

"WHAT IS A BAHAI?"

PART THREE

Devotion to God implies a life of service to our fellow creatures. We can be of service to God in no other way. If we turn our backs on our fellow men we are turning our backs upon God. Christ said: "Inasmuch as ye did it not unto the least of these my brethren, ye did it not unto me." Abdul-Baha says: "O son of man! If thou esteimest mercy, look not to that which benefits thyself, but hold to that which will benefit thy fellow men. If thou regardst justice, choose thou for others that which thou chooseth for thyself."—"Words of Paradise."

Abdul-Baha says: "In the Bahai cause arts, sciences and all crafts are counted as worship. The man who makes a piece of note paper to the best of his ability, conscientiously concentrating all his forces on perfecting it, is giving praise to God. Briefly, all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship, if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity. This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer. A physician ministering to the sick, gently, tenderly, free from prejudice and believing in the solidarity of the human race, is giving praise."

Believe Teaching

The real Bahai will not only believe in the teachings of Baha'u'llah but find in them the guide and inspiration of his whole life, and joyfully impart to others the knowledge that is the well-spring of his own being. Only thus will he receive in full measure "the power and confirmation of the Spirit." All cannot be eloquent speakers or ready writers, but all can teach the "living life." Baha'u'llah says: "The people of Baha must serve the Lord with wisdom, teach others by their lives and manifest the Light of God in their deeds. The effect of deeds is in truth more powerful than that of words. * * * The effect of the word spoken by the teacher depends upon his purity of purpose and his severance. Some are content with words, but the truth of words is tested by deeds and dependent upon life. Deeds reveal the station of the man. The words must be according to what has proceeded from the mouth of the Will of God and is recorded in tablets."—"Words of Wisdom."

The Bahai will, however, on no account force his ideas on those who do not wish to hear them. He will attract people to the Kingdom of God. He will not try to drive them into it. He will be like the Good Shepherd, who leads his flock and charms the sheep by his music rather than like the one who, from behind, urges them on with dog and stick.

Baha'u'llah says in the "Hidden Words": "O son of dust! The wise are those who open not their lips unless they find listeners, as the cupbearer never offers a cup unless he finds one who desires. * * *

Again he says in the "Tablet of Ishraqat": "O people of Baha! Ye are the dawn-places of the love and day-spring of the favor of God. Defile not your tongues with cursing or evil from that which is not worthy. Show forth that which ye possess (i. e., truth). If it be accepted, the aim is attained. If not, to dispute or interfere with him who rejects is vain. Leave him to himself and advance toward God, the Protector, the Self-Sufficient. Be not the cause of sorrow; how much less of sedition and strife! It is hoped that ye may be nurtured in the shade of the tree of Divine Bounty and act as God has willed for you. Ye are all leaves of one tree and drops of one sea."

Courtesy and Reverence

Baha'u'llah says: "O people of God! I exhort you to courtesy. Courtesy is indeed * * * the lord of all virtues. Blessed is he who is adorned with the mantle of uprightness and illumined with the light of courtesy. He who is endowed with courtesy (or reverence) is endowed with a great station. It is hoped that this wronged one, and all, will attain to it, hold unto it and observe it. This is the irrefutable command which hath flowed from the pen of the Greatest Name."—"Tablet of the World."

Again and again he repeats: "Let all the nations of the world convert with each other with joy and fragrance. Convert ye, O people, with the people of all religions with joy and fragrance."

Abdul-Baha says in a letter to the Bahais of America: "Beware! Beware! Lest ye offend any heart! Beware! Beware! Lest ye hurt any soul! Beware! Beware! Lest ye deal unkindly toward any person! Beware! Beware! Lest ye be the cause of hopelessness to any creature! Should one become the cause of grief to any one heart, or of despondency to any one soul, it were better to hide one's self in the lowest depths of the earth than to walk upon the earth."

He teaches that as the flower is hidden in the bud, so a spirit from God dwells in the heart of every man, no matter how hard and unlovely his exterior. The true Bahai will treat every man, therefore, as the gardener tends a rare and beautiful plant. He knows that no impatient interference on his part can open the bud into a blossom; only God's sunshine can do that; therefore his aim is to bring that life-giving sunshine into all darkened hearts and homes.

Again Abdul-Baha says: "Among the teachings of Baha'u'llah is one requiring man, under all conditions and circumstances, to be forgiving, to love his enemy and to consider an ill-wisher as a well-wisher. Not that one should consider another as an enemy and then put up with him * * * and be forgiving toward him. This is hypocrisy and not real love. Nay, rather, you must see your enemies as friends, your ill-wishers as well-wishers, and treat them accordingly. Your love and kindness must be real, * * * not merely forbearance, for forbearance, if not of the heart, is hypocrisy." Such counsel appears unintelligible and self-contradictory until we realize that while the outer carnal man may be a hater and ill-wisher, there is in everyone an inner, spiritual nature, which is the real man, from whom only love and good will can proceed. It is to this real, inner man in each of our neighbors that we must direct our thoughts and love. When he awakens into activity the outer man will be transformed and renewed.

On no subject are the Bahai teachings more imperative and uncompromising than on the requirement to abstain from fault-finding. Christ spoke very strongly on the same subject, but it has now become usual to regard the Sermon on the Mount as embodying "Councils of Perfection" which the ordinary Christian cannot be expected to live up to. Both Baha'u'llah and Abdul-Baha are at great pains to make clear that on this subject they make no such say. We read in the "Hidden Words": "O son of man! Breathe not the stings of any man so long as thou art

a sinner. If thou dost contrary to this command thou art not of Me; to this I bear witness."

"O son of existence! Attribute not to any soul that which thou desirest not to be attributed to thyself. * * * This is my command to thee, obey it." Abdul-Baha tells us: "To be silent pray for them and to help them, through kindness, to correct their faults."

"To look always at the good and not at the bad. If a man has ten good qualities and one bad one, to look at the ten and forget the one; and if a man has ten bad qualities and one good one, to look at the one and forget the ten."

"Never to allow ourselves to speak one unkind word about another, even though that other be our enemy."

To an American friend he writes: "The worst human quality and the most great sin is backbiting, more especially when it emanates from the tongue of the believers of God. If some means were devised so that the doors of backbiting could be shut eternally and each one of the believers of God unsewed his lips in praise of others, then the teachings of His Holiness Baha'u'llah would be spread, the hearts illumined, the spirits glorified and the human world would attain to everlasting felicity."

Enjoin Humility

While we are commanded to overlook the faults of others and see their virtues, we are commanded on the other hand, to find out our own faults and take no account of our virtues. Baha'u'llah says in the "Hidden Words": "Wherefore hast thou forgotten thine own faults and busied thyself with the faults of others? Whoso doeth this is condemned by me."

"The tongue is especially for the mention of me; stain it not with slander. If the fire of self overcome you, be mindful to remember your own faults, and speak not evil of my creatures, because each one of you is more conscious and better informed of his own self than of my creatures."

Abdul-Baha says: "Let your life be an emanation of the Kingdom of Christ. He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. * * * In the religion of Baha'u'llah all are servants and maid-servants, brothers and sisters. As soon as one feels a little better than, a little superior to, the rest, he is in a dangerous position, and unless he casts away the seed of such an evil thought he is not a fit instrument for the service of the Kingdom."

"Dissatisfaction with one's self is a sign of progress. The soul who is satisfied with himself is the manifestation of Satan, and the one who is not contented with himself is the manifestation of the Merciful. If a person has a thousand good qualities he must not look at them; nay, rather, he must strive to find out his own defects and imperfections. * * * However much a man may progress, yet he is imperfect, because there is always a point ahead of him. No sooner does he look up toward that point than he becomes dissatisfied with his own condition and aspires in attain to that. Praising one's self is the sign of selfishness."—Diary of Mirza Ahmad Sohrabi, 1214.

Although we are commanded to recognize and sincerely repent of our sins, the practice of confession to priests or others is definitely forbidden. Baha'u'llah says in the "Glad Tidings": "The sinner, when his heart is free from all save God, must seek forgiveness from God alone. Confession before servants (i. e., before men) is not permissible, for it is not the means or the cause of Divine forgiveness. Such confession before the creature leads to one's humiliation and abasement, and God—exalted be His glory—does not wish for the humiliation of His servants. Verily He is compassionate and beneficent. The sinner must, therefore, himself and God seek for mercy from the Sea of Mercy and Implore pardon from the Heaven of Forgiveness."

Truthfulness and Honesty

Baha'u'llah says in the "Tablet of Tarzab": "Verily honesty is the door of tranquillity to all in the world and the sign of glory from the presence of the Merciful One. Whosoever attains thereto has attained to treasures of wealth and affluence. Honesty is the greatest door to the security and tranquillity of mankind. The stability of every affair always depends on it, and the worlds of honor, glory and affluence are illumined by its light. * * *

"O people of Baha! Honesty is the best garment for your temples and the most splendid crown for your heads. Adhere thereto by the command of the Omnipotent Commander."

Again he says: "The principle of faith is to lessen words and to increase deeds. He whose words exceed his acts, know verily that his nobility is better than his being, his death better than his life."—"Words of Wisdom."

Abdul-Baha says: "Truthfulness is the foundation of all the virtues of mankind. Without truthfulness, progress and success in all of the worlds are impossible for a soul. When this holy attribute is established in man, all the other divine qualities will also become realizable."

"Let the light of truth and honesty shine from your faces so that all may know your word, in business or pleasure, to a word to trust and be sure of. Forget self and work for the whole."—Message to the London Bahais, October, 1912.

Self-Realization

Baha'u'llah constantly urges men to realize and give full expression to the perfections latent within them—the true inner self as distinguished from the limited outer self, which at best is but the temple and too often is the prison of the real man. In the "Hidden Words" he says:

"O son of existence! By the Hands of Power I have made thee and by the Fingers of Strength have created thee. I have placed in thee the essence of my light; therefore depend upon it, and upon nothing else; for my action is perfect and my command has effect. Doubt this not and have no uncertainty therein."

"O son of spirit! I have created thee rich; why dost thou make thyself poor? Nought have I made thee; why dost thou deprecate thyself? Of the essence of knowledge have I manifested thee; why peradventure have I manifested thee? From the day I have been I needed thee; why reeketh thou after others? Turn the scale unto thyself; that thou mayest find standing within thee, powerful, mighty and supreme."

"O my servant! Thou art like a sword of rarest temper and lustre, involved in a dark sheath; the reason of which its excellence remains concealed from the craftsmen. Then come forth from the sheath of self and desire, that the lustre may gleam forth resplendent and manifest to all the world."

"O my friend! Thou art the day-star of the heavens of holiness; let not the darkness of the world eclipse thee. The sun of knowledge is the sun of negligence, that without self or concern thou mayest emerge resplendent and array all beings with the robe of life."