

The Humility of the Earth



Rarely do we find the quality of humility valued or appreciated in our popular culture. We do not celebrate or place confidence in the humble. Yet they are precisely the kind of people needed for the healing of the world. This, perhaps, is the meaning of

The meek shall inherit the Earth

It is appropriate. For the word *humility* is connected with the Earth – *humus* – from the Latin origins of the word. In short, it recalls the lowliness of the Earth below us.

It is curious then that Bahá'u'lláh should use precisely the metaphor of the Earth to capture the essence of humility.

They who are the beloved of God, in whatever place they gather and whomsoever they may meet, must evince, in their attitude towards God, and in the manner of their celebration of His praise and glory, such humility and submissiveness that every atom of the dust beneath their feet may attest the depth of their devotion. The conversation carried by these holy

souls should be informed with such power that these same atoms of dust will be thrilled by its influence. They should conduct themselves in such manner that the earth upon which they tread may never be allowed to address to them such words as these: "I am to be preferred above you. For witness, how patient I am in bearing the burden which the husbandman layeth upon me. I am the instrument that continually imparteth unto all beings the blessings with which He Who is the Source of all grace hath entrusted me. Notwithstanding the honor conferred upon me, and the unnumbered evidences of my wealth—a wealth that supplieth the needs of all creation—behold the measure of my humility, witness with what absolute submissiveness I allow myself to be trodden beneath the feet of men..."[1]

In his last major work, the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, Bahá'u'lláh returns to the theme.

Every man of discernment, while walking upon the earth, feeleth indeed abashed, inasmuch as he is fully aware that the thing which is the source of his prosperity, his wealth, his might, his exaltation, his advancement and power is, as ordained by God, the very earth which is trodden beneath the feet of all men. There can be no doubt that whoever is cognizant of this truth, is cleansed and sanctified from all pride, arrogance, and vainglory.[2]

Elsewhere Bahá'u'lláh writes:

Humility exalteth man to the heaven of glory and power, whilst pride abaseth him to the depths of wretchedness and degradation.[3]

Of course, there is a paradoxical incongruity in these spiritual realities.

Humility is a central quality of [those called upon to serve the community](#).

Thus [Shoghi Effendi](#), Baha'u'llah's great-grandson wrote:

They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavor, by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their candor, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win, not only the confidence and the

genuine support and respect of those whom they serve, but also their esteem and real affection.[\[4\]](#)

(This article is the 188th in a series of what I hope will be 200 articles in 200 days for the 200th anniversary of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh. The anniversary is being celebrated around the world on 21 and 22 October 2017, The articles are simply my personal reflections on Bahá'u'lláh's life and work. Any errors or inadequacies in these articles are solely my responsibility.)