

banner



Bahá'í Journal UK

Journal of the Bahá'í Community of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Volume 19, No.4 – September, 2002 / 159BE

 LARGE PRINT / Standard Print.Spiritual Technology

Applied Spiritual Technology

Religion, if in excess, may lend to ignorant fanaticism and superstition. Science, in excess, may foster rampant materialism, conflict and war

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ describes both religion and science as being two wings of one bird^[1] that will carry civilisation forward. He also describes them as two great forces upon which the progress and advancement of civilisation depend, forces, He argues, that must be kept in balance. Religion, if in excess, may lead to ignorant fanaticism and superstition. Science, in excess, may foster rampant materialism, conflict and war. Thus, both, in the hands of inexpert practitioners, can be destructive.

In like manner, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has argued that both science and religion share a common foundation, namely reason. Both are means by which man discovers reality and truth. When one reads Bahá’u’lláh’s description of the investigation of reality on the part of the “true seeker” in the Kitáb-i-Íqán, a passage often referred to by Bahá’ís as “The Tablet of the True Seeker”^[2], one reads a formula for the unbiased investigation of truth and knowledge that could apply equally to a religionist or a scientist.

The point is that religion and science share a common foundation and have an equivalent impact on civilisation. Both are powerful engines by which man discovers the secrets and forces that govern existence, whether material or spiritual. Thus, one may regard science as a means by which man discovers reality. Technology, on the other hand, though dependent on science for unlocking the fundamental mysteries of how the universe works, is quite distinct from science. It may be described as the application of knowledge for the betterment of the human condition and to further the advance of material civilisation.

Science does not necessarily lead to a direct material benefit; rather scientific discoveries usually come to society via technology. Science discovers, for instance, that information can be stored as electron patterns in a silicon matrix. Technology takes that knowledge, and creates a personal computer, together with all the applications that make it useful for education, industry, art, science and the home. Thus, technology serves as an interface between the discovery of truth through science, and the benefit of that truth in human society.

If science and religion are as similar as Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá have asserted, does it not stand to reason that their relationship to society is also similar? That is, if the benefits of science come to society via people who find practical applications to common problems, might the benefits of religion also share an indirect influence?

One does not need to be a health scientist, have a keen understanding, or even hold a particularly high view of health science in order to benefit from its findings via applied technology. One may even be ignorant of the origins of given practices or that science is at work in the every day pursuit of life. An individual climbing into his car to head off to work may not be aware of the discovery of the ultraviolet electromagnetic spectrum and how it affects his retinae, and of the applied knowledge in protecting his retinae that has gone into the manufacture of his sunglasses, namely their ultraviolet light blocking capacity. He may only be interested in the fact that the glasses feel nice when he faces the glare of the motorway in daylight hours, and believes (rightly or not) that the glasses enhance his appearance. Similarly one may not have to believe in a particular religion in order to

...community, one may not have to believe in a particular religion in order to benefit from its discovery of spiritual truth. This may be especially true when those discoveries are transmitted indirectly to society by individual application. For example, the Bahá'í Faith emphasises the importance of consultation in all matters, great or small. Individual Bahá'ís, by adapting that principle to the solution of problems in commerce, industry, arts, science and the professions can model these adaptations to their colleagues in those disciplines. People are quick to spot and emulate any technology that demonstrates a selective advantage. The key is that they observe both the application and the benefit, and draw the necessary inference between the application and the outcome. One need not believe in Bahá'u'lláh or in His teachings in order to derive a benefit from the application of His principles to solving problems.

This is not to say that the goal of the Bahá'í community should be to provide an indirect and anonymous benefit to greater society – far from it; rather, that society may derive tangible benefits from the Bahá'í Faith and its discoveries of spiritual reality in the present – irrespective of whether or not the beneficiaries recognise the station of its Author. All that is required is that individual Bahá'ís be vigilant, creative and courageous in the application of spiritual solutions to common problems in a manner that allows others to see the benefit of the applied principle. This modelling is best done in those forums in which ideas are exchanged and behaviour is modelled and studied in the natural course of engagement, such as the professions, arts and industry.

There is a practical benefit to such applied spiritual technology that goes beyond the moral imperative to offer one's best and to do what is right. The very act of introducing a new form of behaviour alters people's expectations of how things are done, and modifies the rules of engagement. If behaviour is successfully changed because people see a benefit in doing so, it changes the social environment in ways that select for that type of behaviour. This changes not only what people believe is good, it also changes what they believe is true. It changes their relationship with the greater world, to both the physical and spiritual universe. This, then, can enhance their capacity to recognise, or even seek out, the origin of the truth by which they have begun to live.

W Abdullah Brooks

1 'Abdu'l- Bahá: Paris Talks, p. 143

2 Bahá'u'lláh: Kitáb-i-Íqán, pp. 123-7

