

ETHICS and GLOBALIZATION

Giuseppe Robiati

The term "**ethics**" deriving from the Greek "**habit, way of life**" " entered in common use with Aristotle who titled in this way his treatise of philosophy in practice (Guido Calogero, *Enciclopedia Italiana* XIV [Treves, Treccani, Tumminelli, 1932], 447, s.v. «etica») ...) Since then the term has remained an aquired term within philosophy, just like that part of philosophy "that after logic, doctrine of knowledge, and physics, doctrine of reality, established how mankind had to practically behave vis a vis this new reality" (ibidem). The term, often also identified as morality, has there been "consecrated as a technical term for the designation of every doctrine that is pseculatively elaborated around the problem of the practical behaviour of mankind" (ibidem). Therefore we can mean by the term ethics that area of moral philosophy that studies human behaviour, the science of habits and of social relationships.

We ask ourselves if together with this definition, there exist possible modifications of the meaning of ethics in this modern world characterized by rapid changes. The personal choice that directs the behaviours of in specific social situations is generally based upon moral principles of a religious kind, that differ in the different regions of the planet. For example in the West a behaviour is considered as ethical if it is in harmony with some of the laws deriving form the Jewish-Christian behavioural codes of the Old and New Testament, as per the example of the ten commandments. In Muslim countries the ethical behaviour depends on the coherence with the laws of the Coran, the sacred book of the Muslims, and so on in the various parts of the planet. In the West another generic "good ethical behaviour" has been come about, meant as "good human behaviour", indipently of moral considerations of a religious kind linked instead to the "common sense of the father of the family". An innovative structure of ethics can be found in the writings of Baha'u'llah, an extraordinary Individual who lived in the second half of the 19th century. Prisoner for the almost entirity of his life because of His innovative ideas and His pioneering definition of the rules of life, Baha'u'llah wrote many pages on many subjects, from which one can note that Ethics derives from justice. Therefore to examine the field of ethics, we need to first examine, that of justice. Therefore the study of ethics can be divided into two specific

fields:

Justice at individual level
And collective justice.

The need for this distinction arises from the difference between ethics at the individual level and ethics at the collective or group level. We can now deepen together the main definitions of justice, and of ethics, where it stems from, in the light of Baha'u'llah's writings:

A. At the individual level

At the individual level, justice is that faculty of the human soul that enables each person to distinguish truth from falsehood. In the sight of God, Bahá'u'lláh avers, justice is "the best beloved of all things" since it permits each individual to see with his own eyes rather than the eyes of others, to know through his own knowledge rather than the knowledge of his neighbor or his group. It calls for fair-mindedness in one's judgments, for equity in one's treatment of others, and is thus a constant if demanding companion in the daily occasions of life (Bahá'í International Community, "The Prosperity of Humankind," *The Bahá'í World 1994-5. An International Record* [Bahá'í World Centre, Haifa 1996] 279).

In order to make possible the realization of the conditions outlined in the definition of justice at the individual level ("faculty of the human soul that enables each person to distinguish truth from falsehood") it is necessary to be in possession of the necessary means in order to "distinguish truth from falsehood". These means are available, but need to be developed. Therefore justice implies a "research", that is at personal level a "free and independent search for the truth" through the two instruments available to human beings: the intellectual abilities (intelligence, knowledge) and the interior abilities (talents and spiritual qualities).

In the Seven Valleys, one of His Writings he outlines the synthesis of the seven stages that each human being goes through in his search for the objective of life, until he reaches the ocean of his "true knowledge", Baha'u'llah describes as the first stage of this voyage "the Valley of Search"

Without this valley, and without exercising patience in this search, "the wayfarer on this journey will reach nowhere and attain no goal (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and The Four Valleys*, rev. ed. [Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991] 5). In this phase the "the seeker reacheth a stage wherein he seeth all created things" (ibid. 5).

It is at

this stage that the ability of the human soul that allows each person to distinguish between "true and false" starts to bear its fruits. In this phase, the human being starts to "know ignorance and knowledge," "doubt and certitude" arriving, at the same time to distinguish between "the morn of guidance from the night of error" (ibid. 8).

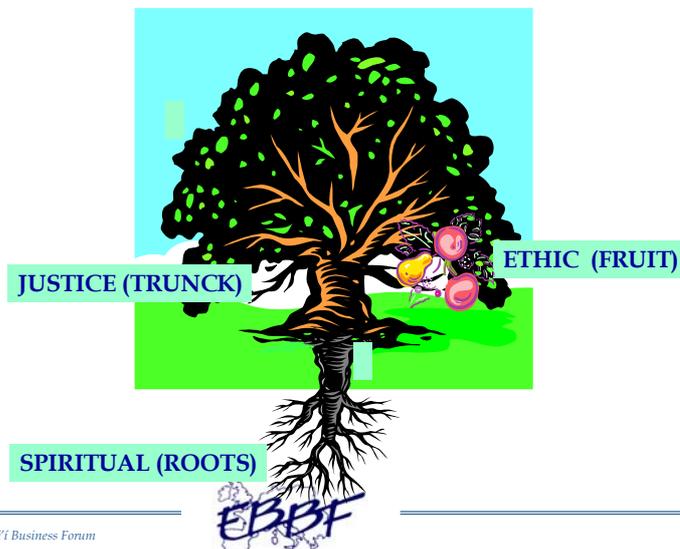
Proceeding then through the other valleys he will start to "to come out of doubt into certitude" (ibid. 11), which is what will allow him to be able to distinguish between "true and false". With time, those who walk this journey

and who start to use this "faculty" gain a very powerful instrument, the "true knowledge", that will allow them to distinguish between "true and false". They therefore become "aware" and know how to decide between true and false in their daily actions. In this way they acquire the ability to adopt a personal behaviour that is ethically correct. If we want to use a metaphor, we can say that the roots of a plant, well planted in the ground and well nourished, will produce a strong tree and therefore tasty and nourishing fruits. Well the roots are the "spiritual faculty of justice at the individual level" the trunk is the faculty to "distinguish between right and false" and the fruit is the "individual ethical behaviour". The fruit is excellent if the entire structure of the plant is harmonious and complete. Therefore we can conclude that ethics at the individual level is the first fruit of justice. And in turn, justice is an attribute of God.

Baha'u'llah says in the Hidden words:

“ O son of spirit! The best beloved of all things in My sight is justice, turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbour...”

(Baha'u'llah : Hidden words from Arabic n.2)



He who has acquired the personal ability to distinguish between true and false, that is, justice, can be defined as an ethical person. Wherever one operates, in their personal life, in the family, in the company where he works, in society at large, this person will behave in an ethical manner producing positive actions and events that promote the wellbeing of the society that surrounds it. But the choice of making this journey can only be

voluntary and personal

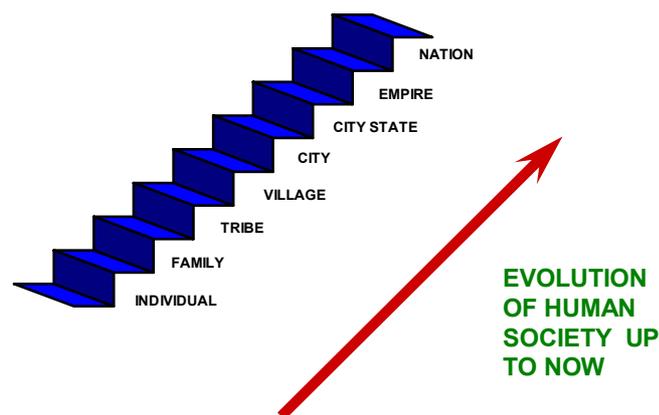
B. at the collective level.

From the writings of Baha'u'llah we can deduce the following definition of justice at collective level:
At the group level, a concern for justice is the indispensable compass in collective decision making, because it is the only means by which unity of thought and action can be achieved. Far from encouraging the punitive spirit that has often masqueraded under its name in past ages, justice is the practical expression of awareness that, in the achievement of human progress, the interests of the individual and those of society are inextricably linked. To the extent that justice becomes a guiding concern of human interaction, a consultative climate is encouraged that permits options to be examined dispassionately and appropriate courses of action selected . . . Concern for justice protects the task of defining progress from the temptation to sacrifice the well-being of the generality of humankind -- and even of the planet itself -- to the advantages which technological breakthroughs can make available to privileged minorities. In design and planning, it ensures that limited resources are not diverted to the pursuit of projects extraneous to a community's essential social or economic priorities (Bahá'í International Community, "The Prosperity of Humankind," *Bahá'í World 1994-5* 279).

If from the Baha'i writings we deduce that "At the group level, a concern for justice is the indispensable compass in collective decision making, because it is the only means by which unity of thought and action can be achieved," as a consequence we need to examine what is "the group", what does this "collective" term and specifically what does "collective" mean today and how this concept of "collective" has taken shape over the centuries. Examining the thinking of Baha'u'llah we can say that He gave origin to a new concept of history, defining the first important anticipation fo the "theory of collective evolution" and of the systemic vision of the world.

Baha'u'llah maintains that history evolves along a discontinuous ascending line and that each historical phase represents a progress vis a vis the preceding one. In other words, collective history is cumulative and progressive. It is in constant change and evolution. He underlines the concept that all is relative and progressive and that humanity evolves slowly, but inexorably, towards a greater unity with a global advancement of life and civilization. In the 19th century when it was formulated, this opinion was daring and pioneering and was considered ertical and dangerous. For this reason Baha'u'llah was forced to roaming from one prison to the next for forty years until His death that took Him, as a prisoner, in the Holy Land in 1892.

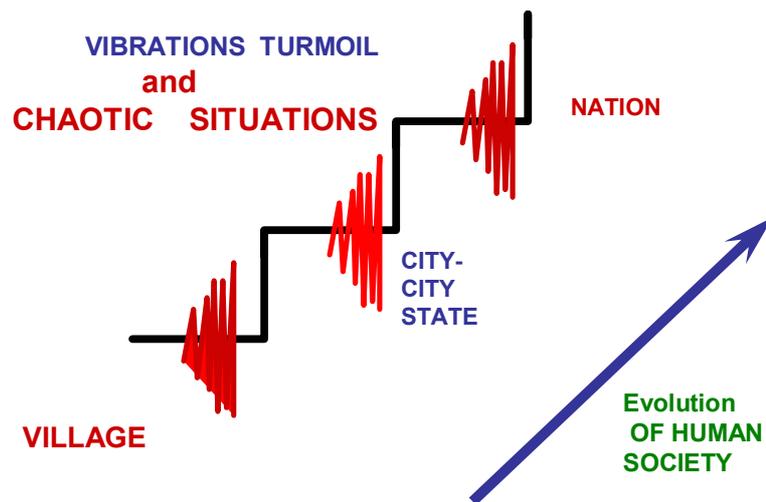
Therefore, in the thinking of Baha'u'llah, collective history of the human race has evolved through increasingly wide and complex social aggregations. At the origin there only existed aggregations of couples. These, aggregating together with other couples in order to better confront the problems of survival, gave birth to tribes. Then, stimulated by commercial exchanges, they formed villages. The need to defend themselves from enemies, from predators, from the hostile nature and because of the increase of the population created the conditions to transform villages, over the centuries, into cities and the cities, through military and new social structures, transformed into city-state (to begin with independent and then interdependent). With time, these territories evolved into regions and nations and these, in turn into sovereign nations. Today the majority of nations of the planet are sovereign and politically independent. The graph n.1 shows in a concise form the evolution of the human society in its totality.



Graph n.1 Human society evolved through aggregations of increasing complexity

What we have described has happened everywhere even though with different timescales and rhythms, depending on the territorial dimensions, of the different social, political and economic contexts belonging to the different cultures and religions. Normally the passage from a life style defined by tradition to a more modern and aggregated level stems from deep crises that involve the organisation of the "group", of the "collectivity", of its rules and of its ethics.

IN Graph n.2 we visualise how at the end of each evolutionary phase the passage from one stage to the one immediately after arises through a series of crises. The maximum extension of the oscillations represents the intensity of the level of crisis that brings about the "jump forward". The extension of the oscillations, that accompanies the final period of each phase, is a sign that precedes the next phase. These chaotic oscillations are generated by the fact that the existing institutions do not have the capacity to solve the current problems. In these chaotic phases what generally happens is that the existing institutions do not have the capacity to solve the current problems. In these states of chaos what generally takes place is that the rules, the laws and the behavioural systems (i.e. Ethics) go through deep crisis of identity.



Graph n.2 Each phase of the evolution coincided with a social and economical destabilisation that grows as the next phase approaches.

The crisis of the modern world arises because the current organisations and laws do not have the ability to solve the problems that have arisen. There are impulses that push humanity towards the next evolutionary level: from the current one, based on the individuality of nations. To the next one, likely to be transnational and international. The problems that have come about are no longer solvable within the national political systems, given that they are now relating to super-national and international issues and no sole nation has the ability and the possibility

to solve them.
At this stage the whole concept of ethics at the group and collective level comes about. Many put forward the following questions "Can the ethical rules that national states have equipped themselves with assist the system to enter a new vision of ethics? The crisis that are taking place are perhaps due to the impossibility of finding new rules that may be applicable to all? Can over two hundred nations in the world define a common ethics? Can a planet dominated by a small group of nations that impose their own model of ethics, be it industrial or development related, allow the development of a super-national ethics? How can we solve the problem of the single religious rules that provide quite different and sometimes contrasting guidelines that affect the behaviour of individuals in different parts of the world? Which are the key sensitive points that we go and affect?" In order to give an answer to these questions we need to refer to the definition of "justice" in the collective sense that we have previously mentioned:

At the group level, a concern for justice is the indispensable compass in collective decision making, because it is the only means by which unity of thought and action can be achieved. . . . To the extent that justice becomes a guiding concern of human interaction, a consultative climate is encouraged that permits options to be examined dispassionately and appropriate courses of action selected . . . Concern for justice protects the task of defining progress from the temptation to sacrifice the well-being of the generality of humankind -- and even of the planet itself -- to the advantages which technological breakthroughs can make available to privileged minorities. In design and planning, it ensures that limited resources are not diverted to the pursuit of projects extraneous to a community's essential social or economic priorities (Bahá'í International Community, "The Prosperity of Humankind," *Bahá'í World 1994-5* 279).

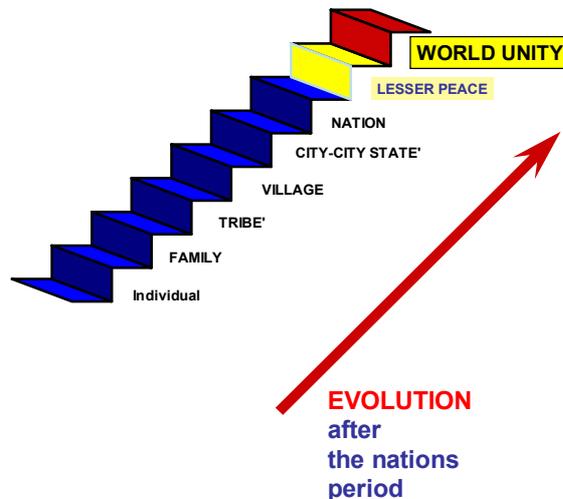
In order to redefine the term "collective" we therefore need to reanalyse the interactions between individuals and society, between society and the environment, between the collectivity and the economy, between consumption and resources, between religion and humanity. It is exactly in this critical point of the transition where the old ethical system shows all of its weakness. It therefore becomes necessary to redefine the "group" or "collectivity" with reference to the development of society.

It becomes evident that, given the underlying direction of development from the age of stone up to modern age, from microsystems to macrosystems, from nomadic style of society to the city-state, to principalities, to monarchies, to sovereign states, towards a concept of life organised with increasingly complex macrosystems, we can definitely and scientifically define "the collectivity" based upon what Baha'u'llah wrote over a century ago:

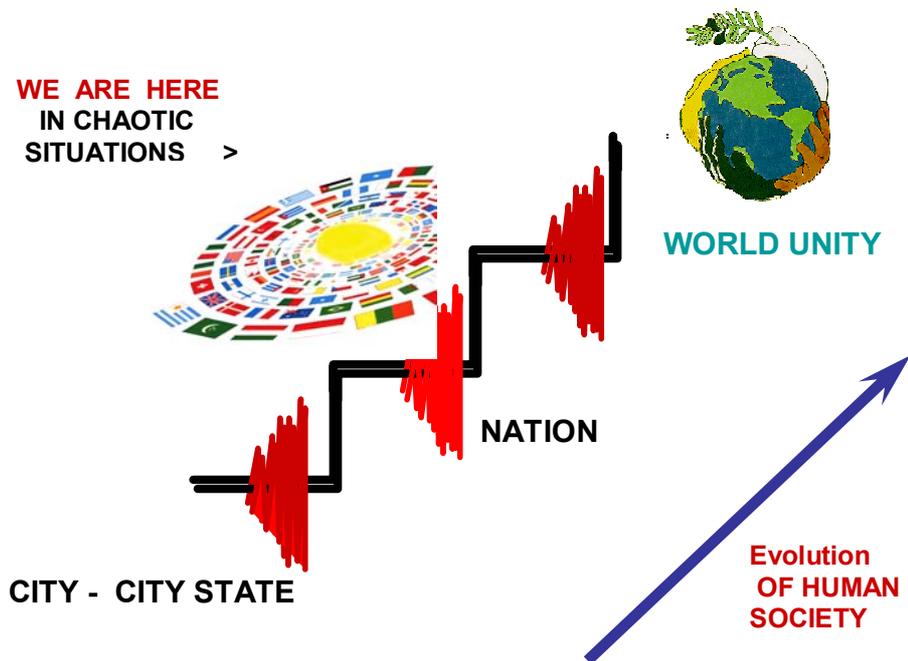
” The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established “ (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings*. [Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1971] 286).

To that we can add the following words commenting His Writings:

Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life (Shoghi Effendi, *The of Bahá’u’lláh* [Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1955] 202).



Graph n.3



Graph

n.4

We can therefore hypothesise that it is not through the perpetuation of by now outdated ethical rules that the world will be able to overcome the empassé that it now finds itself. It will be only by adopting new and adequate social, economical, ethical and spiritual doctrines that the world will be able to bring about the necessary change. We can therefore offer ethics a new surge defining group ethics as the ethics of the entire planet. The acceptance of the unity of the human race implies a new ethical organisation that establish new rules that under the Baha'I Writings offer in a clear and evident manner:

1. A world legislature that ... will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples ((cfr. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 203-4). This Entity, identifiable with the Universal House of Justice, already has been in existence since 1963.

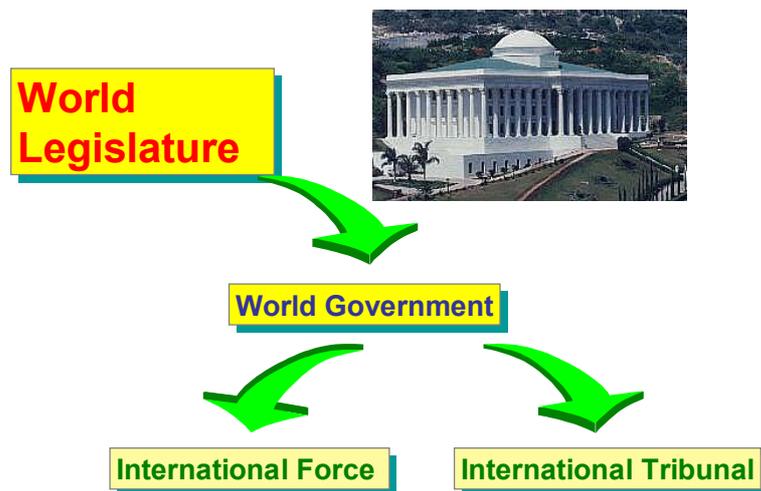
2. A world Executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature. (cfr. *ibidem*).

3. A world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system. (cfr. *ibidem*).

4. An international monetary system will bring about in due course a single world currency to slow down the strength and speculations of some strong currencies. (cfr. *ibidem*).

5. A new organisation establishing that sources of raw materials within national territories are not the property of the single governments but under the custody of a world executive entity that will manage its equitable distribution. (cfr. *ibidem*).

6. The renunciation by all nations of the world to the right of declaring war and the attribution of this right to the world executive entity. (cfr. *ibidem*).



Graph n.5

These, together with the unconditional acceptance of the uniqueness of God and of religion and of the human race are the rules of "the « the indispensable compass in collective decision making, ... the only means by which unity of thought and action can be achieved ... [and which] protects the task of defining progress from the temptation to sacrifice the well-being of the generality of humankind (Bahá'í International Community, "The Prosperity of Humankind," *Bahá'í World 1994-5* 279).

The operational application of justice, of collective ethics, is the compass that warrants development, where rules are the same for all, where economical resources no longer belong to single governments and where "consultation" becomes "the operational expression of justice in human matters", the means of dialogue over the decisions necessary in order to warranty a sustainable development (cfr «The Prosperity of Humankind», *Bahá'í World 1994-5* 273-96; traduzione italiana: *La prosperità del genere umano*).). This approach is without a doubt destined to further evolve itself, until it is able to give life to the institutions of a Supreme State and the establishment of justice at a global level . (cfr. Shoghi Effendi, World Order of *Bahá'u'lláh* 208-10).

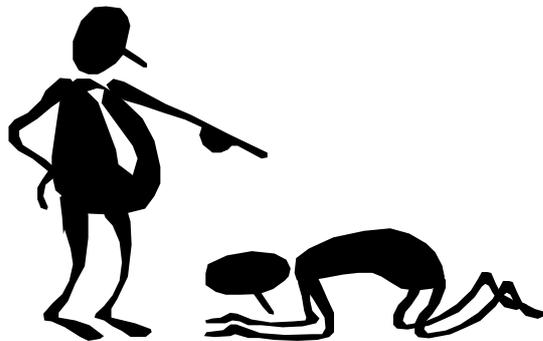
As we have seen, the promotion of an individual ethical behaviour, even though necessary, can nonetheless be considered as insufficient, on its own, for an effective promotion of an ethical group behaviour, able to change the aspect of life for the inhabitants of the planet. It is indispensable to integrate ethics at the individual level with ethics at the collective level, involving the consciences of each human being and, necessarily, underlying in any case the inherent dignity of each individual without distinctions, realising his intrinsic value and innate abilities. And given that this is applicable for each human being, we can declare that this perspective is in line with the principle of the unity of the human race, the fundamental principle for anything relating to ethics and to justice.

The principle of the unity of the human race, far from being a mere rhetorical enunciation for utopian hopes, is shaping current education and is destined to increasingly inspire educational and ethical projects and programs. The only guiding principle that can guide our concrete replies to this fundamental question is the principle of the unity of the human race, that forms the basis of the fact that all human beings belong to the same human species representing to a maximum extent its system of aggregation where the concept of unity in diversity finds its maximum realisation.

Adhering to the principle of the unity of the human race means, recognising today that the human being is essentially a spiritual being and therefore the spiritual aspect of human reality, when considered of utmost importance, is the best basis to pursue the balance between the material aspects of life. It is evident that the forces that are pushing progress towards world unity induce us not only to continue in the knowledge and application of the interior virtues at a personal level, but also to give particular relevance to the qualities that come into play in the relationships between the components of different groups and different interests that each one of those components represents. It therefore becomes evident how the two poles of "individual" and "collectivity" (and as a consequence the two ethics, personal and collective) are intrinsically linked and will never reach a

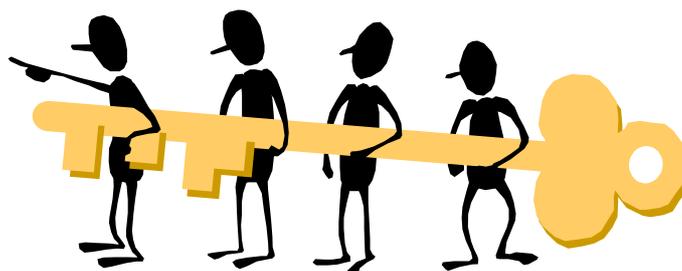
sustainable development, if the two ethics will not march side by side: individual awareness and sustainable development.

In the light of this new paradigm, even the conception of leadership is destined to be affected by a deep transformation. Talking of "ethical leadership" nowadays appears as a contradiction, given the heightened state of corruption in the political, business, religious fields in every part of the world. Leadership has been thought of, for far too long, as a means of power and control over others and has operated in that sense centralizing the decision making power and forcing others to uniform themselves to it, assuming a number of such expressions that include for example autocracy, paternalism, totalitarianism, the manipulation of mass-media or of the positions of "expertise".



Graph .6

The new paradigm of leadership, on the contrary, means that the leader, today, must be concerned above all with the aim of serving the community, rather than creating the maximum possible short term return for himself or for his own ideas or for his own career and personal privileges. His main duty has to be that of serving in the best possible interests of the entire system, rather than of a single ideology, side, party, company, nation.



Graph n.7

But this will only occur when everyone will have understood the true meaning of individual ethics and collective ethics passing through the search for truth, described at the beginning of this article, and through the vision of the collective process that in the words of Baha'u'llah expresses itself with these words written more than a century ago:

The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings* 286).