

## Understanding Each Other in these Confusing Times

Badi Shams

In our world today, an air of confusion and irritation manifests itself in different ways in different people.

Baha'is believe that the world is in the process of giving birth to a wonderful new world order with a great future. What we are experiencing now is the pain before its birth. In a sense, we are the midwives responsible for preparing and assisting with the birth:

We stand on the threshold of an age whose convulsions proclaim alike the death-pangs of the old order and the birth-pangs of the new. Through the generating influence of the Faith announced by Baha'u'llah this New World Order may be said to have been conceived. We can, at the present moment, experience its stirrings in the womb of a travailing age—an age waiting for the appointed hour at which it can cast its burden and yield its fairest fruit.

“The whole earth,” writes Baha'u'llah, “is now in a state of pregnancy. The day is approaching when it will have yielded its noblest fruits, when from it will have sprung forth the loftiest trees, the most enchanting blossoms, the most heavenly blessings. Immeasurably exalted is the breeze that wafteth from the garment of thy Lord, the Glorified! For lo, it hath breathed its fragrance and made all things new! Well is it with them that comprehend.” – Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 168.

We all react to this pregnant period in different ways, but I'll let you decide where you belong, and suggest the course of action Baha'is are taking for surviving this period of changes and transformation in the history of humanity.

One extreme is those people who show no sign of being affected by these rapid changes and confusion, but quietly and with great courage do their best for the betterment of the world. Some of them have an affiliation with religious beliefs, and yet some are believers in science. They have realized their mission in life and do the best they can without needing to fight or hate those who take opposing views. They know how to see the common ground between people, and not the differences. They know what they are doing will bear fruit in the future. The Baha'i teachings describe them like this:

Lift up your hearts above the present and look with eyes of faith into the future! Today the seed is sown, the grain falls upon the earth, but behold the day will come when it shall raise a glorious tree and the branches thereof shall be laden with fruit. Rejoice and be glad that this day has dawned, try to realise its power, for it is indeed wonderful! God has crowned you with honour and in your hearts has He set a radiant star; verily the light thereof shall brighten the whole world! – Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris Talks*, p. 69

The other extreme? Those who thrive on confusion, seek only their own self-interest, and do whatever they can to get what they want. Since people like this think the end justifies the means, they do not consider the morality of their actions—but they lie, destroy, hate and even kill anything opposed to their

version of the truth. Many of them are followers of different so-called religious groups—even though no real religion supports violence—or various radical ideologies. They function as the leading causes of the destruction of the old order, which ultimately contributes to the process of change, too.

Then there are those who cannot understand what is happening around them, and feel helpless to figure out a course of action. They often give up, and their efforts are limited to complaining and reminding everyone how hopeless the present time is and how they miss the good old days when everything was good and decent. They have forgotten their most important duty as citizens of the world: **“All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.”** – Baha’u’llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah*, p. 214.

That last group of people, who could be you or me, have sincere motives and good intentions. They want to contribute towards building a just society—to defend the poor, save the planet from pollution, bring about a better health care system, a better system of education, a better system of government, and better economic policies. They have many other wonderful goals, as well. But instead of changing things for the better, they end up not knowing what to do.

We have a moral obligation to reach out to all these groups, and lovingly help them see the possibilities in creating a new world order. Those who already expend their energy selflessly building a better world need our encouragement and support for their sacrificial work. Those confused about what to do also need our help to remove the dark clouds hanging over their lives. Those good-hearted and yet frustrated souls need to be reminded that their anger and impatience is self-defeating, so that they do not end up frustrated and hating others. Those on the path of destruction are the most difficult to help, and yet we can always pray for them and make sure that their actions and words do not create feelings of hate in our hearts:

... The world is like the body of man—it hath become sick, feeble and infirm. Its eye is devoid of sight, its ear hath become destitute of hearing and its faculties of sense are entirely dissolved. The friends of God must become as wise physicians and care for and heal this sick person, in accord with the divine teachings, in order that—God willing—it may perchance gain health, find eternal healing and that its lost powers may be restored; and that the person of the world may find such health, freshness and purity that it will appear in the utmost beauty and charm. – Abdu’l-Baha, *Baha’i World Faith*, p. 356.

Baha’is believe that we should be like physicians for the healing of humanity—physicians who recognize the symptoms and then prescribe the correct medicine. That medicine, the Baha’i teachings say, is embodied in the cause, the principles and the spiritual remedies brought by Baha’u’llah.