if (b) the measures adopted by the individual in generating wealth serve to “*enrich the generality of the people*”, and if (c) the wealth thus obtained is expended for “*philanthropic purposes*” and “*the promotion of knowledge*”, for the establishment of schools and industry and the advancement of education, and in general for the welfare of society.

Wealth therefore is not the cause of the problem we are discussing, rather the problem is caused by greed, acquisitiveness, and the hoarding of wealth.

Reasons for Hope

The Baha’i teachings offer humanity principles and strategies that can overcome wealth imbalance and it’s many other problems to ensure a peaceful, secure and equitable future for the human race:

Each one of you must have great consideration for the poor and render them assistance. Organize in an effort to help them and prevent increase of poverty. ... The laws of the community will be so framed and enacted that it will not be possible for a few to be millionaires and many destitute. – Abdu’l-Baha, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 36.

One practical and dynamic reason for hope—which the Baha’i teachings encourage and exemplify—lies in the almost invisible but rapid growth of interconnected groups of people, happening in just about every corner of the globe, who come together in what might be called “The University of Global Survival.” Hundreds of thousands of Baha’is and their friends, neighbors and colleagues are engaging in the study and activation of community-building principles and strategies all over the planet. This growth is taking place, almost unnoticed, like the slow growth of mycelium beneath the surface, until one night the ground is covered in mushrooms.

This kind of growth phenomena generally takes place at the grass roots of society. It is people-based, and can quickly become a shared experience between those of many cultures and philosophies. This movement, happening now especially through the efforts of the Baha’i Faith and its grassroots community-based activities, focuses on these central driving principles: cooperation and reciprocity, the oneness of humanity; the elimination of the extremes of wealth and poverty; the eradication of all forms of prejudice, and the equality of the sexes.

But all engines require fuel or a driving force to make them work. The driving force of human society is not power, money or even clever strategies—rather it is built on the foundation of guiding principles and morals, and how well these are observed in society. These principles are

central in every religion, and shape almost all social laws. When they break down in a given society, that society disintegrates. History has many examples of this disintegration. The economic solution in the Baha'i teachings is essentially spiritual:

The fundamentals of the whole economic condition are divine in nature and are associated with the world of the heart and spirit. This is fully explained in the Baha'i teaching, and without knowledge of its principles no improvement in the economic state can be realized. The Baha'is will bring about this improvement and betterment but not through sedition and appeal to physical force—not through warfare, but welfare. Hearts must be so cemented together, love must become so dominant that the rich shall most willingly extend assistance to the poor and take steps to establish these economic adjustments permanently. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 238-239.

The Baha'i-inspired movement now taking place across the globe provides moral, ethical, and spiritual education to children, youth and adults alike. It trains this generation and the ones that follow to become more thoughtful, caring and co-operative, making spiritual and moral training the fuel of the engine that can drive a better future:

Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures. – Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 260.

This worldwide movement, dedicated to equality and justice, works everywhere for the establishment of world unity, believing that “The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.” – Ibid., p. 286.

You may want to consider investigating this powerful, hopeful movement.