

Baha'i Perspectives on Parker Palmer's Five Habits of the Heart

Habit 1: An understanding that we are all in this together

O CHILDREN OF MEN!

Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest. Such is My counsel to you, O concourse of light! Heed ye this counsel that ye may obtain the fruit of holiness from the tree of wondrous glory.

(Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words)

Discussion: Why are we all created from dust, not gold or jewels? Is it easier to be united if we are all from the same dust? Is it easier to be detached?

Habit 2: An appreciation of the value of “otherness”

O ye lovers of this wronged one! Cleanse ye your eyes, so that ye behold no man as different from yourselves. See ye no strangers; rather see all men as friends, for love and unity come hard when ye fix your gaze on otherness. And in this new and wondrous age, the Holy Writings say that we must be at one with every people; that we must see neither harshness nor injustice, neither malevolence, nor hostility, nor hate, but rather turn our eyes toward the heaven of ancient glory. For each of the creatures is a sign of God, and it was by the grace of the Lord and His power that each did step into the world; therefore they are not strangers, but in the family; not aliens, but friends, and to be treated as such.

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu'l-Baha)

Discussion: How do we speak to people so that they will feel as family and friends? How should we interact with them on virtual spaces such as email and Facebook? What if they seem to show malevolence, hostility or hatred toward us?

Habit 3: An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways

A critic may object, saying that peoples, races, tribes and communities of the world are of different and varied customs, habits, tastes, character, inclinations and ideas, that opinions and thoughts are contrary to one another, and how, therefore, is it possible for real unity to be revealed and perfect accord among human souls to exist?

In answer we say that differences are of two kinds. One is the cause of annihilation and is like the antipathy existing among warring nations and conflicting tribes who seek each other's destruction, uprooting one another's families, depriving one another of rest and comfort and unleashing carnage. The other kind which is a token of diversity is the essence of perfection and the cause of the appearance of the bestowals of the Most Glorious Lord.

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu'l-Baha)

Discussion: How must we understand and embrace differences among people for these differences to be “tokens of diversity” and “the essence of perfection” and “the cause of appearance of the bestowals of the Lord”?

Habit 4: A sense of personal voice and agency

God has not intended man to blindly imitate his fathers and ancestors. He has endowed him with mind or the faculty of reasoning by the exercise of which he is to investigate and discover the truth; and that which he finds real and true, he must accept. He must not be an imitator or blind follower of any soul. He must not rely implicitly upon the opinion of any man without investigation; nay, each soul must seek intelligently and independently, arriving at a real conclusion and bound only by that reality. The greatest cause of bereavement and disheartening in the world of humanity is ignorance based upon blind imitation. It is due to this that wars and battles prevail; from this cause hatred and animosity arise continually among mankind.

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, Foundations of World Unity)

Discussion: If we all were to follow this guidance, investigating questions for ourselves and reaching our own conclusions, how then are we prepared to join with others in decision-making and community building? How can our independent investigation of truth help to prevent discord, hatred and strife?

Habit 5: A capacity to create community

All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The Almighty beareth Me witness: To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Say: O friends! Drink your fill from this crystal stream that floweth through the heavenly grace of Him Who is the Lord of Names. Let others partake of its waters in My name, that the leaders of men in every land may fully recognize the purpose for which the Eternal Truth hath been revealed, and the reason for which they themselves have been created.

(Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah)

Discussion: Our leaders, whether political, economic or institutional, all have a responsibility to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. But we ordinary people have the same responsibility. If we display the virtues mentioned by Baha'u'llah, how will this civilization be different from the world today? How can we contribution to creating this community right now in our daily lives?

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